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Shifting demographics among racial and ethnic groups within the United States continue to reflect an increasing diverse society. Projections based on 2010 Census figures and official estimates through 2013, the United States is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse (Colby & Ortman, 2014). For example, 310,753 (97.5%) of 2014 respondents identified themselves with one racial/ethnic group. Of this number, 62.2% of the participants identified themselves as Non- Hispanic White, making them the racial majority over Black or African Americans (13 .2%), Asians (5.4%), American Indians and Alaska Natives (1.2%), and Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders (.2%). The data offer another snapshot of responses within which individuals identified themselves as members of more than one racial group. (While those figures are absent in this proposal, they will be provided in the presentation). Projections based on a cohort-component method suggest that the U.S. population will continue to become increasingly diverse. Even though the non-Hispanic White racial group will remain the largest, no racial group will make up more than 50% of the nation's population by 2060. However, Colby & Ortman (2014) were careful to indicate that these predictions only illustrate one possible outcome, if a number of mitigating factors hold constant. Furthermore, these data are linked to a racial phenomenon, not a cultural one.

These diversities are reflected in the middle grade student population, as they are members of longstanding racial groups or members of biracial or multiracial groups that have emerged. Uneven growth in physical, intellectual, emotional, social and ethical dimensions add to the racial characteristics that make middle level students so diverse (Davis–Powell, 2014; National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). These diversities are causes for celebrations, but at the same time offer challenges for preparing middle level teacher candidates to work with students who look different than they do and come from cultural backgrounds that may be unfamiliar to them. The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) Middle Level Teacher Preparation Standards requires candidates to develop and demonstrate an understanding of diversity implications related to the development of young adolescent learners (NMSA, 2010). At the same time, middle school students have an ability to reason about social justice realities and ideals (Necochea, Stowell, McDaniel, Lorimer, & Kritzer, 2001). Teacher candidates must demonstrate their ability to use this knowledge of young adolescent development and capacities to implement curricular material and instruction strategies that are responsive to students' local, national, and international histories, language/dialects, and individual identities (NMSA, 2010). Anecdotal accounts suggest that these preservice teachers become overwhelmed with the thought of learning the cultural background and potential of each student in their classes. My experiences suggest that this preoccupation is limited to racial differences and distracts them from gaining insights into a more encompassing nature of culture. The prospect and likelihood of preparing to interact and mentor

students who come from backgrounds that differ from their own is a daunting task for teacher candidates and their respective middle level teacher educators.

The concept of culture is a multi-faceted one that is susceptible to change over time as a myriad circumstances dictate. From a sociological perspective, it consists of the beliefs and values, behaviors toward members of the group and those outside of it, norms established by group members who have the power to do so, language acceptable for communicating within and outside of the group, tangible artifacts (e.g., clothing, food, jewelry). These categories of thoughts are shared among a group of individuals and reside within their minds (Spradley & McCurdy, 2008); they are intangible and go well beyond skin color. Spradley & McCurdy (2008) add, "[C]ulture is a kind of knowledge, not behavior: It is in people's heads. It reflects the mental categories they learn from others as they grow up.

The dynamic growth spurts among young adolescents and the multiple aspects of cultural contexts of cultural provide an imperative for middle level teacher candidates to develop an appreciable level of cultural competence. Basically, cultural competence refers to an educator's ability to positively impact students who are members of a culture or cultures different from his/ her own (National Education Association [NEA], 2016). A development of cultural competence emerges from foundational knowledge of various cultures and groups with an attitude of embracing cultural diversity. The trajectory continues toward an ability to engage in reflections on the individual's interactions with members from various cultures and to become better informed, because of those experiences (Deardorff, 2009; Landa & Stephens (2017). It seems, then, that positive interactions among and with diverse individuals are at the heart of developing cultural competence. Middle Level teacher educators must expose their teacher candidates to strategies and dispositions with this goal in mind. Contrariwise, my teacher candidates complained that some of my colleagues warned them against attitudes and instructional practices that were inconsistent with culturally- relevant and culturally responsive practices but failed to offer practical suggestions for resolving their shortcomings.

Given the adage that actions speak louder than words, it was clear to me that exhortations to adopt social justice dispositions and diversity mindsets through lectures and other direct instruction approaches were inadequate to foster development toward cultural competence. Class discussions about diversity and informal conversations outside of class nudged me to seek authentic experiences that would foster my teacher candidates' growth toward cultural competence. What could I do to develop their ability to reach across cultural boundaries to effectively teach their future students, as a result of their growing knowledge, set of accompanying reflections, and myriad experiences?

At the University of South Carolina, my middle level teacher candidates must enroll in and complete a course that provides an overview of national trends related to learning environments with an analysis of the relationship of early adolescent developmental characteristics to organization, curriculum, instruction, and teaching in the middle level school. To reach this goal, explicit attention is given to diversity that includes the complexity and diversity that exist among young adolescent adolescents. Furthermore, candidates engage in examinations and analyses of behavior management issues, techniques, and special provisions related to social justice within academic and cultural contexts. To support the candidates' growth toward the integration of theory and

practice, the course instruction and activities take place at a middle school that is in close proximity of the University campus. More importantly, a rich diversity of students from various racial groups, socio-economic status, neighborhoods, and cultural backgrounds attend there. I revised this middle level behavior management class to include a service learning component. In short, service- learning is an instructional strategy that is based on a perspective that students learning by doing (Chenarani, 2017). It allows my teacher candidates, most of whom are White, to apply their academic knowledge that they gained during the course to rendering a service, supervising students, most of whom are of Color, during after school activities.

Given the diversity of students that candidates face and the complexities associated with culturally relevant and culturally responsive imperatives that often overwhelm teacher candidates, I engage them through the use of a lived experience in I construct and use a sociogram, based on their responses to a few questions. In its simplest form, a sociogram is a graphic representation of relationships that exist among students (Sobieski & Dell'Angelo, 2016). The activity begins through a collection of data that the students provide about themselves. After distributing an index card or a half sheet of paper to each teacher candidate, the course instructor request responses to the following in order of their preferences:

1. Name three classmates whom you would like to sit next to you for the rest of the semester. (The first name listed is the top selection).
2. Name three classmates whom you would pick to work with you on a major class project with the goal of earning the highest grade in the class.
3. Name three classmates to join a championship kickball team you are assembling.

The first question is intended to provide insight into individuals who are likeable or sociable. The second question seeks to identify individuals who demonstrate academic prowess. Finally, the third question serves as a "wildcard". I generally reserve it for identifying persons perceived to have the greatest athletic ability, given the premium that Americans place on sports and entertainment.

After collecting the responses, I organize and tabulate the results by assigning three points for the top vote getter, two points for the second pick and one point for the third pick. For each prompt, I place preservice teachers' names (pseudonyms) in concentric circles with the highest scorer(s) in the middle circle and less popular choices in the outer rings in decreasing order along with their respective selections (See figure 1). Alternatively, the instructor might create a diagram that includes the pseudonyms and their selections without the use of concentric circles. In either case, a single- headed arrow shows whom the individual selected. A double- headed arrow shows the individuals selected each other (See Figure 2).

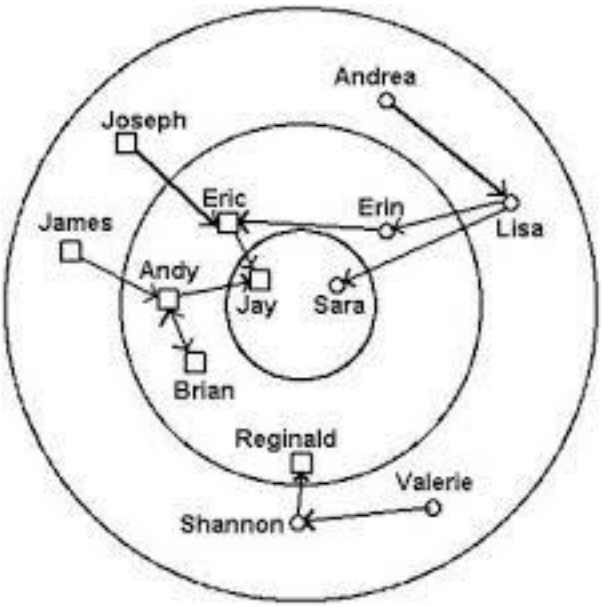

Figure 1: Sociogram that uses concentric circles. It is a visual representation of how class members selected each other in response to a particular prompt.

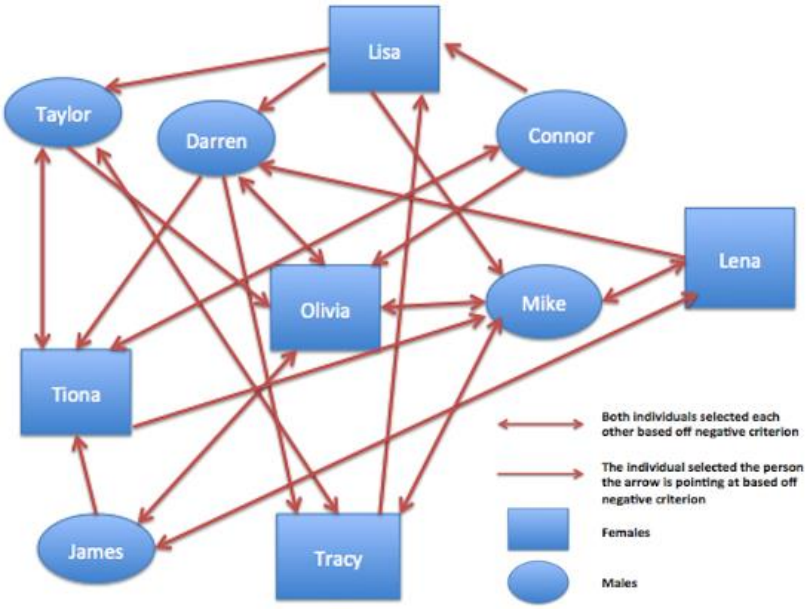

Figure 2. A sociogram without the use of concentric circles. It is an alternative visual representation of how class members selected each other in response to a particular prompt.

When conducted in an anonymous manner, the sociogram representations can be authentic and unpredictable. To preserve the dignity and well- being of my teacher candidates, I share neither the results of their rankings nor whom they selected. Instead, I present data that emerged in another behavior management class or sociograms generated from middle school student data, although the latter option appeals to teacher candidates more. During this presentation, I point out surprising or unexpected instances in which a class member who emerges as the most likeable person or viewed as the most

"intelligent" individual. Concurrently, a scenario in which person who appeared to be the most influential class member and selected by the fewest number of peers may emerge on occasion. These instances often arrest prejudices that some preservice teachers might have class members who appear to be privileged by race, sex, socio-economic status, etc.

I use the sociogram representations, together with the following discussion questions to help my teacher candidates unlearn preconceptions to which they cling. These questions may include the following:

- Why are some individuals selected more than others?
- What strategies might a teacher use to make isolates and/or less selected individuals more popular choices?
- If class knew the real names of the individuals, what (if any) patterns related to race or backgrounds emerge?
- How might the instructor use this information to foster attitudes and behaviors in a way that reflect cultural competence?

In context of the behavior management course, my development of sociograms and engagement of teacher candidates in reflective discussions provide concrete experiences and analyses that begin to help them disarm racial and cultural biases and/or prejudices to begin development of cultural competencies.

As a formative assessment, teacher candidates can use sociogram representations to form heterogenous and collaborative groups so that their students gain positive experiences in working with peers from diverse backgrounds. Just as it can help identify a need for individual and/or classroom interventions (Leung & Silberling, 2006), a sociogram can provide a visual representation of relationships between students within or across cultural groups, establishing a community of learners despite the cultural differences that may exist. This lived experience gives teacher candidates a method for generating and interpreting student data to plan culturally responsive (Gay, 2000) learning activities and addressing diversity in their future classrooms. Also, candidates are able to observe a demonstration of cultural competence strategy (NEA, 2016), as counternarrative to lectures on how privileged they are.

As noted earlier, culture is multifaceted and dynamic (Spradley & McCurdy, 2008). It extends far beyond skin color and physical traits to include relationships that undergo change, particularly during young adolescent growth. Even so, cultural competence develops over time and results from impactful and engaging experiences that precipitate changes. Meanwhile, Sobieski & Dell'Angelo (2016) indicate that the use of sociograms are well suited to reveal these complexities and changing nature of student relationships. Therefore, sociograms can be viewed as a tool for assisting middle level teacher candidates' cultural competence in addition to a myriad of other active learning experiences (National Education Association [NEA], 2016; Ruppert, Adcock, & Crave, 2017).

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