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# **The Motivation and Transformation of White Culturally Responsive Higher Education Professors**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this round table is to discuss the motivation, transformation and pedagogy of eight White culturally responsive professors featured in the author's dissertation. This dialogue will highlight the participants' perspectives on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and compare it with the discourse of CRP in higher education.

## **Introduction**

Institutions of higher learning have become much more racially, culturally and linguistically diverse. Rising enrollments by students of color as well as students from nonwestern nations into predominately White institutions (PWIs) have significantly affected the population demographics of those schools. Haviland and Rodriguez-Kiino (2008) noted that, as student populations in these colleges and universities become more diverse, the challenges associated with teaching a diversity of students tend to rise. Scholars have argued that, because people have different racial identity development processes, epistemologies, and cultural belief systems, professors must know and understand their students' cultural differences and how those differences impact their learning (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007, Gollnick and Chinn, 2002). Much has been written about White professors being out of sync with many of the needs of their students of color and are, therefore, not culturally sensitive with their pedagogy. However, some White educators have taken on the challenge of creating inclusive classrooms and environments that exemplify culturally responsive pedagogy. This round table will discuss the author's dissertation research that focuses on the journey that eight White culturally responsive professors took to become culturally responsive educators.

## **Background**

In the past, educators were trained to view adult learners as a homogenous group. Therefore, they expected learners of color to learn in the same manner as those in the mainstream culture. As a result, learners of non-dominant cultures often find that their personal experiences do not coincide with what is being taught in higher education. Consequently, education practitioners who instruct adults of various social, cultural, racial and linguist backgrounds are often unprepared to serve them. Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the phrase "culturally relevant teaching" to explain a method of teaching that uses the learners' cultural referents to empower them academically, socially, psychologically, and politically (1992). Canniff (2008), Gay (2000) and Sealey-Ruiz, (2007) suggest that educators who practice culturally responsive pedagogy can have a positive influence on the lives of their students, especially students of color, because they develop alternate pedagogies to compliment the educational experiences of their students.

A substantial amount of literature has been written on defining culturally responsive pedagogy and theoretical and practical approaches to reaching students of varying backgrounds. However, there is a void of the lived experiences of education scholars, which may inform others about significant issues concerning culturally responsive teaching in higher education.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the motivation and transformational experiences of eight culturally responsive White higher education professors and how their experiences influence their teaching practices in the classroom. This study not only focuses on how White educators deal with issues of race but also other diverse factors such as but not limited to class, gender, nationality, and language. The author used the qualitative method of inquiry, to attempt to understand the processes, practices, and viewpoints of the participants in the study. The goal was to understand the participants' perspectives of culturally relevant teaching and relate their experiences with the public discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy in higher education.

### **Findings and Implications**

Although all of the participants had varying upbringings, backgrounds, and significant perspective changing incidents that occurred in their lives, the author found several similar themes among these participants. They all have had experiences that caused them to understand the social inequalities that exist in education today and have transformed the way that they teach and the way in which they view learners. These educators have found ways to create inclusive classrooms and curricula while challenging their students, peers and superiors to do the same.

This research hopes to add to the scholarship of culturally responsive teaching and to create a dialogue about how we as educators can teach learners of all backgrounds. It is intended to provide insight into the makeup of a successful educator whose teaching styles help all learners towards cultural awareness, transformation and self-discovery in the classroom.

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