

**Respecting the dignity of each learner
in culturally-relevant pedagogy:
A person-centered learning approach**

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Introduction

As the student demographic landscape in the U.S. is growing more and more diverse, it is pressing to prepare teachers for culturally-diverse classrooms (e.g., Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sleeter, 2001). In this vein, preservice teachers should cultivate their cultural awareness. Thus, based on the person-centered learning assessment scale (Freiberg, 2009), I designed a twenty-minute lesson centering on culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to a group of preservice teachers who have varying backgrounds. The overarching purpose of the lesson is to cultivate the pre-service teachers' cultural sensitivity by transforming them from tourists into citizens in the classroom (Freiberg, 1996).

I taught the lesson twice to the same group of students successively. The theme of the two lessons is about making teaching culturally-relevant. After teaching the first time, I collected the data from the person-centered learning assessments from the peer students and analyzed them both quantitatively and qualitatively. For the second lesson, I made some changes by absorbing the comments and feedbacks from the assessments.

Overall, the two lessons corroborate that person-centered learning approach can effectively engage the preservice teachers in the classroom. More importantly, the

person-centered learning analysis favorably supports that I respect the dignity and right of each learner. Moreover, the find reveals that I have successfully worked as a learning facilitator.

Analysis

In this section, I analyzed the two lessons I taught to the preservice teachers in the classroom. I supported my analysis by the data from the person-centered learning assessments and the instructional audio records from the lesson.

The Educator Section: Respecting the dignity and freedom of the learners

In this section, I ensured equitable opportunities for each student to speak publicly. Moreover, I directly talked with each individual by replying with positive comments like “Good points!” and “Thanks for sharing!” Specifically, compared with the PCLA I analysis, I taught better during the second time, which can be verified by the PCLA II analysis. Further, my scores are highly congruent with the peer scores in items 5 and 9 indicated by PCLA II.

PCLA I Analysis (The educator portion)

Measurement Indicator	Peer score	My score
1. The Educator interacts with individuals and small groups of learners.	7.6	8.0
5. The Educator respects the right and dignity of each learner.	7.6	6.0
9. The educator acts as a resource person, facilitator, guide, and assistant in the student’s learning.	6.8	8.0
15. The educator fosters cooperation among learners.	8.4	6.0

PCLA II Analysis (The educator portion)

Measurement Indicator	Peer score	My score
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1. The Educator interacts with individuals and small groups of learners.	8.8	10.0
5. The Educator respects the right and dignity of each learner.	9.6	10.0
9. The educator acts as a resource person, facilitator, guide, and assistant in the student's learning.	9.6	10.0
15. The educator fosters cooperation among learners.	6.4	8.0

To sum up, firstly, I prioritize the equitable interactions with the individuals and small groups of the learners. Accordingly, when I taught the lesson second time, I designed the “guess the sitcoms and movies” activity to hook the students’ interests. On one hand, this group guessing activity can facilitate the students’ cooperation; on the other hand, the group guessing activity can foster the students’ cultural sensitivity, especially the American pop culture. I asked one American student, Debbie, and one international student, Karen, to volunteer. One of the group members was required to describe the scenes, plotlines or the classical lines from the movies excluding the title of the movies. The other group member was expected to guess the title of the movies or sitcoms. In my teaching instance, Debbie described the movie and Karen guessed the movie. I showed the posters of the movies and sitcoms. I found this activity engaging. Some other students even supported Debbie and Karen. Consequently, the classroom atmosphere became stimulating at the beginning. We had the conversation below:

Gang: Who wants to join in? OK, Debbie! Thank you! Karen! Thank you! Can you just stand against the power-point slides? You are not allowed to look at the ppt. So, are you ready?

Debbie: Yes!

Gang: Let’s begin!

Debbie: Six good buddies. Three ladies and three guys.

Karen: Friends?

Debbie: Right! Good job!

As the guess activity went on, Karen could not guess several sitcoms or movies like the Big Bang Theory and Forrest Gump. To better support Karen, I said “The other people can help Karen. You can give some hints.” After hearing this, Sarah (pseudonym) timely provided the classic line “Run” in the movie Forrest Gump.

Overall, Karen worked out 4 out of the 6 sitcoms and movies. As an international student who comes from another cultural background, she did a good job. Realizing this, I positively verbalized: “Karen performed very well! I know Karen comes from Vietnam and it is difficult for international students like Karen to guess the movies. They are all American movies and sitcoms. It is really a cultural issue. I also want to thank Debbie here. Thanks for your description! Thanks Sarah! Thanks for your support.” In this way, I responded with warmth and positive feedback. More importantly, I respected the right and dignity of each learner.

After this activity, I debriefed with the students what they have learned from this activity in terms of culturally-relevant teaching, especially when you teach an immigrant student or ESL student. Tenesha (pseudonym) insightfully commented that: “Do not assume they know all and try to incorporate something from their culture.” I responded that: “Hi Tenesha! Good point! I think we cannot take it for granted. You grew up in this cultural environment. But for the immigrant kids or the ESL students, they come from totally different cultural backgrounds. It takes time for them to learn this new culture and lifestyle here.”

Over the course of the debriefing, the other students also shared their opinions. So instead of directly providing the answer, I created an open and inspiring environment where the students' concerns and opinions were shared. For this reason, I acted as a learning facilitator by releasing students' critical thinking potentials.

However, I did not find that I perform well in fostering the cooperation among learners in my first and second teaching. From the collected feedback, one student commented that: "I did not see any pair work/group work. Therefore, this one is not very effective." Similarly, another student replied that: "We did not do group work." But one student reflected that when they worked on the movie and sitcom guess activity, they had group work. Also, one student commented that they discussed the video clip, they exchanged their ideas and thus had pair work.

In summary, my reflection is that different students have various understandings about this indicator. Some students think the movie and sitcom guess activity is cooperation among learners. Yet others assume that working on a project is cooperation among learners. Personally, I did not emphasize cooperation among students due to the limitation of my lesson plan. I should ask the students to collaboratively work on a project like how to flexibly implement culturally-relevant pedagogy in diverse classrooms. In this way, the students may possibly give higher scores on this item.

The Student Section: Transforming the students from tourists to citizens

Overall, compared with PCLA I analysis, I taught more effectively in engaging student in this section, which was indicated by PCLA II analysis below:

PCLA I Analysis (The student portion)

Measurement Indicator	Peer score	My score
18. The Learner is encouraged to make self-assessments about their needs, interests, and abilities.	5.6	10.0
20. The student demonstrates involvement with her or his learning materials.	5.2	6.0

PCLA II Analysis (The student portion)

Measurement Indicator	Peer score	My score
18. The Learner is encouraged to make self-assessments about their needs, interests, and abilities.	8.0	8.0
20. The student demonstrates involvement with her or his learning materials.	7.6	6.0

To further relate culturally-relevant pedagogy to the students' experiences, I prepared and distributed some worksheets among the students. The intention of the worksheet was to prompt the students' prior teaching experiences related to cultural issues. Simultaneously, I wanted to locate the students' interests and concerns by invoking their reflections on the opportunities and challenges they encountered in their educational contexts. After filling out the worksheets, the students were encouraged to share what they wrote.

I said: "I will ask you to answer the open-ended questions. You can briefly talk about your potential opportunities and challenges in making your teaching culturally-relevant in your own specific educational contexts. You just write down some keywords about your teaching experiences. Then we will share what you have written. We will spend one-minute on this task."

Based on the grouping of the students in the class, I named the student groups international student group and the local American group. One minute later, I said:

“Time is almost up. Please write down some key words. Shall we begin with the international student group or the local American group?” I approached the American student group and continued that: “I understand that this group has long and rich teaching experiences in American public schools. So who wants to share first?”

Sarah first shared her viewpoints: “The opportunity is inclusion. Inclusion is getting all the students’ voices in the classroom. Sometimes, learning needs to change the students from tourists into citizens involved in education.”

I replied: “Yes! We can use Dr. Freiberg’s *tourists* to *citizens* concept in the classroom.”

Sarah further explained: “You have the opportunity to learn from your students.”

I questioned: “Could you please explain how you learn from your students?”

Sarah confirmed that: “Learning about their cultures, their pasts, and their beliefs. Perhaps we can also learn a new language from our students.”

I replied: “I know you are interested in Mandarin Chinese and your son is learning Chinese in school.”

Sarah commented: “Right! Exactly! ”

During the self-assessment activity, Tenesha talked about relationship building and the importance of liking the students. Also, Debbie insightfully mentioned supportive, open and safe space in classroom where the students and teachers could share their feelings and concerns. After that, Wenting concurred that the students could act as experts in their own culture, and Karen stated that teachers could also learn from

the students in terms of culture.

From the analysis, first, I guaranteed that each student in the classroom could freely express their perspectives. Second, I replied to each student with supportive comments such as “It is a good point!” “I agree with you!” and “Thanks for sharing!”

My weakness in this section is that I did not facilitate students’ multiple ways of learning indicated in my person-centered learning assessment: taking notes and working on the poster (The PCLA I peer score and PCLA II peer score are 5.2 and 7.6 respectively). In retrospect, I should have rearranged the self-assessment activity. Perhaps I could have inserted a group activity here. Specifically, after filling out the self-assessment worksheets, I could have asked Wenting and Karen to exchange their experiences. Then Wenting could have talked about Karen’s self-assessment. In this way, Wenting would have not only understood her own teaching reflection, but also Karen’s teaching stories. Meanwhile, when the students shared their takeaways from this class, I could have provided a blank poster for them. Then I could ask each student to write what they have learned from this 20-minute lesson.

The Resource Section: Providing rich and updated learning materials

In terms of the resource, I provided appealing PowerPoint slides, the clock boy (Ahmed Mohamed) incident video clip, and the further reading materials about culturally-relevant pedagogy. One noteworthy example is about the clock boy incident video clip. My intentions are two-fold. First, I want to make the lesson content reflect the status quo of the present research issues. Second, I hope the lesson content touches on the current educational event in society. After watching the video clip, we had a

discussion: If you were Ahmed Mohamed’s teacher, what would you do? Tenesha expressed that the science teacher should have understood what the student had made. Interestingly, Debbie mentioned the cultural separation and the importance of cross-cultural understanding.

By watching and discussing the video clip, I hope the students can better understand the necessity, backgrounds, tenets, and the possible strategies in applying culturally-relevant pedagogy in their own educational contexts. From the analysis, I found that I did well in incorporating rich resources in this mini-lesson. The PCLA I and PCLA II analysis are congruent with my two-time teaching below:

PCLA I Analysis (The resource portion)

Measurement Indicator	Peer score	My score
37. The lesson content is updated to reflect current research, and relevant events.	9.2	10.0

PCLA II Analysis (The resource portion)

Measurement Indicator	Peer score	My score
37. The lesson content is updated to reflect current research, and relevant events.	9.6	10.0

Meanwhile, the content areas are interdependent. First, we watched the clock boy incident video clip with the students. After the discussion on the video, I contextualized the imperativeness of culturally-relevant pedagogy. Specifically, I detailed the changing demographic backgrounds of the students in the American public education system with pictures and numbers. Then I introduced the concepts and the principles of culturally-relevant pedagogy. Finally, I asked the students to share what they have learned from this lesson in the lens of making teaching culturally-relevant in the

classroom settings. We had the conversation below:

Gang: Can everyone share several points by using one sentence to summarize what you have learned from today's session? Which group should we start with? This time we will begin with international student group. So, Karen, can you just briefly talk about your thoughts, comments or any feedback on how to make teaching culturally-relevant?

Karen: Er...I am quite interested in the quote from the professor you shared. She also talks about... Can you go back to the slides?...Yes! It is a pedagogy that empowers students politically. I think that politics is quite sensitive. But it is necessary to teach students to get rid of the biases and stereotypes about another culture.

Gang: Yes! Students should find the bias. Good point! Insightful! Thank you!

In the following time, Wenting talked about why and how teachers work as facilitators who can make their teaching tailored to a specific group. Tenesha shared that teachers should strengthen the partnership between school and family, and Sarah said that teachers should not assume students know everything. Finally, Debbie touched on the authentic exposure to the culture in the classroom. In summary, I asked each student to share their takeaways in sequence. The students moved beyond the basic conception about culturally-relevant pedagogy and honed their critical thinking abilities.

The PCLA I related to this indicator shows that the peer score is not very high (averaging 6.0 out of 10 points) in making the content areas interrelated and integrated in lessons. From the PCLA II analysis, the peer score improved by 1.6 points, but it

was still not highly congruent with my personal score that I gave myself. I found one student commented that: “It seems that most of the students know about culturally-relevant pedagogy except me who is not clear about this [sic].” From this feedback, it can be inferred that some students are not familiar with the concept and find it a little difficult in learning. As a result, they did not rate high on the resource portion in this section.

PCLA I Analysis (The resource portion)

Measurement Indicator	Peer score	My score
35. According to the needs of the student, content areas are interrelated and integrated in lessons.	6.0	8.0

PCLA II Analysis (The resource portion)

Measurement Indicator	Peer score	My score
35. According to the needs of the student, content areas are interrelated and integrated in lessons.	7.6	10.0

From my perspective, I assume culturally-relevant pedagogy is an abstract concept, especially for international students. For this reason, I think it is necessary to begin with some specific examples around them such as popular sitcoms and movies. Then we discussed our own teaching experiences in different contexts. Further, we watched and discussed the clock boy incident video and the changing American public education landscape.

After finishing these activities, I formally introduced the concept and principles of culturally-relevant pedagogy. I emphasized that it was not necessary to memorize this concept. However, it is important to understand the meaning and apply it flexibly in your own classrooms. Finally, the students and I shared what we have learned from

this class.

Discussion

Through the two-lesson analysis, I have effectively taught culturally-relevant pedagogy to the preservice teachers by respecting the dignity of each learner. Since the K-12 classrooms in the U.S. is becoming more and more diverse, it is imperative to facilitate preservice teachers' cultural competency, which will prepare them well for their future diverse classrooms. Cultural sensitivity is the initial step, preceding cultural responsibility, toward a culturally-responsive educator. After the preservice teachers have cultural sensitivity, they can competently cope with the multicultural issues in varying educational contexts.

Meanwhile, the person-centered learning approach effectively transforms the students from tourists into citizens (Freiberg, 1996). Specifically, the students' freedom to learn (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994) is respected. From the PCLA I and PCLA II analysis, it can be found that I respect the right and dignity of each learner. More importantly, I have effectively worked as a resource person and learning facilitator. From the average peer scores in PCLA II, it can be inferred that I sufficiently ensured equitable opportunities for each student to speak publicly in the classroom. After the students finished speaking, I responded with warmth and positive feedback.

Additionally, it can also be concluded that I have provided rich learning materials conducive to learning like the video clip. Thus, the students can gain deep learning (Egan, 2010) by playing an essential role in the classroom.

Due to the limitation of the timeframe (20-minute teaching in total), I did not

receive a high peer score in fostering cooperation among the learners. Also, the tight teaching schedule contributed to the lack of student involvement in working on a poster.

Additionally, due to various student backgrounds, some students in this classroom found it difficult to learn the concept of culturally-relevant pedagogy. In future teaching, I should create activities where students can work on group activities.

References

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Appendix:

Person- centered Learning Assessment

The Educator

1. The Educator interacts with individuals and small groups of learners.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	mostly effective	very effective

Indicator: Teacher directly talks with individuals while explaining the contents. Teacher also engages in the groups of learners while working on the group activity.

Feedback:

5. The Educator respects the right and dignity of each learner.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	mostly effective	very effective

Indicator: Teacher ensures equitable opportunities for each student to speak publicly in the classroom. After student finishes speaking, the teacher responds with warmth and positive feedback.

Feedback:

9. The educator acts as a resource person, facilitator, guide, and assistant in the student's learning.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	mostly effective	very effective

Indicator: Instead of directly providing the answer, the teacher offers rich and engaging learning materials related to the objective.

Feedback:

15. The educator fosters cooperation among learners.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	mostly effective	very effective

Indicator: Teacher facilitates pair work/group work among the students in the classroom. Teacher supports the students to collectively work out the problem.

Feedback:

The Student

18. The Learner is encouraged to make self-assessments about their needs, interests, and abilities.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	mostly effective	very effective

Indicator: The students will be distributed assessment, scales or worksheets to evaluate their prior learning experiences, needs, interests and goals.

Feedback:

20. The student demonstrates involvement with her or his learning materials.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	mostly effective	very effective

Indicator: The student adopts multiple ways of learning: taking notes, engaging in group activities, working on the poster, etc.

Feedback:

Resources

35. According to the needs of the student, content areas are interrelated and integrated in lessons.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	mostly effective	very effective

Indicator: The content areas are connected with each other. The content areas are chosen based on the students' main concern and needs. They can satisfy students' learning desire.

Feedback:

37. The lesson content is updated to reflect current research, and relevant events.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	mostly effective	very effective

Indicator: The lesson content can reflect the status quo of present research issues and related areas. The lesson content touches on the current educational event in society.

Feedback:

Lesson Plan

Teacher: Gang Zhu

Grade: Pre-service teachers (Undergraduate-Level)

Date: 02/09/2016

Subject: Culturally relevant pedagogy

Focus: (1) Design pair-group activities that ask learners to understand the necessity, definition and implication of Culturally relevant pedagogy. (2) Based on the individual educational context, the learners are encouraged to develop their own Culturally relevant pedagogy strategies.

Learning Objectives& Standards: (1) Learners should understand the conception, components and meaning of Culturally relevant pedagogy (academic success, cultural competency and critical consciousness). (2) Learners can integrate Culturally relevant pedagogy with their own specific educational context (Take-away).

Accommodations: Firstly, I will ask the learners to self-assess their experiences (confusion, obstacles, opportunities, etc.) related to Culturally relevant pedagogy so I can locate their needs and concerns. Then the learner will watch a short video clip on “Clock Boy” Ahmed Mohamed. After watching the video clip, we will discuss the implication of the video clip. Finally, I will deliver a presentation on the background and the contents of Culturally relevant pedagogy.

Instructional Variability: I ask the learners to share their teaching experiences to diverse learners. We will discuss the commonalities/differences revealed in the discussion.

Critical Thinking Questions: (1) What is the justification of Culturally relevant pedagogy?
(2) As an educator, how do you foster cultural understanding within school/classrooms?

Explanation Content: I provide background information, demonstrate and give examples on Culturally relevant pedagogy.

Check for Understanding: I will use questioning, and discussion, to evaluate students’ understanding.

Guided Practice: I will provide a real case about diverse classroom. Then we will work out the solutions by pair-work.

Individual Practice: I will check if students have doubts on Culturally relevant pedagogy. Then I will further explain it if necessary.

Closure: (1) The students will share what they have learned today.

(2) The students will reflect how they apply Culturally relevant pedagogy to their own educational contexts and practice.