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## Cultural Mentors: Using Transformative Learning Theory to Examine Adaptation and Supporting Relationships of Women Educators in Cross-Cultural Settings

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# **Cultural Mentors: Using Transformative Learning Theory to Examine Adaptation and Supporting Relationships of Women Educators in Cross-cultural Settings**

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of the roundtable is to discuss a qualitative study-in-progress, which examines how women educators who have worked abroad for six months or more view the role of supporting relationships in facilitating transformative learning.*

## **Content of the Roundtable**

The following questions will be addressed to promote discussion of the study-in-progress during the roundtable: What are the disorienting experiences women have in cross-cultural settings? What kind of supporting relationships does the person form to negotiate and maintain a transformative process? In what ways does the individual stay the same transformed person when she returns to the home culture? How does repatriation of a transformed individual relate to culture shock? What special patterns are there for women to learn in cross-cultural settings? How can this research project enable those, especially women, going to work in cross-cultural settings in the future? Participants of roundtable may be individuals who have interests in transformative learning theory and its application to cross-cultural adaptation, autobiographical learning, how women make meaning of their experiences in a host country and qualitative research methodology. Individuals who have worked in a host culture or plan on doing so in the future may find this roundtable especially beneficial.

## **Reason for Research**

The deep-down purpose of the research lies far beyond the words in the title. This study is a result of autobiographical learning. I am a woman who has taught overseas at the university level for three years: two years in Jordan and one year in Malaysia. It has been suggested that studies need to be done about women educators overseas, but none have materialized other than narratives (Elfenbein, Lucas, Ewell, Cirkensa & McFadden, 1997). Studies about professionals working overseas in the 1990's were mostly done in regard to the business world. There is no body of literature that explains the whole transformative learning process of a woman

educator in a cross-cultural setting. Additional need for research is shown by the positive response to the research topic by the participants and those with similar experiences.

## **Framework of Study:**

This qualitative study is grounded in transformative learning theory developed by Mezirow (1978). Moreover, it is a study of women being analyzed by a woman. Supporting relationships have not been addressed much in the literature and are of special interest, as women tend to emphasize the importance of connection and relationships in learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997). The research is part of the burgeoning body of literature, which combines transformative learning theory and cross-cultural learning (Harper, 1994, Holt, 1994, Kennedy, 1994, Lee, 1999, Taylor, 1993, Temple, 1999; Whalley, 1995). The study has also drawn from the literature about cross-cultural learning and working abroad.

## **Methodology**

This is an in-depth semi-structured qualitative study. Nine to twelve participants meet the following criteria (1) American or Canadian women with college degrees or professional training who lived in a host culture (2) stayed six months or more in the host culture (3) sought out supporting relationships in the host culture (4) participated in an academic experience (5) returned home after the experience and (6) knew a dominant language used in the host culture for instructional purposes.

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