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Culturally Relevant Practice Frameworks and Application in Adult Education

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Abstract: This literature review examines the use of three frameworks on culturally relevant practices influence on adult education, by comparing framework components to andragogical principles and process elements.

Keywords: culturally relevant practices; andragogy

Over the past two decades adult educators have paid attention to the effect of culture and identity on teaching and learning, acknowledging the multiple biological, psychological, environmental, sociocultural, economic, and political factors which influence how adults learn (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). This paper aims to explore the use of culturally relevant practices in adult learning settings through three distinct frameworks: culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching. What follows is an exploration of the pedagogical and andragogical aspects within these frameworks. By examining these three pedagogical and teaching frameworks, I set out to demonstrate the extent to which adult education have utilized these frameworks and identify gaps in addressing unique adult learning needs. Finally, I conclude by providing recommendations to expand culturally relevant practices in adult teaching and learning environments.

Culturally Relevant Practice Origins

Culturally relevant practices within adult education have origins in other educational practices, which emerged to address racial, ethnic, cultural, and social diversity within learning settings. In the 1970s and 1980s education scholars and practitioners developed such frameworks as multicultural education, multiculturalism, and diversity appreciation education to integrate learners' racial, ethnic and culture backgrounds into educational structures, curriculum, and policy (Ladson-Billings, 2001). By the 1990s, scholars and practitioners moved beyond multicultural and diversity appreciation education by conceptualizing ideological and theoretical frameworks on culturally relevant reaching practices in K-12, postsecondary, and higher education (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2001). What follows in this section is a brief examination of three frameworks which advanced the established practices regarding culture in education: culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. In 1992, Gloria Ladson-Billings described a set of pedagogical practices used by primary and secondary education teachers to address African American students' gaps in achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ladson-Billings postulated that educational teaching and theory were core to reforming repressive educational practices detrimental to African-American student achievement and psychosocial well-being (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). This concept, coined culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), sought to link schooling and culture in micro-level and macro-level educational practices. Also inherent within CRP is the systematic implementation of practices that challenge what one accepts as 'good teaching' through critically examining teachers' methods, behaviors, attitudes, biases, and assumptions to understand the teaching nuances.

Culturally Responsive Teaching in K-12 Education. By 2000, education scholar Geneva Gay debuted a conceptual framework known as culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Gay (2018) defines CRT as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters relevant to and effective for them. It teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students" (p. 36). Throughout the text, Gay (2018) outlines curricular and instructional practices to address the needs of multiple racial and ethnic learning groups, while outlining salient principles, values, and beliefs, from which to attribute effective culturally responsive practices.

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Higher Education. Higher education scholarship has also explored culturally relevant practices. In 1995, Raymond Wlodkowski and Margery Ginsberg published *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, targeting college faculty, teaching centers, and in some cases, student services personnel (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). The authors proposed a motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching (MFCRT) with five essential characteristics: 1) respect for diversity; 2) engage the motivation of an array of learners; 3) safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environments; 4) use of teaching practices across disciplines and cultures; and 5) promoting equitable and just learning (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009, p. ix). Key knowledge, skills and values, are highlighted throughout the authors' work specific to the intersection of motivation and culture, inclusion, integrating learners' motivations and attitudes into the learning environment, negotiating multidimensional assessment processes that reduce bias, and implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009).

Summary. Ladson-Billing's (1995) CRP, Gay's (2018) CRT, and Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) MFCRT approach culturally relevant practices from different perspectives. Whereas Ladson-Billings (1995) focuses more on pedagogy, ideology, and values within her framework, Gay (2009) provides instructional practices, teaching skills, and approaches to critical teacher development. All three frameworks do not provide educators with comprehensive methods of instruction from which to create the ideal and most inclusive classroom. Instead, these pedagogies implore teachers and educators to consider their own thinking, perspectives, and biases, critically examine the existing curriculum and educational policies, and expand learning opportunities beyond dominant cultural norms that exist within learning environments and throughout broader society. It is now necessary to examine the existence of these practices in adult education.

Culturally Relevant Practices in Adult Education

I have broadly discussed culturally relevant frameworks in education. Moving forward, I examine culturally relevant practices in adult education marking trends similar to K-12 and higher education, with regard to the emergence of culturally relevant practices.

Seminal work by Tisdell (1995) and Guy (1999a, 1999b) illustrate the first calls to action regarding examining the impact of socio-cultural influences and inclusion have on adult education learning settings. According to Guy (2009), culturally relevant adult education (CRAE) aims to transform classroom environments, programs, and models by repositioning power dynamics, addressing social inequities within the learning environment, and enhancing learners' critical awareness and agency. Further inherent within CRAE are engaging learners who often face oppression, acknowledging learners' cultures that are not equitably recognized and affirmed within learning spaces, and considering the impact of learners' sociocultural differences on interactions and content. Comparatively, Alfred (2002), presented tenets of sociocultural theory, which invites adult educators to consider (1) learners' individual

characteristics, dimensions, and perspectives; (2) sociocultural contexts, which encompass the physical, social, and institutional culture, and; (3) interaction between learners and communities. These various conceptualizations of culturally relevant adult education have informed research and practice in the field.

Other scholars explored the application of culturally relevant practices through empirical research and within professional practice (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Rhodes, 2015; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007; Tisdell, 2014; Tisdell, Taylor, & Forte, 2013; Wu, 2016). Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Colin, Peterson, and Brookfield (2010) challenge the field to examine how race and racism impact teaching, learning, adult education literature, and practice. Similarly, Wang (2008, 2009) published a two-volume series, *Curriculum and Development for Adult Learners in the Global Community*, which provides strategies for curriculum and adult learning that address diverse contexts across culture, nationality, social identity, language, and learning medium. Most recently, Rhodes (2018) produced a literature review on culturally responsive teaching with adult learners and surmised that learners' cultural identities, adult educator's awareness of their own identities, and curriculum planning were the most common areas covered in adult education literature. Let us now juxtapose culturally relevant practices with guidelines for types of learners, through exploring andragogy.

Andragogy and Culturally Relevant Practices

The use of the word pedagogy—while common in various K-12, higher education, and adult education settings—does bring to question the optimization of CRP and CRT frameworks when working with adults. Pedagogy is often used to refer to methods and practices of teaching in education, while other education scholars stress that pedagogical models are specifically designed for teaching children (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015). In the 1960s, Malcolm Knowles popularized andragogy, a set of assumptions or principles based within adult education that focuses on the development and education of adults, to provide an alternative framework to counter pedagogy (Knowles et al., 2015). The six andragogical assumptions are 1) the learner's need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn" (Knowles et al., 2015, pp. 27-28). While andragogy received recognition and popularization in adult education, scholars criticized its principles, purporting inattention to learner's sociocultural and political contexts, such as race, gender and class (Sandlin, 2005). Though andragogy receives criticism, many adult education scholars recognize its contributions to adult education and use it in various practice settings.

Others critique Knowles's (2015) inconsideration of learning contexts such as "teaching/relationship, issues of power in the classroom, and communication" (Baumgartner, 2008, p. 39). Sandlin (2005) dissects common critiques of Knowles's (1984) andragogical assumptions across critical, feminist, and Africentric theoretical perspectives, noting that andragogy is presented as apolitical, from a middle-class Eurocentric perspective, and is very individualistic, thus ignoring the influence of society and environment on learners. Further, Sandlin (2005) argued that andragogy's assumptions perpetuate inequality among marginalized learners because it reinforces the status quo. While Sandlin (2005) interrogates how andragogy fails to address socio-cultural and political environmental influences and provides alternative theoretical approaches, Sandlin (2005) does not explicate on how these alternative models can and should be incorporated into adult education practice. Critiques to Knowles's (1984) conception of andragogy from scholars as it relates to integrating learners' social and cultural identities provides opportunity to explore how existing culturally relevant frameworks fill these gaps.

Analysis of Andragogical Elements in Culturally Relevant Practices

Having briefly discussed the concept of andragogy, in this section I examine the extent to which CRP, CRT, and MFCRT frameworks align with unique learning characteristics of adults. Knowles's andragogical model incorporates eight process elements, which include: 1) preparing learners, 2) climate, 3) planning, 4) diagnosis of needs, 5) settings of objectives, 6) designing learning plans, 7) learning activities, and 8) evaluations (Knowles et al., 2015). The process elements will serve as categories for analysis, which I will summarize on Table 1 to show my results (See Appendix A).

Because Ladson-Billing's (1995) CRP is philosophical and ideological in nature, focusing more on "attitude and disposition" (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 167), the andragogical process elements did not neatly align. Those who employ CRP could have varied in-class practices which do not seem interrelated or based on patterns. The CRP approach to climate is the most applicable to andragogy, as teachers consider both individual and communal learner experiences. Beyond andragogy, CRP is intentional about sociopolitical consciousness through enhancing students' critical self-awareness. Learners' self-direction and need for content based on real-life experiences or issues was also not present in CRP. However, one can argue that learners' prior knowledge and experiences were consider in how it informs students' learning within CRP, as teachers must consider students' cultural and communal perspectives and experiences in developing learning opportunities. Lastly, CRP does not explicitly consider learners' intrinsic motivation.

Gay's (2018) framework, while comprehensive and multifaceted, does not directly align with andragogical process elements, except for climate and learning activities. Overwhelmingly, the onus is on the teacher to decide what and how to implement various practices within learning settings. It is important to note that academic achievement is a significant priority within K-12 education, which may increase responsibility on the teacher to produce learning environments that enhance achievement. The academic achievement priority may also result in less focus on students' intrinsic motivation, in comparison to andragogy. CRT does, in some ways, reflect an orientation to learners' needs, which corresponds with Knowles's fifth andragogical principle. However, self-direction, intrinsic motivation, and prior learning are not inherent components of CRT. Gay's (2018) provides educators with multiple subject and age-specific examples from which CRT can be applied, including alternative instructional methods through case study examples and guidelines for authentic instruction.

While written for higher education and adult learners, Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) MFCRT makes no mention of andragogy principles, or guidelines associated with adult learning and development (Knowles, 1984). Despite this absence, the framework aligns in many ways with the andragogical process elements, apart from diagnosis of needs (see Table 1). The setting objectives, designing learning plans, and learning activities process elements varied widely when reviewing MFCRT. Because the framework discusses motivation at length, it also explores different strategies educators can enact with learners to garner and enhance intrinsic motivation, relating to the sixth andragogical principle. Specifically, Wlodkowski (1999) outlined five criteria for inviting motivation: safe, successful, interesting, self-determined, and personally relevant. The self-determined criteria encourage learners to use choice in their learning based on values, perspectives, needs, and feelings, which directly aligns with self-direction. Personally relevant criteria ask learners to consider past experiences and interests that influence participation in the learning activity, which align with andragogy's third and fourth assumptions. Each framework on culturally relevant practices provides different educators with

different purposes for engaging learners, although specific adult learning needs may need more thorough consideration for application.

Discussion and Conclusion

Culturally relevant practices continue to be vital to adult education. The content synthesized above provides a framework for future reframing of culturally relevant practices in adult education. Some implications are organized here:

- We need to understand what effect culturally relevant practices, which originated in K-12, have on adult education through a systematic review of the literature.
- We need to reframe how and in what ways andragogical assumptions can adopt culturally relevant practices to enhance adult learning.
- We need more empirical and evidence-based research on culturally relevant practices in adult learning settings, particularly nonformal learning settings that exist outside of traditional educational classrooms.
- We must enhance training and development opportunities for adult educators to apply culturally relevant education within their respective learning environments.

Two of the three frameworks on culturally relevant practices originated in K-12 education. Additionally, Guy (1999a, 1999b, 2009) provided theoretical and ideological bases for culturally relevant adult education, yet there is less known about how Guy's work influences adult education through empirical literature. Reviewing abstracts, identifying the number of articles that attempt to apply conceptual frameworks, and identifying new theoretical and conceptual frameworks relevant to adult education will increase knowledge on its impact in the field. Further research should be conducted to explore how these culturally relevant practices that originated from K-12 education impact adult education scholarship.

Andragogy as an instructional guide and a set of principles continues to contribute to adult education practice. The comparative analysis between principles and the culturally relevant frameworks revealed opportunities to consider how to adapt, enhance, or create frameworks that enhance adult education practice.

Another area worth examining in adult education are the use of culturally relevant practices within nonformal learning settings. The conceptual frameworks presented in this paper primarily target formal learning environments in K-12 and higher education. How does adapting these practices in nonformal learning settings change the effectiveness? Do adult educators need to consider additional factors when engaging with learners? These two questions are examples of questions which we must ask to further the discussions on culturally relevant practices in adult education.

Throughout the adult education literature, empirically based literature on the efficacy and effectiveness of culturally relevant practices in adult education was less present. Future research in this effort have the opportunity to provide adult educators with more scholarship from which to improve their practice. Lastly, there is a general paucity of studies describing training and development opportunities to implement and enhance culturally relevant practices specific to adult education. Considering the unique factors that exist among learner populations, learning purposes (e.g. adult basic education, vocational education) and developing instructive and methodological capacities for adult educators will improve effectiveness in the field.

This paper set out to explore the influence of culturally relevant practices on adult education. Through research, I identified three frameworks to examine: Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy, Gay's (2018) culturally responsive teaching, and Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching. Each

framework was briefly described, compared with one another, and compared to Knowles's (1984) andragogical framework. The examination of each framework revealed interesting results about its influence on and intersection with adult education. Ladson-Billings's (1995a) pedagogical framework along with Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) motivational framework were more amenable to aligning with andragogical process elements with respect to learner preparation, climate, planning, designing learning plans, learning activities, and learning assessment. This alignment is no surprise given the authors' experience in both higher education and adult education. Ladson-Billings's (1995a) and Gay's (2018) frameworks did not neatly align with the andragogical model, partially due to the K-12 origination and intended purpose to support learner achievement. In both frameworks, the educator is ultimately responsive for designing learning activities and environments to facilitate culturally relevant and culturally responsive experiences for students. Through the andragogical lens, CRP and CRT revealed gaps in applicability within adult learning. Whereas MFCRT had more alignment with adult education, its primary purpose is to support educators in higher education.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Comparison of Andragogy Process Elements with Three Culturally Relevant Practices

Andragogy Process Elements	Pedagogy	Andragogy	CRP	CRT	MFCRT
Preparing learners	Teacher-directed	Self-directed	Onus on teacher	Onus on teacher	Mutual preparation between learner and teacher
Climate	Formal authority-oriented, competitive, judgmental	Informal, mutually respectful, consensual, collaborative supportive	Individual and collective empowerment; sociopolitical consciousness	Formal, varied, responsive to socio-emotional wellbeing and learners' social identities.	Collaborative, inclusive, respectful, affirming of the leaner
Planning	Primarily by teacher	By participative decision making	Led by teacher; uses students' culture for learning	Primarily by learner, varies based on context, may include learner contributions	Collaborative Learning
Diagnosis of needs	Primarily by teacher	By mutual assessment	Not specified	Identified by teacher	Not articulated
Setting of objectives	Primarily by teacher	By mutual negotiation	Set by teacher Broader than specific content-based learning	Identified by teacher	Identified by educator (developing attitude)
Designing learning plans	Content units, course syllabus, logical sequence	Learning projects, learning content sequenced in terms of readiness	Not specified	Primarily by teacher through identifying learning styles	Varies; some defined by teacher. Co-constructed with learner (e.g. learning contracts, goal review schedules)
Learning activities	Transmittal techniques, assigned readings	Inquiry projects, independent study, experiential techniques	Not specified	Varies by learner and subject. No one-size fits all approach	Various activities (e.g. experiential, reflective, projects, decision-making)

Assessment/ Evaluation	Primarily by leader	By mutual assessment of self-collected evidence	Not specified	Primarily by leader	Considers learners' perspectives and values; Self-assessment; Allows learners to demonstrate knowledge and skill in multiple ways;