Reviewer’s report

Title: Teaching students about uncertainty: the findings of a qualitative study focusing on cultural diversity

Version: 3 Date: 10 October 2006

Reviewer: Desiree Lie

Reviewer’s report:

General
It is hard to review this as original research with a prospective design. Reasons are given below.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

As a reviewer of this article as 'original research', I have a fundamental issue with the research design which is not resolved by the current revisions. The questions posed for this qualitative study (to the stakeholders) are as follows:
1. How do you understand the term “cultural diversity”?
2. What do you think should be taught at undergraduate level about cultural diversity?
3. What main topics do you think that cultural diversity teaching should encompass at undergraduate level?
4. How do you think cultural diversity should be taught?

Nowhere in this question route is ‘ambiguity’ or ‘uncertainty’ articulated as a theme to be explored and the facilitator was not instructed to specifically address the theme of uncertainty. And yet the paper begins and ends with the rationale that the teaching of uncertainty and how it is expressed in curriculum is an important part of diversity education.

Thus the research design of this study appears to be retrospective in that only after the interviews (which were designed to explore diversity education only, not uncertainty and ambiguity within Diversity curricula) did the idea that ambiguity and uncertainty might be key components of Diversity education come to play or emerge. To make the point that Diversity education needs to include uncertainty as a theme, the researcher would really need to go back and restructure the interview to address exactly that point, instead of making the point based on an unanticipated theme arising out of a set of questions directed a Diversity training in general.

The numbers of stakeholders in this study are simply too small to reach the conclusions of the ‘study’. Seven medical students cannot possibly be representative of medical students in general.

I cannot justify the study as written in this manuscript as 'original research' for the questions posed: how are uncertainty and ambiguity viewed in the cultural diversity curriculum?

It reads more like a re-analysis of data already mined for its original, published primary purpose.

A better format to present the findings might be an opinion piece: How might results from a prior study from stakeholders in Diversity education inform our views about teaching uncertainty and ambiguity in medical education? How can future studies inform the relationship between teaching Diversity and uncertainty?

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests. I wish to remain an anonymous reviewer for this manuscript.