

# Self-study: Elevating Preservice Teachers in Teaching Practice through Mentoring and Culturally Responsive Teaching

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## INTRODUCTION

This self-study addresses the pressing need to investigate the impact of mentoring/coaching on the independent teaching of pre-service teachers (PSTs) within the context of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2018), with a specific focus on classroom management. In addition, the study highlights the personal growth of both mentee (PST) and the mentor (the researcher) from multiple perspectives. Through the lens of Culturally Responsive Teaching, the study offers practical insights into the obstacles confronted by PST while incorporating this pedagogy into the classroom. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective PST mentoring/coaching, offering recommendations to enhance the preparation and support provided during this transformative phase of a preservice teacher's education.

## BACKGROUND

The Purdue CDF Freedom School Program operated for the first time in West Lafayette in the Summer of 2023 in collaboration with First United Methodist Church of West Lafayette, who served as a site sponsor. Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom School is a free six-week, literacy-based summer program for students in grades K-12 (locally we targeted K-5). Purdue CDF Freedom School program modeled after the national CDF Freedom Schools® national program and curriculum (CDF Freedom Schools, 2020a).

The CDF Freedom School encourages a love of reading and learning through a culturally responsive curriculum. The Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) affirms students with engaging literature and exposure to the broader community through addressing an array of local and global social justice topics (CDF Freedom Schools, 2020b). In Purdue's site, students were taught by PSTs who were currently studying in the teacher education program, with a 1:10 teacher to student ratio. CDF Freedom School model implements Culturally Responsive Teaching as the main pedagogy for teaching, it means teachers need to individualize the course according to the student population. PSTs were provided with a curriculum guidebook, and they were required to follow the guidebook for teaching Integrated Reading Curriculum, with the limited alteration (CDF Freedom School, 2022b). In integrated curriculum time, each PST will do one read aloud every day (or every two days) with students and do various activities that correspond to the teaching theme. After the IRC, students have 15-minutes independent reading time. The afternoons consisted of various activities including STEM engagement, creative writing, field trips, social action activities etc.

One of Purdue site's objectives is to serve as a training ground for pre-service teachers (PSTs), facilitating the integration of the theory of culturally responsive teaching into practical application. This program offers PSTs hands-on experience, effectively bridging the divide between their teacher education and future independent teaching roles.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does my mentoring/coaching help a PST's first independent teaching experience with a focus on classroom management and personal growth.
2. What coaching and mentoring strategies are effective to PST's independent teaching experiences, and conversely, what strategies prove less effective in the mentoring process?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Culturally Responsive Mentoring (Han & Onchwari, 2018)

- Inclusive Mentoring (Robertson et al., 2023)

Teaching Through Interaction Framework (Hamre et al., 2013)

- With the focus on classroom organization dimension

## METHODOLOGY

This research employs a case study approach (Yin, 2018), using variety of qualitative data collection methods (shown in data collection section) to comprehensively explore the impact of mentoring and coaching on SLI's independent teaching experience. With mentor was able to have an in-depth mentorship with the mentee (PST).

The researcher analyzed data using interpretive qualitative methods (e.g., Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher focused on class observation field notes, one-on-one debriefing recordings as main data sources.

In the data analysis process, the researcher:

- Organized the successes and challenges from the one-on-one debriefing, field notes and mentor's self-reflection memos
- Analyzed data to develop findings from main data sources
- Employing the Teaching Through Interaction Framework ((Hamre et al., 2013) as an assessment tool to measure the growth of mentee's (PST) classroom management skills.
- Utilizing the Inclusive Mentoring Practice as a codebook to assess the effectiveness of the mentoring strategy and identify any elements that may be lacking in the mentorship.

## DATA COLLECTION

Method	Description	Frequency	Data collected
IRC Observation	Observing mentee's IRC teaching (with 6-8 students)	Every weekday (6 weeks)	Field notes & memos, video recordings
	Debriefing with mentee (PST) to discuss IRC successes and challenges, mentee would also bring up the issue, and mentor provide solution/comments	Twice a week (15 - 20 min)	Voice recording, mentor's self-reflection memo
	Daily debriefing with site coordinators and three other PSTs to discuss daily success and challenges	Daily (30 - 40 min)	Video/audio recording
One-on-One Debriefing	Debriefing with mentee (PST) to discuss IRC successes and challenges, mentee would also bring up the issue, and mentor provide solution/comments	Twice a week (15 - 20 min)	Voice recording, mentor's self-reflection memo
Whole Group Debriefing	Daily debriefing with site coordinators and three other PSTs to discuss daily success and challenges	Daily (30 - 40 min)	Video/audio recording

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Successes		
Aspect	Mentee (PST)	Mentor (Researcher)
Implication of Mentorship	Gaining experience of working with mentor	Facilitated meaningful mentorship, contributing to mentee's growth
Self-reflections	Engaged in reflective practices for personal development	Modeled and encouraged reflective practices, fostering growth for both
Hands-on Opportunity	Actively participated in practical teaching experiences (receiving feedback, seeking support, etc.)	Support mentee's experiential learning in CRT setting
Communication Strategies		Implemented effective communication strategies to guide and support
Learning How to work with PST		Shared expertise in working with PST, fostering a collaborative environment

Challenges		
Aspect	Evidence	Countermeasures
Developmental Process Gap	Mentor ignored mentee's developmental process gap at the beginning of mentorship	Mentor needs to recognize the developmental process gap and work to address it
Power Dynamic	Mentor did not acknowledge nor address power dynamics at the beginning of mentorship	Acknowledged and addressed power dynamics at the beginning of mentorship,
Ask for Input	Mentor encouraged mentee to voice her opinion, but mentee always says she does not have much to say, eventually, mentor start to lead the debriefing	Fostering an equitable partnership, and utilizing resources to build a more structured debriefing
Struggled with Delegation of control during debriefing	Giving control: mentor leading the debriefing Gaining control: mentee was more in a passive receiving role during debriefing	Actively involved mentee in debriefing with affirmation, asking questions, utilizing reflection tools to facilitate the debriefing, etc.

## LIMITATIONS

1. Time constraints

2. Knowledge gap

The mentee was not from the Purdue teacher education program, which introduces several challenges, including the alignment of expectations, understanding the background knowledge of the mentee, effectively bridging the knowledge gap, etc.

3. Difficulty translating theory into practice

Barriers include incomplete understanding of CRT holistically, lack of prior experience with diverse student populations, some conflicting perspectives between the teacher education program and the Freedom School model

4. Limited experience of working with diverse student populations

Due to the demographic of West Lafayette and Lafayette, our site has a highly diverse student population. Many students were coming from different cultural backgrounds, different family status, with needs and learning styles. i.e., children from foster cares, immigration families, kids who had traumatic experiences, etc.

5. Teacher burnout

Due to objective factors such as the complexity of the program and the initial establishment of the site, both staff and PSTs experienced mental exhaustion, leading to illness in the latter half of the program

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this self-study highlights the successes and challenges of both mentees and mentors in the Purdue CDF Freedom School program (summer 2023). Along with the discovery of complexities and challenges embedded in mentoring relationships. The findings highlight successes and failures in mentorship and emphasize the importance of providing ongoing support throughout the Freedom School program.

This self-study has not only provided valuable insights into effective mentoring and coaching but has also helped to clarify the direction for subsequent research. For future studies, the researcher aims to cultivate more discussions on the importance mentorship and coaching of CRT in teacher education, with the goal of fostering a smoother transition for pre-service teachers into independent teaching.

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