

# Professional Learning to Promote Motivation and Academic Performance among Diverse Adults

Margery B. Ginsberg, University of Washington-Seattle and Raymond J. Wlodkowski, Professor Emeritus Regis University

When we reach beyond policy and student support services, what do we know about instructional innovations that enhance motivation and performance among underserved adult learners? In particular, how can adult educators more consistently support student motivation across diverse student groups? Among the reasons we embrace these questions is our firm belief that a primary purpose of adult learning is the intellectual and moral empowerment of human beings to achieve personal goals that matter, not only for oneself, but for a pluralistic and just future. The work of David Justice confirmed and inspired this conviction. As a champion for educational reform, he supported innovations that extended access to a broader population of adult learners, responding to the limiting conventions of higher education with transformative as well as pragmatic consequences.

Our response to the questions that guide this article are a theory and a set of practices that can help adult educators develop a clear focus on intrinsically motivating instruction for a range of adult learners. From literature and research that span academic disciplines, we offer a *motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching*. Described in detail in *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching in College* (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski 2009), the framework is an instructional model that has been generative for over a decade to develop new ideas and directions for lessons and courses. We apply it in our own teaching to guide instructional interactions with greater fidelity in supporting the integrity of learners as they attain relevant educational success and mobility.

The first part of the article explores the concept of “motivation” and asserts the significance of motivation within a culturally diverse educational context. This section is followed by an introduction to the *motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching* with its application to three different formats: a professional development workshop, a post-secondary course, and the Japanese lesson study process applied to professional learning in higher education.

## Motivation and Cultural Pluralism

When we define motivation as the natural human capacity to direct energy in the pursuit of a goal, an undergirding assumption is that human beings are purposeful. We constantly learn, and when we do we are usually motivated to learn. We are directing our energy through attention, concentration, and imagination to make sense of our world. Defining “learning” as an active and volitional process of constructing meaning from experience and text, there is substantial evidence that motivation is consistently and positively related to educational achievement (Wlodkowski 2008).

At the same time, the task of supporting adult motivation in diverse classrooms is a highly nuanced endeavor. Who we are culturally and how we interact with the world is an intriguing intersection of language, values, beliefs, behaviors, and experiences that pervades every aspect of a person’s life while it continually changes and evolves. What culture is not is an isolated, mechanical aspect of life that can be used to explain phenomena in the classroom or that can be learned as a series of facts, physical elements, or exotic characteristics (Banks 2006; Gay 2000). The study of culture is not an experimental science in search of a law. Rather, it is a highly interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz 1973). Across cultural groups, all students are motivated though some may not be motivated to learn what an instructor has planned. In such instances, their motivation may be in another direction, aligned with a different perspective, or part of another set of values; but in any circumstance, adults are not inert.

Colleges and universities have more students than ever before whose perceptions and ways of making meaning vary from one another and from the instructor. Influenced by global forces and unprecedented patterns of migration and immigration, skillful post-secondary teaching requires skill and humility. In the United States alone, almost thirty million people were born in other countries. Forty-eight percent of students in New York City's public schools come from immigrant-headed households that represent more than one hundred languages. In California, 1.5 million students are classified as English language learners (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2002). The implications of this ethnic diversity for higher education are significant.

### **The Challenge and Potential of Innovation in Adult Learning**

Scholars offer a range of considerations to diversify teaching and assessment, including schema for experiential, transformational, and contemplative learning (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 2007). Given this array of perspectives on teaching and learning, the prospect of significant instructional improvement ought to be hopeful. Yet, opportunities for innovation are often dismissed. Such is the case with approaches to instructional change that present overly precise scripts, while neglecting the significant variation among learners and the need for nuanced repertoires. It is not uncommon for faculty to harshly critique externally imposed instructional ideas as naive about culture, incompatible with the local context, politically motivated, and historically repetitive.

#### **The framework enables the construction of a common culture within the learning environment that all learners can accept**

Although change can be a strenuous process, transformation among people is certainly possible and tends to be cumulative in its progression. Like the movement of the hour hand of a clock, pedagogical innovation may be imperceptible and yet dramatic over time. People do change. How we vote. How we confront injustice. How we relate to our environment. How we alter our own teaching practices.

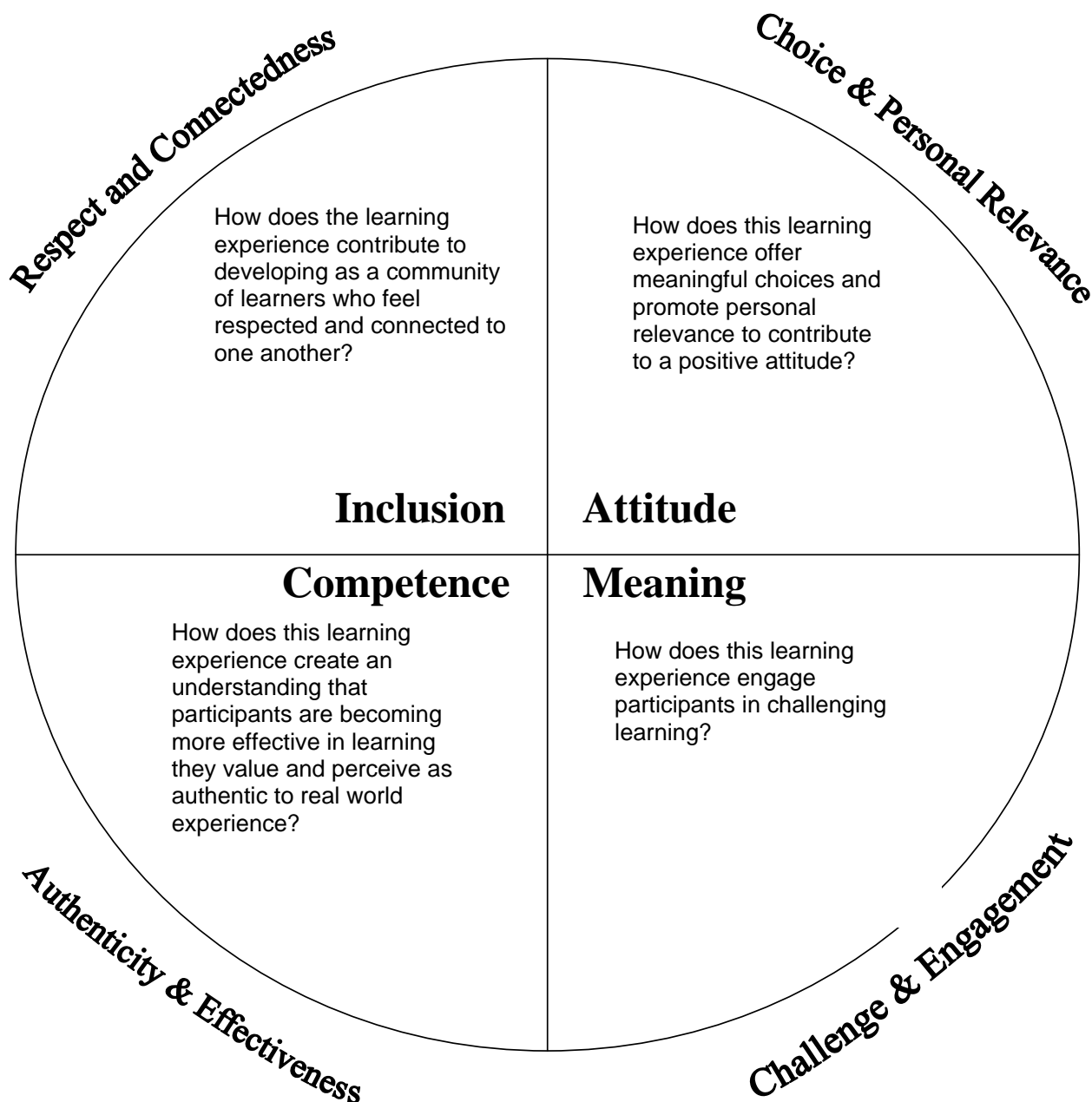
However, asking faculty to change without a shared language to discuss instructional practices and within the vacuum of their classrooms is likely to be ineffective. Innovative instruction benefits from the practicality of a shared language, especially as it mediates and contextualizes the exchange of local knowledge. As an instructional language, the *motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching* serves as an orienting tool for planning and making sense of learning experiences.

Although there is research that suggests a relationship between the motivational framework and productive learning outcomes (Wlodkowski 2008; Wlodkowski, Mauldin, and Gahn 2001; NCREL 1999), we offer this model as a heuristic for the number of possible influences on learning in any context. Our goal is to provide a pedagogical compass that can guide instructional planning to strengthen motivation and learning in culturally rich environments.

### **The Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The essentials of the motivational framework are that it 1) respects diversity; 2) engages the motivation of a broad range of students; 3) creates a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment; 4) derives teaching practices from across disciplines and cultures; and 5) promotes equitable learning. While respectful of different cultures, the framework enables the construction of a common culture within the learning environment that all learners can accept. The framework systemically represents the four motivational conditions of inclusion, attitude, meaning, and competence that act individually and in concert to provide a pedagogical ecology that continuously enhances intrinsic motivation to learn.

**Fig. 1.1 Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching**



Copyright © 2000 by M.B. Ginsberg & R.J. Wlodkowski

We define each condition using the two criteria that indicate from the learners' perspective that the condition is present in the learning environment.

1. **Establishing Inclusion:** Creating a learning atmosphere in which learners and instructors feel *respected* by and *connected* to one another.
2. **Developing Attitude:** Creating a favorable disposition toward learning through *personal relevance* and learner *volition*.
3. **Enhancing Meaning:** Creating *engaging* and *challenging* learning experiences that include learners' perspectives and values.
4. **Engendering Competence:** Creating an understanding that learners have *effectively* learned something they value and perceive as *authentic* to their real world.

Each of these conditions is research-based from applied studies within a number of disciplines (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski 2009). This model assumes that people, by nature, possess the motivation to learn and that learning is multi-determined—resulting from neural activity, cognitions, emotions, and actions that are inseparable from memory, social activity, instructional process, and the ingredients of the setting where the learning takes place (Lave 1988; Zull 2002). The framework also functions as a means for designing instruction from the beginning to the end of a learning unit. By continuously attending to the four motivational conditions, the instructor can select strategies from a wide array of theories and literature to enhance motivation in the learning setting.

A basic way for an instructor to use the motivational framework is to take the four motivational conditions from the framework and to transpose each into questions to use as guidelines for selecting motivational strategies and learning activities for a lesson plan.

1. **Establishing Inclusion:** How do we create or affirm a learning atmosphere in which we feel respected by and connected to one another?
2. **Developing Attitude:** How do we create or affirm a favorable disposition toward learning through personal relevance and learner volition?
3. **Enhancing Meaning:** How do we create engaging and challenging learning experiences that include learners' perspectives and values?
4. **Engendering Competence:** How do we create an understanding that learners have effectively learned something they value and perceive as authentic to their real world?

## Workshop Mapping with the Motivational Framework

The context for our first example is a one-day's workshop in which the Director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington introduced the motivational framework to members of her faculty development staff, using the article "Cultural Diversity, Motivation, and Differentiation" (Ginsberg 2003).

To begin, the director (Victoria) asked participants what issues are pending for them that they need to set aside to focus on the day's activity. Referring to this activity as "the parking lot," she prompted participants to write their thoughts on a piece of paper and share with a colleague next to them. Next, she asked participants to put their piece of paper away and out of sight, assuring them time for retrieval at the conclusion of the session (*motivational condition: establishing inclusion through respect and connectedness, in this case with a non-intrusive collaborative introductory exercise.*)

Victoria continued by introducing the topic, purpose, and approach for the lesson she was about to facilitate, followed by requesting participants to write down a personal goal they wanted to accomplish as a result of the workshop (*motivational condition: developing a positive attitude through volition and relevance, in this case through the use of goal setting*). After completing this task, she distributed copies of "Cultural Diversity, Motivation, and Differentiation" along with a protocol known as "collaborative text annotation" (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski 2009, 359–60). This protocol asks learners to work collaboratively in groups and provides scaffolding for interacting with text (*motivational condition: enhancing meaning through challenge and engagement, in this case using a text-based protocol to encourage meaningful connections to personal experiences and work*).

**With such self-generated knowledge learners were inclined to explore possibilities for change and ways to take effective action.**

*motivational condition: enhancing meaning through challenge and engagement, in this case using a text-based protocol to encourage meaningful connections to personal experiences and work.*

Prior to concluding, Victoria asked participants to work with a partner to revisit the personal goals they had set for themselves to ensure that she had helped to engender competence in ways that they value. (*motivational condition: engendering competence through authenticity and effectiveness, in this case using learners' personal goals to reflect on learning*). An essential aspect of Victoria's workshop and of all motivating lessons for professional learning is designing it in ways that allow educators to experience the motivational conditions they will apply to their own work with adults.

## Course Mapping with the Motivational Framework

During the 1980s, in a course now considered iconic in its influence on social justice education, Beverly Daniel Tatum (1992) taught the psychology of racism in a manner that reflected some of the most important principles of adult learning and motivation. Her instructional approach influenced the transformation of her students' perspectives and behavior. We use this course as a context for exemplifying how the motivational framework and its conditions could be used to map and construct a powerful learning experience over time.

In the following description, we once again insert italics to identify the four conditions of the motivational framework as they occur throughout Dr. Tatum's course. You'll also notice that the motivational conditions are often mutually supportive. At times they overlap because boundaries of human experience are not precise or singularly determined. Yet, when we map a course, we can usually associate different aspects of the course with a primary motivational condition.

When Dr. Tatum taught this particular course, class size averaged twenty four students; most were white European-Americans, and ranged in socioeconomic background from very poor to very wealthy. The course was designed "to provide students with an understanding of the psychological causes and emotional reality of racism as it appears in everyday life" (Tatum 1992, 2).

Beyond the reading material and media used in the course, Dr. Tatum created opportunities for learners to experience situations where the realities of racism might exist and be witnessed firsthand (*two motivational conditions: developing a positive attitude through relevance and volition, and enhancing meaning through challenge and engagement*). These experiences included visiting supermarkets in different racially composed neighborhoods to compare costs and quality of goods and services and going apartment hunting as mixed racial partners. Students kept journals for critical reflection of their experiences, using their writing as an opportunity to examine their own underlying beliefs and assumptions and to generate their own sense of these experiences (*motivational condition: engendering competence through effectively learning something of value and authentic to one's world*).

Furthermore, there was an opportunity following these activities to engage in reflective dialogue with peers and to search for a clearer understanding and interpretation of their experience (*motivational condition: engendering competence*). With such self-generated knowledge (constructed by the students, not told to them by the professor), learners were inclined to explore possibilities for change and ways to take effective action (*motivational condition: developing a positive attitude through volition and relevance*).

Students could work collaboratively in small groups to develop realistic action plans to interrupt racism (*motivational condition: establishing inclusion through respect and connectedness*). They also had the opportunity to privately tape an interview of themselves regarding their racial views and understanding at the beginning of the course and at the end of the course. After reviewing these two tapes, they wrote about their perceived changes in racial understanding (*motivational condition: engendering competence*).

The instructor, Dr. Tatum, accepted the validity of students' experiences, thinking, and judgments, and, with context and meaning-making as central components, guided learning in a way that was a transforming process: At the conclusion of the course, students acted with new awareness and self-understanding.

If Dr. Tatum were to have mapped this course using the framework, she might have approached it as follows:

## Course Mapping with the Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching

*How can this learning experience...*

*...help students feel respected by and connected to other students and to the teacher?*

Develop explicit norms for group discussion to ensure equitable opportunities for public discourse.

Use peer collaboration for community visits and journals.

### **Establishing Inclusion: Respect and Connectedness**

*...promote volition and greater personal relevance?*

Provide choices, such as generating forms of action and knowledge through personal experience in the community and

determining what to share in journals and class discussion.

### **Developing a Positive Attitude: Volition and Personal Relevance**

*...engage students in challenges that include their perspectives and values?*

Use multiple modes of instruction and learning opportunities: reading, discussion, community engagement in authentic settings, storytelling, critical questions, and allowing for emotion in order to render deeper meaning.

### **Enhancing Meaning: Challenge and Engagement**

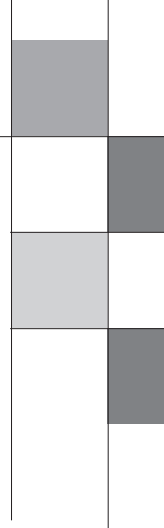
*...create an understanding that learners have effectively learned something they value and perceive as authentic to their real world?*

Create frequent opportunities for sensemaking through journals, discussion, ongoing additional forms of personal group reflection.

Provide ongoing instructor and peer feedback.

Provide for pre- and post-taped interviews for documentation of changes in racial understanding.

### **Engendering Competence: Authenticity and Effectiveness**



**Collaboration that occurs within an authentic context, such as a classroom setting, has the greatest likelihood of promoting positive change**

The purpose of the framework is to guide the likelihood that a course or an individual lesson will address all four motivational conditions in ways that are culturally relevant for adult learners. Dr. Tatum's example illustrates use of the framework for constructing significant learning experiences throughout a course from beginning to end. In the following section, we offer one more application of the framework—in this instance a lesson to prepare a team of adult educators to engage in a form of professional learning known as lesson study.

### **The Lesson Study Process**

Change theorists remind us that if we are truly doing something different, we will—at least initially—expose personal flaws and contradictions (Fullan 2004). When adults experience something that is relevant and unsettling, and have the time and support to gain insight into the experience, they are at the portal of a new perspective. Collaboration can ease the discomfort that new risks impose at the same time that it encourages local imagination. However, collaboration that occurs within an authentic context, such as a classroom setting, has the greatest likelihood of promoting positive change. In a classroom, adult learners can witness interactions and derive firsthand insights into teaching and learning.

With this understanding in mind, we have actively experimented with a form of professional learning known as “lesson study.” It is a way to develop professional learning that is intrinsically motivating because it is collaborative, relevant, engaging, and allows participants to derive well-contextualized measures of effectiveness. Lesson study, referred to in Japanese as *jugyokenku*, has been central to Japanese professional development for many years and has recently become the focus of considerable research from elementary through postsecondary education in the United States (Lewis, Perry, and Murata 2006). There are several different galleries of examples and insights about lesson study on the Web. The Web site of the Lesson Study Group at Mills College ([www.lessonresearch.net](http://www.lessonresearch.net)) is particularly informative.

**Lesson Study Overview.** The goal of lesson study is to improve instructional practice by collaboratively planning, teaching, and debriefing a lesson. Faculty come together as an interdisciplinary or subject-specific team to plan a specific lesson for a particular student group. The team then moves directly (or within a reasonable period of time) into a classroom where one member of the team teaches the planned lesson, while the other members observe. The process concludes with the group debriefing about the observed lesson, including its influence on student attention, motivation, and learning. One of the strengths of this approach is that it allows for observation of the lesson's effect on individual students as well as on particular student groups within the class. It provides one of the few opportunities for faculty to constructively note and respond to inter-group differences that may fall along the lines of gender, income, race, and ethnicity. All faculty set goals for themselves and for a continuous cycle of developing, observing, and making sense of research lessons in each others' classes.

As a strategy to systematically design, teach, observe, debrief, and build a professional community of educators, lesson study stimulates a discussion of authentic issues from a teaching experience in ways that allow clear examples from shared experience. Further, one of its strongest attributes is generating awareness of the variety of shared instructional knowledge that resides among a group of educators.

The process is not an evaluation of teaching practices where the critique is personal or comparative. Listening is as much a part of the process as sharing observations, wonders, and ideas.

**Lesson Study Procedure.** Ways to explore using this process based on the motivational framework include:

1. **Gather a team of educators** for a half-day, on-site professional development. A priority before beginning this process is to create a collegial environment in which to plan and examine a real-time lesson. This allows for more authentic and in-depth discussion of teaching practices (*motivational condition: establishing inclusion through respect and connectedness*).
2. **Identify an academic discipline** within which the team seeks to design a lesson (*motivational condition: developing a positive attitude through volition and relevance*).
3. **Plan the lesson** (possibly with the motivational framework as a template), keeping specific student data in mind—when available—such as test scores, participation rates, and assignment performance. Collaboratively plan a lesson that is of genuine concern to faculty (*motivational condition: enhancing meaning through challenge and engagement*).
4. **Teach the lesson in a designated class.** The instructor or a combination of instructors may want to teach in tandem or succession. Other team members observe the lesson, take field notes on the learning experience as a whole, and make connections in how students, in particular or in general, respond and learn (*motivational condition: enhancing meaning through challenge and engagement*).
5. **Debrief the lesson as a team**, discussing the strengths and areas of challenge with particular students and student groups (*motivational condition: enhancing meaning through challenge and engagement*). Although all team members record notes, one person publicly scribes for the group.
6. **Discuss the lesson as a colloquium** during which team members share notes and data collected while observing the lesson. For this part of the process, which is tangent to debriefing the lesson, one team member creates a chart to capture insights for later reference. Prior to concluding, the team summarizes what was learned. They also select a new focus of study or refine and re-teach the lesson, reflect on the lesson study process, and set individual goals based on collective insights (*motivational condition: engendering competence through effectively learning something of value and authentic to one's world*).

## Summary

Returning to this article's focusing question, "What do we know about instructional innovation that enhances motivation and performance among diverse adult learners?", we have responded in the form of a motivational framework with conditions we believe are essential to eliciting diverse adult learners' intrinsic motivation to learn. We have applied this framework to three contexts: a professional development workshop, a course on the psychology of racism, and the structure of a professional learning experience. All three examples are based on the assumption that when adults endorse or determine learning they find relevant, their motivation emerges. Because the authority of the teacher must be shared to some extent and because knowledge must be constructed from multiple cultural perspectives, this is a complex and subtle way to teach.

Although the topic of curricular reform is beyond the scope of this article, we consider content and pedagogy in many ways to be inseparable. The kind of culturally responsive procedures available to a research course may be quite different from those accessible to a language course. Further, even if the same procedures were to be used in both disciplines, their form and texture might markedly vary. Nonetheless, it is possible for educators to share significant pedagogical insights across disciplines when there is a common language for discourse.



Change and adaptation to new ways of teaching is a multidimensional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal negotiation. Our decisions are mediated by standards of quality and excellence that are defined by individuals, institutions, communities, and cultural agreements. Nonetheless, we believe that the unique spirit and meanings that motivate learners and teachers can be affirmed even amid the confusion of competing expectations and policies.

As dean of the School for New Learning, this challenge was David Justice's daily work. Recalling his achievements reminds us that innovations such as culturally responsive instruction are essential yet elusive goals requiring prolonged commitment. Not only is such teaching a constant learning process, it requires self-scrutiny as well as empathy to integrate the multiple perspectives of adult learners on a continual basis. Given this large landscape of pedagogical concerns, the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching offers a coherent approach to teaching diverse adults in ways that are equitable, relevant, and stimulating.

## References

- Banks, J. A. 2008. *Race, culture, and education: The selected works of James A. Banks*. New York: Routledge.
- Fullan, M. 2004. *Leadership and sustainability: System thinkers in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gay, G. 2000. *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Geertz, C. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ginsberg, M. B. 2005. Motivation, cultural diversity, and differentiation. *Theory into Practice*. 44 (3): 218-25.
- Ginsberg, M. B., and R. J. Wlodkowski. 2009. *Diversity and motivation: Culturally responsive teaching in college*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lave, J. 1988. *Cognition in practice*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, C., R. Perry, and A. Murata. 2006. How should research contribute to instructional improvement? *Educational Researcher* 35 (3): 3-14.
- Merriam, S. B., R. S. Caffarella, and L. M. Baumgartner. 2007. *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- NCREL. 1999. *Professional development: Learning from the best*. Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Suarez-Orozco, C., and M.M. Suarez-Orozco. 2002 *Children of immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tatum, B. D. 1992. Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review* 62: 1-24.

Wlodkowski, R. J. 2008. *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wlodkowski, R. J., J. E. Mauldin, and S. W. Gahn. 2001. *Learning in the fast lane: Adult learners' persistence and success in accelerated college programs*. Indianapolis: Lumina Foundation for Education.

Zull, J. E. 2002. *The art of changing the brain: Enriching the practice of teaching by exploring the biology of learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

## About the Authors

**Margery B. Ginsberg**, PhD, has a background as a teacher on two Indian reservations, university professor, and Texas Title I technical assistance contact for the United States Department of Education. Margery is an associate professor at University of Washington-Seattle, where she works with doctoral students who are aspiring systems-level leaders. She also directs the Center for Action, Inquiry and Motivation (AIM) in the College of Education. Her authored and co-authored books include *Diversity & Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching in College* (2009), *Creating Highly Motivating Classrooms: A Schoolwide Approach to Powerful Teaching with Diverse Learners* (2000) and *Motivation Matters: A Workbook for School Change* (2004). Her primary interest is helping systems innovate instruction that is increasingly responsive to diverse adult learners in a rapidly transforming world. She has a PhD from the University of Colorado-Boulder in Bilingual/Multicultural/Social Foundations of Education.

**Raymond J. Wlodkowski** is Professor Emeritus at the College of Professional Studies, Regis University, Denver. He is a psychologist who specializes in adult motivation and learning. He is the founding Executive Director of the Commission for Accelerated Programs (CAP) and the former Director of the Center for the Study of Accelerated Learning at Regis University. Among the books he has authored is *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide to Teaching All Adults* (2008), now in its third edition and the recipient of the Phillip E. Frandson Award for Literature. He is also the co-author with Margery B. Ginsberg of *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching in College* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (2009). Raymond has a PhD in Educational Psychology from Wayne State University.