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Scholarly Identity Snapshot Renewed

My scholarly identity

Looking back at my first scholarly identity snapshot, many things still ring true. I would still say that my identity is grounded in justice and teamwork, and I still absolutely love teaching sociology. My teaching skills are definitely more refined now that I know about and try to practice learner-centered, culturally relevant, and sustaining pedagogy. I still often reflect on my time as a college adviser and the steps I will be taking to make college access programming more community oriented. I am starting my Masters thesis in the spring and although I am not directly focusing on college access, I will be doing work on self-directed learning skills. This is in part due to the chapter on motivation in McKeachie's text and the chapter on self-directed learning in Brookfield (Brookfield, 2013; McKeachie, 2013). With the pandemic, asynchronous classes, time limitations, and quantitative necessity¹ of my thesis, I unfortunately can't do a more in-depth college access or teaching project. Hopefully, though, I am able to "double dip" and turn this work into a mentored teaching project as part of the Certificate in College Teaching.

I don't think my beliefs, values, or commitments have drastically changed over the course of the semester. My Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) indicated that I was very liberal, progressive, and embrace intercultural and global opportunities. Considering that I haven't retaken the BEVI just yet, I don't think I will go in the opposite direction in valuing

¹ In my program, students complete a high-quality paper (can submit to Graduate School for a Masters) in our second to third year if we do not have a Masters degree when entering the program. The majority of students do a quantitative paper rather than a qualitative because our program is on a tight five-year schedule.

these things *less*. If anything, the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project has shown me that collaborative research is possible online, during a global pandemic, with folks from different places and spaces. Our group worked really well throughout all aspects of the project and I hope I have such a positive experience like this one again in the future. I was able to really embrace the global opportunity as a part of this course. This doesn't happen often. The only other time I even had a global experience as part of my education was when I studied abroad in Amsterdam when I was an undergraduate. That trip was a lot of firsts – first flight, first time in Europe, first time out of the United States. In a parallel, this was my first COIL experience and first research experience with a team member living outside of the United States, and like my trip to Amsterdam, was extremely valuable! One thing I am juggling with is the dichotomy between research and teaching. The COIL project feels more focused on research *in the context of* a teaching course. Sure, there's the overlap of the general COIL learning experience as a "pedagogy", but this was overshadowed by the month timeline and rushed feeling. I enjoyed it through and through, but the assignment itself seemed to be separate from applying the pedagogy we spent time learning about throughout the course.

I would say my scholarly identity has changed throughout the COIL project. At first, I was uncomfortable digging through literature that I didn't have some sort of background or previous understanding in. Both Guanglong and Renae coached me through this asynchronously as we outlined the beginning parts of our paper. Now, as I'm beginning the literature review portion of my Masters thesis, I'm now able to more confidently dig through academic articles and other literature that isn't based in sociology to connect ideas, concepts, and theories. Unfortunately, I ended up axing most of that writing on the paper because it was too long! Other pieces were kept as they pointed directly to our methodology, though, so it did not go to waste.

Some of this literature as well pointed toward the background of my Masters thesis. All of the collaboration has boosted my confidence in my scholarly identity and built the foundation for the first big milestone of my PhD journey.

Pedagogy

In thinking about my teaching philosophies, I see the overall aim and purpose of education is to prepare us to be responsible citizens and to have the skill of understanding the connections between different aspects of our world. Obviously, we cannot see all of the relationships all the time, but the *ability* to see them is what matters. At some point, I wish that each individual wants to learn for the sake of learning as the process of producing and finding knowledge is liberating. I say “producing and finding knowledge” as we all produce knowledge and can find the knowledge that others produce. I believe half of my pedagogy is culturally sustaining and the other half is learner-centered.

Django Paris (2012) describes culturally sustaining pedagogy as “support[ing] young people in sustaining cultural and linguistic competence of their own communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence”. For my field, sociology offers a unique skill in the sociological imagination: the ability to “zoom out” and see the impact of greater social forces on our individual lives. In this way, learners with intersecting oppressed identities gain a greater understanding of their positionality but can move forward in sustaining their own cultural practices. In some ways, this is resistance to the dominant White culture!; Understanding dominant cultural and social practices is a form of access in and of itself. In teaching how to do this, I try to tie as many other perspectives into the foundational sociology course as possible. It is not only Karl and Weber who have a class (economic) perspective, after all! Sociology is not just a theory nor only exists in a textbook; it is an approach to

understanding. I spend many hours looking for new ways for different concepts to be portrayed, such as in research, through podcasts, short and long videos, et cetera. In this way I'm creating my own professional development as I haven't found a specific workshop that covers this skill.

Learner-centered teaching is a pedagogy that shifts power in the classroom from educator to learner, encourages reflection and collaboration, and really *engages* learners in the messy work of learning (Weimer 2013). At its core, learner-centered teaching empowers learners to be creators of knowledge, not just the educator imparting knowledge upon a passive learner. As I try to incorporate learner-centered pedagogy into my role as a TA and recitations, I believe all learners are inherently good and can be trusted. The vast majority of learners are interested and care about the material because learning about large social forces and oppression can be liberating. Like I said above, understanding how the social world functions opens the door to paths and practices of resistance. For example, as I work with students to build skills in sourcing and citations, they know I give them the benefit of the doubt as many are first-year students. Unfortunately, some students take advantage of this belief and blatantly plagiarize, I actually had a student do this *this semester!* Luckily, this is extremely rare and there are processes for dealing with this issue when it arises. With all honesty, I do have trouble incorporating learner-centered teaching into my online asynchronous recitations. In my role, I am limited to what the professor lectures about during the week and he tends to teach straight out of the textbook. What I do, though, to make my sections more learner-centered is to incorporate what learners want to learn about into their assignments and optional discussion boards. This is a practice in professional development like searching for other media.

In thinking of assessment within the context of learners as co-creators of knowledge, I am juggling with the question: how do I assess knowledge that is not my own in this space? *Should I*

be assessing knowledge that is not my own, especially knowledge that is created counter to, or in resistance to, what is imposed upon me to grade according to dominant sociology? That last sentence is a bit of a word salad, but it is in reference to “foundational” historically white sociology that has alienated certain voices and populations from the field. After all, we still teach that Auguste Comte as the “founder of sociology” when Ibn Khaldun first conceptualized general sociology hundreds of years earlier. Who am I to assess students’ resistant expressions of knowledge when I come from the dominant race, language, and culture?

Conclusion

Clearly, I am thinking about a lot within the context of the course. The incorporation of different pedagogies into my teaching and juggling with the dichotomy (false dichotomy?) of research and teaching. I don’t have a one or two sentence teaching philosophy yet, or at least one that I’m comfortable sharing publicly or privately. I’m not a perfectionist very much, though I do want to have something polished before I share it. I’ll get there soon.

References

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