

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

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Abstract

This research aims to teach culturally-relevant pedagogy to the preservice teachers by respecting the dignity of each learner. By comparing and contrasting the data collected from (Person-centered Learning Assessment) PCLA I and PCLA II (Freiberg, 2009), the researcher analyzed two lessons centered on culturally-relevant pedagogy. The research finds that person-centered learning approach can effectively transform the students from “tourists” into “citizens” in the classroom, whereby their dignity and freedom to learn are respected. Additionally, the researcher can work as a resource person by engaging the students in stimulating learning environments. Last, the preservice teachers in the research were encouraged to locate their challenges and opportunities over the course of learning the concept of culturally-relevant pedagogy. Thus, the preservice teachers demonstrated active involvements in the various learning activities.

Keywords: culturally-relevant pedagogy, person-centered learning, resource person, dignity of learner.

Introduction

As the student demographic landscape in the U.S. is growing more and more diverse, it is pressing to prepare teachers for the increasingly culturally diverse educational settings (e.g., Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sleeter, 2001). Based on the person-centered learning assessment (Freiberg, 2009), I designed a twenty-minute lesson centering on culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) that was presented to a group of preservice teachers who had varying backgrounds. The over-arching 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). According to Freiberg, when students are tourists, they "simply pass through without involvement, commitment, or belonging" (Rogers and Freiberg 1994; as cited by Freiberg, 1996; p. 32). For the metaphor "citizens," Freiberg means that students can become informed and involved members in the respecting and caring classroom community (1996).

The researcher taught the lesson twice to the same group of students successively (two weeks apart). The theme of the two lessons was about making teaching culturally-relevant. After teaching the first time, the researcher collected the data from the person-centered learning assessments from the peer students and analyzed them both quantitatively and qualitatively. For the second lesson, the researcher 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, which is evidenced by the analysis of the twice teaching sessions (the mean evaluation score of the second-time teaching 8.6 is higher than the first one 7.6). More importantly, the person-centered learning analysis favorably supports that the researcher respects the dignity and right of each learner (the second teaching score is higher than the first one in the respecting the dignity and right of each learner category). Moreover, the study reveals that the researcher successfully worked as a learning facilitator (the average scores on this section were consistently high). These analyses are supported by the data from the person-centered learning assessments and the instructional audio

records from the lessons, which are described in detail in the following section.

Literature Review

Person-Centered learning

Deeply rooted in counseling and psychotherapy, person-centered learning was mainly developed by leading humanitarian psychologist Carl Rogers (1951; 1961; 1983; 1994). In client-oriented therapy, Rogers (1961) characterized three core principles that underpin counseling: congruency, acceptance and understanding. By the same token, in person-centered learning approach, instructors usually act the role of facilitators, who provides resources for the learners; students are respected as the whole person, who play active roles in the learning process. Moreover, the person-centered learning environment is warm and supportive (Rogers, 1983). Overall, Rogers called a radical shift from traditional teacher-centered learning to innovative student-centered learning.

Building on Rogers's classical work, Freiberg expanded personal-centered learning approach to the practical field, especially in school climate (e.g., Freiberg, 1998; 1999) and classroom management arenas (e.g., Freiberg, 1999; Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000). However, beyond the chasm between teacher and student centeredness, Freiberg posited that person-centered learning is different from simplistic view on student-centered learning, which often overshadows teachers' function. By drawing upon his multi-year project Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline project (Freiberg, 1991; Freiberg et al., 1995), Freiberg distinguishes the differences between teacher-centered classroom and student-centered classroom (2009; p.101):

Teacher-Centered Classrooms	Person-Centered Classrooms
Teacher is the sole leader	Leadership is shared
Management is the form of oversight	Management in the form of guidance
Teacher takes responsibility for all paperwork and organization	Students are facilitators for the operations of the classroom
Discipline comes mostly from the teacher	Discipline comes from the self
A few students are the teacher's helpers	All students have the opportunity to become an integral part of the management of the classroom
Teacher makes the rules and posts them for the students	Rules are developed by the teacher and students in the form of a classroom constitution or compact
Consequences are fixed for all students	Consequences reflect individual differences
Rewards are mostly extrinsic	Rewards are mostly intrinsic
Students are allowed limited responsibilities	Students share in classroom responsibilities
Few members of the community enter the classroom	Partnerships are formed with business and community groups to enrich and broaden the learning opportunities for students

Furthermore, Freiberg argues that although we teach about democracy, we rarely practice it in our schools and classrooms (1996; p. 36). Accordingly, in person-centered learning environment, students can change from “tourist” into “citizens” (Freiberg, 1996), whereby students change from passive knowledge receptors to active and informed individuals in classroom communities (Freiberg, 1996).

In summary, Cornelius-White’s meta-analysis (2007) on learner-centered teacher-student relationships reveals that they are effective. Meanwhile, research found that student motivation and achievement highly correlate to positive relationships between students and teachers and a positive climate for learning (Alfassi, 2004; McCombs, 2001). Theoretically, informed by person-centered learning approach, scholars connect person-centered learning with classroom instructions (e.g., Cornelius-White & Harbaugh 2009; McCombs, 1997) and school reform (e.g., Cornelius-White & Brown, 2006; Lambert & McCombs, 1998).

Culturally-relevant pedagogy

In multicultural education area, culturally-relevant pedagogy is gaining momentum (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Nieto, 1999; 2004). In most cases, culturally-relevant pedagogy and culturally-responsive pedagogy are used interchangeably (Gay, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009; Howard, 2003). According to pioneering researcher Ladson-Billings, culturally-relevant pedagogy is:

a pedagogy of oppression not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order, (p. 160).

Different from conventional value-free and culture-null pedagogies, culturally-relevant pedagogy addresses several pressing thematic issues in public education, especially in urban school settings. One noteworthy example is the racial and cultural discrepancy between White teachers and minority students (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013). Researchers (Gay, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009) propose several principles undergirding culturally-relevant pedagogy such as respecting colored students' culture and language, having high academic expectations on students, etc.

The overarching purpose of culturally-relevant pedagogy is to address the racial and cultural issues in education (Delpit, 1988, 1997; Ladsong & Tate, 1995). However, culturally-relevant pedagogy is neither stable or fixes, it evolves all the time. For instance, some scholars associated culturally-relevant pedagogy with community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; 2006) and counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, in terms of minority students' cultural backgrounds, some researchers (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) theorized funds of knowledge to incorporate students' diversity.

After reviewing the literatures, the researcher noted that there is paucity of research that connects person-centered learning and culturally-relevant pedagogy, especially in teacher education arena.

Out of this reason, this research endeavors to bridge the gap between these two pillars.

Methodology

This research utilized mixed methodology to analyze the collected data. Specifically, the researchers first analyzed the quantitative data that collected through the Person-centered learning assessment (PCLA) scale. Meanwhile, the researchers analyzed the qualitative data including instruction audio-tape and the comments from the preservice teachers.

This research adopted Person-centered learning assessment (PCLA) scale developed by Jerome Freiberg (2014). Person-centered learning assessment (PCLA) is a flexible, mixed-methodology survey aimed to promote person-oriented learning across different educational settings (Freiberg, 2014). The educator can flexibly select the evaluation items and the corresponding description indicators that suit his/her teaching goal. Simultaneously, PCLA also incorporates feedback for each indicator so that educators can receive qualitative comments from students. In this way, educators can analyze what their strengths and weaknesses are in person-centered teaching approach.

Conclusion

As for this study, there are three categories in the person-centered learning assessments in total: the educator section, the student section, and the resource section (for more details, see appendix). The researcher prioritized the three sections for he assumed these sections were critical components in teaching the concept of culturally-relevant pedagogy in the lens of person-centered learning. In this section, I analyzed the two lessons that I taught to the preservice teachers in the classroom. Co-currently, the researcher analyzed each section with the collected quantitative and qualitative evidences.

**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
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 and one international student to volunteer a group. 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, Callie (pseudonym) described the movie and Khanh guessed the movie. I played the posters of the movies and sitcoms. I found this activity engaging. Some other students even supported Callie and Khanh. Consequently, the classroom atmosphere became stimulating at the beginning. We had the conversation below:

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

Callie: Yes!

Gang: Let’s begin!

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

Khanh: Friends?

Callie: Right! Good job!

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

Overall, Khanh 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: “Khanh performed very well! I know Khanh comes from Vietnam and it is difficult for international students like Khanh to guess the movies. They are all American movies and sitcoms. It is really a cultural issue. I also want to thank Callie here. Thanks for your description! Thanks

Deidre! 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 teaching culturally-relevant, especially when you teach an immigrant kid 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 we 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 better 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 better relate culturally-relevant pedagogy to the students' experiences, I prepared and distributed some worksheets among the students. The intention of the worksheets was to prompt the students' prior teaching experiences related to cultural issues. At the same time, 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 take an assessment. 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 job."

One minute later, I said: "Time is almost up. You just write down some key words. Shall we begin with the international student group or the local American group?" I approached to the American students group and continued that: "I understand that this group has long and rich teaching experiences in American public schools (based on the grouping of the students in the class, I named the student groups international student group and the local American group respectively). So who wants to share first?"

Deidre 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 concept that from tourists to citizens in the classroom."

Deidre further explained: "You have the opportunity to learn from your students."

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

Deidre confirmed that: "Learning about their culture, their past, 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."

Deidre commented: "Right! Exactly!"

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

From the analysis, first, I have guaranteed that each student in the classroom could freely express their perspectives on culturally-relevant pedagogy. Second, I replied each student with supportive comments like "It is a good point!" "I agree with you!" "Thanks for sharing!" Acting this way, I created an open and supportive class-room environment where each student was encouraged to express their opinions in affirmative tones.

My weakness in this section is that I did not note 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 Jing and Khanh to exchange their experiences. Then Jing could have talked about Khanh's self-assessment. In this way, Jing would not have only understood her own teaching reflection, but also Khanh's teaching stories. Meanwhile, when the students shared their take-away from this class, I could have provided a blank poster for them. Then I could have asked each student to write what they had learned from this 20-minute lesson.

**The Resource Section:
Providing rich and updated learning materials**

In terms of the resource, I provided appealing power-point slides, 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 understand what the student had made. Interestingly, Callie 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 consistently 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 demographic backgrounds of the changing American public education 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? Let’s start which group? This time we will begin with international student group. So, Khanh, can you just briefly talk about your thoughts, comments or any feed-backs on how to make teaching culturally relevant?

Khanh: Er...I am quite interested in the quote from the professor you share. She also talks about... Can you go back to the slides?...Yes! It is a pedagogy that empowers students politically. I think that political is quite sensitive. But it is a need to teach student get rid of the bias and stereotype about another culture.

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

In the following time, Jing talked about that teachers should work as facilitators who can make their teaching tailored to the specific groups. Tenesha shared that teachers should strengthen the partnership between school and family and Deidre said that teachers should not assume students know everything. Finally, Callie touched on the authentic exposure to the culture in the classroom. In summary, I asked each student to share their take-away in sequence. The students moved beyond the basic conception about culturally-relevant pedagogy and honed their critical thinking ability.

The PCLA I related to this indicator shows that the peer score is not very high (averaging 6.0) in making the content areas interrelated and integrated in lessons. From PCLA II analysis, the peer score improved by 1.6 but it was still not highly congruent with my score. 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.” From this feedback, it can be inferred that some student are not familiar with the concept and find it a little difficult in learning. As a result, they did not rate high 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 like the 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, along with the students, we 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 classroom in U.S. is becoming more and more diverse, it is imperative to facilitate preservice teachers' cultural competency, which will prepare them well in the 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, person-centered learning approach effectively transforms the students from tourists into citizens (Freiberg, 1996). Specifically, the students' freedom to learn (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994) was 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. One example is when talking about the American movies, I encouraged the students to work in pairs and played an active role in learning. 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 student finishes speaking, I responded them 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, I did not receive high peer score in fostering cooperation among learners. Also, the student did not demonstrate involvement in working on a poster. Due to

various backgrounds, some students find it difficult to learn the concept on culturally-relevant pedagogy. In future teaching, I should create activities where students can work on group activities.

Note: The names of the participants in this research are all pseudonyms.

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Appendix

Person-centered Learning Assessment Scale

The Educator

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

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

Feedback:

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

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:

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

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

Feedback:

4. The educator fosters cooperation among learners.

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

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

Indicator: The students will be distributed pieces of papers or worksheets to state their prior learning experiences, needs, interests and goals.

Feedback:

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

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

Feedback:

Resources

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

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:

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

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

Feedback:
