Chapter 74

Culturally Responsive Teaching with Adult Learners:
A Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, educational research has strongly supported the incorporation of culture and cultural identities into adult learning environments. However, much of the literature about culturally responsive teaching, a well-established framework in multicultural education research, has been conducted in the K-12 setting, leaving one to question how adult education researchers and practitioners utilize these approaches. This article describes research conducted from a culturally responsive framework in various adult learning environments. In general, many studies eschewed the complete culturally responsive framework, choosing selected aspects commonly identified with sociocultural theory. The most commonly used tenets were: the importance of learners' cultural identities, the need for adult educators to explore their own cultural identities, and the role that diverse curriculum and materials play in establishing an inclusive learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, educational research has strongly supported the incorporation of culture and cultural identities into adult learning environments (Nelson, 2006; Ntseane, 2011; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007). However, much of the literature about culturally responsive teaching, a well-established framework in multicultural education research, has been conducted in the K-12 setting, leaving one to question how adult education researchers and practitioners utilize these approaches. Almost two decades ago, Guy (1999) called upon educators to embrace culturally responsive teaching practices to enhance the learning environment for adult learners from minority backgrounds. This article describes research conducted from a culturally responsive framework in various adult learning environments. In general, many studies eschewed the

complete culturally responsive framework, choosing selected aspects commonly identified with socio-cultural theory. The most commonly used tenets were: the importance of learners' cultural identities, the need for adult educators to explore their own cultural identities, and the role that diverse curriculum and materials play in establishing an inclusive learning environment.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

The influence of culture on the classroom is a foundation of multicultural education (Banks, 2006; Bennett, 2001) and is exemplified by the assumption that both students and teachers bring their cultural identities into the classroom. As described by Guy (2009):

Adult learners bring to the learning environment a range of experiences grounded in communicative and interaction strategies. Given the cultural basis of these strategies, they may or may not serve learners well depending on the way in which the educational activity itself is framed.

In *Culturally Responsive Teaching,* Gay (2010) elaborates on this tenet and asserts that culture is "at the heart of all we do in the name of education, whether that is curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessment".

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a framework that positions learner culture at the core of the learning process and uses the "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). A central assumption is that learners from minority cultures experience a cultural mismatch resulting from differences between their home culture and the culture of school, which becomes problematic due to the dominance of majority group cultures and the stigmatization of minority group norms and values (Lee & Sheared, 2002). Culturally responsive pedagogy, therefore, addresses this mismatch by placing student culture at the center of the learning process, utilizing student values, beliefs, and experiences in the learning process.

Culturally responsive teaching is an umbrella term which encompasses a variety of approaches, such as culturally relevant, culturally sensitive, culturally congruent, and culturally contextualized pedagogies (Gay, 2010). It is believed to be more appealing and meaningful to learners from non-dominant backgrounds than traditional pedagogies. An additional tenet is that culturally responsive teaching helps minority students learn more easily and deeply than traditional, non-culturally-situated learning environments (Gay, 2013; 2010; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). According to Gay (2013), there are five major premises underlying all culturally responsive approaches:

1. Culture is at the basis of all human interaction, including the learning process.
2. There is a compelling need to change negative and deficit-based explanations of unequal academic achievement levels.
3. Educators must overcome significant challenges to implementing culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms.
4. The core tenets of culturally responsive teaching are inherently congruent with American democratic ideals.
5. Culturally responsive teaching must be situated within effective teaching theory.

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