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## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AS AN INNOVATIVE STRATEGY IN EDUCATION: EXPERIENCE OF THE UKRAINIAN EDUCATOR IN THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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*In a globalized world, cultural diversity and identity have become defining issues that require attention and immediate response. The educational sphere is not an exception. Successful teaching in the modern classroom setting requires more than a proficiency in the field and/or skills to apply effective pedagogical techniques. A successful 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher needs to be socio-culturally conscious, willing and capable to relate to their students and build trusting relationships, especially in culturally, socially, demographically diverse classrooms.*

*This article profiles the culturally responsive teaching model through the lens of an immigrant's experience as an educator in the USA. The research focus covers four motivational conditions (establishing inclusion; developing positive attitude; enhancing meaning; engendering competence) that can spark inquiry in learning. Analyzing Dr. R. Wlodkowski's "Motivational Framework" used as a teaching strategy in the classroom, the author of the article highlights its impact on students' intrinsic motivation. A favorable learning environment that boosts motivation should contain following elements: students feel connected and respected, relate to their personal experience, voice, choice, cultural values, as well as understand and correlate their learning with their goals.*

*In addition, an observation is made that a personal story of immigration enhanced senses of students' equity and solidarity based on cultural diversity. The author of the article suggests that through personal narrative, the educator's identity can be a powerful tool to motivate a diverse student population.*

**Key words:** *motivational framework, intrinsic motivation, diversity, cultural competence, culturally responsive teaching, narrative, identity.*

**Introduction.** In recent years attention to the interconnected issues of diversity and identity in different spheres of human life has increased. Realities of the modern (global) world show the borders diminishing between countries, nations, communities, which leads to greater life-changing opportunities for people, ultimately challenging them to constantly adjust, assimilate, and culturally adapt. Such conditions evoke in many cases feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and cultural irrelevance. The educational sphere has

responded to these challenges with promotion of culturally responsive teaching as an innovative strategy (G. Gay, M. Ginsberg, J. Irvine, J. Irizarry, R. Wlodkowski and others). In the USA a myriad of different state and nationwide initiatives, programs, and studies have shown the importance and urgency of the mentioned topics (Interactive Workshops, Professional Developmental Conferences (“Culturally Responsive Teaching in College Through a Motivational Framework”) UMass Amherst; Multicultural Bridge; National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems; 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center, etc).

**Theoretical framework and main findings.** After my husband’s Peace Corps Service in Ukraine, we moved back to his hometown of Pittsfield, MA. My life as an immigrant began. My scientific interest has always focused on identity in its interdisciplinary relations. Interestingly enough it would be my personal experience as an educator-immigrant in the U.S., which revealed a new interesting prospective of my research. I noticed that my cultural identity could be used as a tool to positively motivate students.

Working at the local public school, it was my personal story, my personal cultural narrative that influenced, motivated and engaged students in their learning process. Holding a position of a site-coordinator for an after-school program (21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center CCLC) has allowed me to build relationships with students with various cultural backgrounds. Historically, Morningside Community School (MCS) 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC enrolls a significant number of at-risk students. They require social-emotional education to gain skills that help them self-regulate their behavior in order to show academic, social, and civic growth. MCS’ classroom is very diverse culturally, demographically, academically, making thus intrinsic motivation a primary goal for an educator. Working with such diverse student groups, I came to understanding that to create motivationally significant learning environment [1] was possible through shared cultural experiences. So, I decided to try and use my authentic cultural background as a tool to engage my students by applying it on **Dr. R. Wlodkowski’s Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching** [5].

Dr. R. Wlodkowski suggests creating the following four conditions in a learning environment:

- Establishing Inclusion;
- Developing Positive Attitude;
- Enhancing Meaning;
- Engendering Competence

**Establishing Inclusion** – creating atmosphere where all participants of the learning process feel connected, and respected. The best way in my opinion to relate to your students and create for them “inclusive environment” is through different opening lesson topics/activities. “Ice-breakers” usually serve this purpose well. Equally as important is not only to emphasize commonalities within the group, but also address and discuss cultural differences.

**Developing Positive Attitude.** Learning more about another person's cultural background broadens our cultural outlook and helps build personal connections – what do we have in common, what makes us different? Every student in my program knows that Mrs. Ireland is from Ukraine. My story and narrative draw interest, spark inquiry. Students ask questions about my country and where it is situated on the World Map, they want to hear the language and learn some phrases, they want to learn about Ukrainians and our national/cultural peculiarities. Through discussing these topics we are creating a culturally responsive learning space, and through the intercultural dialogue students gain basics of cultural competence as well. Positive attitudes create a trusting atmosphere, where everybody feels safe and respected. Engaging students into positive cross-cultural communication motivates them into further inquiries.

**Enhancing Meaning.** I firmly believe that social environments as well as cultural experiences play an essential role in the learning process. R. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg argue that other people and their environments are the source of knowledge[6]. By focusing on my personal story and sharing my cultural background with students, I am able to motivate them to learn more about one another and feel connected.

Using the K-W-L strategy [8] in the classrooms, we talked about what we knew, and what we wanted to know about each other and at the end of the session – what we learned. Topics such as Foreign Languages We Speak and Family Traditions were very popular and created a perfect opportunity for self-disclosure by all the participants. Students had freedom to speak about what they thought would be relevant to the topic, interesting to others and meaningful to them.

**Engendering Competence.** Interesting as it is, by introducing the Ukrainian language to the students, learning some of the words from the languages they speak at home, provided cross-cultural commonality between my students and I.

Thus, ELA students, who tend not to stand out, be less confident, feel embarrassed if they mispronounce a word in English or make a grammar mistake, felt more comfortable having a bilingual site-coordinator, whose pronunciation wasn't always perfect, but who nevertheless in their opinion was successful. My narrative inspired them to be proud of their culture and their everyday achievements.

A foreign language, cultural interaction was helpful with building relationships with at-risk students. Noticing natural ability of one of my at-risk students in learning a foreign language, I started to introduce to him some Ukrainian words and phrases in a very easy, informal fashion. Soon enough, we were able to conduct short dialogues in Ukrainian. After I was able to highlight what he had learned in a more formal classroom setting, his classmates were impressed. As a result, his talent helped him to improve some of his relationships within his class and with his peers. This is empirical evidence of how innovative cross-cultural communication promotes Social Emotional education by creating inclusive and positive learning space.

**Conclusion.** Within the last year, I am growing more and more confident in the fact that personal cultural narrative helps to build stronger relationships with students and their families, having a more lasting impact on students' academic performance. An authentic, culturally sensitive communication style enhances effective cross-cultural teaching making all participants of the learning process partners through personal relevance and intercultural awareness. Building personal relationships with students through culture is not a magic wand that can fix any issue, but it definitely can be a powerful tool in driving student engagement and enhancing motivation.

“The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” [10, 147-148]. I believe in Ricoeur's logic. For it is exactly that the idea of a cultural narrative that can be used to engage and inspire. It is truly story or one's personal narrative when shared in the educational setting that can captivate students and serve as the hook that leads them on the journey of further discovery.

In a global, multicultural society, the ability to adapt to rapidly changing social circumstances and environment is paramount. That's why personal stories like mine can inspire students showing them that anybody can achieve success not despite, but due to their cultural heritage.

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## МЕТОД КУЛЬТУРНОГО РЕАГУВАННЯ У ВИКЛАДАННІ ЯК ІННОВАЦІЙНА СТАРТЕГІЯ В ОСВІТІ: ДОСВІД УКРАЇНСЬКОГО ВИКЛАДАЧА В АМЕРИКАНСЬКІЙ СИСТЕМІ ОСВІТИ

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*У глобалізованому світі питання культурного розмаїття та ідентичності стали визначальними, вимагаючи уваги науковців й активних спроб їх вирішити. Сфера освіти не є виключенням в такому тренді. Успішне викладання сьогодні вимагає від вчителя не тільки глибоких знань у своїй сфері чи/і вмінь застосовувати дієві педагогічні прийоми. Успішний вчитель 21-го століття відзначається наявністю соціокультурної свідомості, бажанням і здатністю знаходити спільності зі своїми учнями і будувати взаємовідносини, які будуються на повазі і довірі, особливо коли мова йде про культурно, соціально, демографічно розмаїті класи.*

*У статті розглядається модель викладання, що базується на врахуванні культурних особливостей учнів, крізь призму досвіду викладача-іммігранта в США. Фокус дослідження зосереджено на чотирьох мотиваційних умовах, які інтенсифікують процес навчання. Аналізуючи “мотиваційну концепцію” професора Р. Влодковського, яка була використана як педагогічна стратегія, автор статті окреслює її вплив на внутрішню мотивацію учнів. Сприятливі навчальні умови, які стимулюють мотивацію, включають такі елементи: відчуття приналежності і взаємної поваги учнями, можливість звернення до попереднього особистого досвіду, вибору і культурних цінностей, розуміння і співвідношення навчання з власними цілями.*

*Підкреслено, що особиста “історія” вчителя-іммігранта, його/її ідентифікаційний наратив може стати ефективним методом розвитку в учнів почуттів рівності і взаємності, бажання вчитися. Саме завдяки правильному акцентуванню на культурному розмаїтті всіх сторін навчального процесу можливе дієве внутрішнє мотивування.*

**Ключові слова:** *мотиваційна концепція, внутрішня мотивація, культурне розмаїття, культурна компетенція, викладання, що базується на врахуванні культурних особливостей учнів, наратив, ідентичність.*