

**Transcript for Culturally Responsive Play as Pedagogy**  
**BCcampus FLO Friday recorded on December 12, 2025**  
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**Host: Helena Prins**

KAMINI KAMDAR:

So thank you so much to everyone for joining us today on this FLO Friday. And my name is Kamini. I am a kindergarten teacher. I'm also a PhD candidate at York University, and my work at York University or my research really centres around engaging newcomer families in early learning settings and then in education in general, as well as culturally responsive pedagogy. I'm really excited to share just some more information about the topic of Culturally Responsive Play as Pedagogy with you today.

So I'm joining you today from Toronto, Ontario. So I'd like to go ahead and just say a land acknowledgment. I acknowledge the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat, and that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties. I recognize that this land has been and continues to be home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. A land acknowledgment is only a beginning... It does not replace the ongoing work of unsettling colonial assumptions, attending to Indigenous sovereignties, and rethinking how our practices in education may reproduce or interrupt colonial harm. It's going to move on to the learning outcomes for our session today.

We have two learning outcomes for our session. The first is that we'll identify how a culturally responsive pedagogy of play can amplify learner voice, foster identity building, and strengthen relationships with diverse families and children. The second learning outcome is to explore the role of loose parts play and identity affirming play as culturally sustaining and inclusive teaching tools.

I'll take you through just a brief agenda for our session today. So we're going to have an overview of culturally responsive play in pedagogy. We'll talk a little bit then about types of play. So there's different types of play that research has shown. One is play as progress and one is play as self. And then we'll situate culturally responsive play along with those notions of play. We're going to talk a little bit about loose parts play and sort of how we can, add a culturally responsive element to loose parts play, pause for reflection and sort of a little bit of a collaboration, and then we'll go back into talking about affirming identity through play, and then closing reflections and time for questions.

So what is culturally responsive pedagogy? Before we talk a little bit about culturally responsive play, I thought it was really important for us to first sort of go over cultural responsive pedagogy. The term culturally responsive pedagogy really comes from the work of a scholar named Geneva Gay, and Geneva Gay really sort of thinks about culture responsive pedagogy as a framework to recalibrate our pedagogical practices to ensure that the unique, diverse

cultural, linguistic, ethnic identities of children and families in educational settings are made visible. And in addition to that, something to really highlight is that when we engage in culturally responsive pedagogy, we are then drawing on acknowledging and affirming the social and cultural capital of those children and families that are diverse in our settings. So Geneva Gay also offers six major premises of culturally responsive pedagogy. We're not going to dive into the entire six, but I thought it was important for us to understand what the fundamental premises of culturally responsive pedagogy are. The first is that culture counts. Second, conventional reform is inadequate. Intention without action is insufficient. Strengthen vitality of cultural diversity. And competence or incompetence is never universal or all inclusive. Then the last one test scores and grades not symptoms are symptoms, sorry, and not causes of achievement problems. And I'd like to just expand on this for a quick second and talk about our learning frameworks, let's say, any learning framework in itself is not universal. So when we really say that cultural competence or incompetence is not all inclusive or never universal, we're acknowledging that the importance that we place on particular educational goals are really unique to our own learning contexts. That way we can say that we are really open to all ways of knowing and all ideas of what knowledge counts from a global perspective. And then Geneva Gay also says that the practice of culture responsive pedagogy is different, novel, innovative, and unconventional. This is sort of what I'd like to keep in mind as we move through our session, that the work that we're doing today, thinking about culture responsive pedagogy, sometimes can feel fumbly, it can feel new. And that is sort of where we're going with this. It's not intended to feel that way, but it is innovative. It's new. So these are the things that come with that.

Just a quick quote from the work of Geneva Gay. She says here, "Culturally responsive teaching is about teaching, and the teaching of concern is that which centres classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of reference." Again, we're really challenging the notion of one set of learning goals or one way of learning or learning towards specific goals and thinking about it from a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural perspective.

Here I'd like just to take a brief moment to pause and reflect and engage with you in the chat and ask, On a scale of 1 to 5, how comfortable are you with the topic of culture responsive pedagogy? One being very unfamiliar and then 5 being very familiar. Where do you see yourself on that scale, have you engaged with this topic previously? And, you know, I'll say, you know, I am learning also. I think we're always in a process of lifelong learning. So I can't say, I'm at a 5. I feel like, you know, again, the work is innovative and new, so we're really sort of in this together. Yeah. So 2, 3, same thing. I feel like I'm probably around like a 3, you know, committed, for sure. I think this is really where it starts, is being committed to a new way of teaching and thinking about our teaching and then play in general. I'm going to add in here too, a 3. Yes, it does. Dr. Martin, it does sound like critical pedagogy and intersectionality, 100%. Definitely key pieces in culturally responsive teaching. I'll just give it about another minute in case anyone wants to add. Lots of 3s. Yeah. So 4s, and 2s. We're right in the middle of it. I agree. Universal design for learning is definitely an important component, for sure.

So let's think a little bit about culturally responsive play. Now that we just have a little bit of a foundation on culturally responsive pedagogy, let's build on that and think about culturally responsive play. Studies have shown that outside of early childhood education, play as a pedagogy, has struggled to gain credibility as a pedagogy, as a pedagogy of value of importance, and also identity creation, visibility, meaning making. At the same time, we know play is valuable for children and adults alike. So here we're going to sort of brainstorm a little bit about the elements of play. And the reason that I wanted to sort of just touch on the elements of play for a quick second is because, you know, in creating this presentation, I was thinking about how loaded that word play is. You know, oftentimes, when we hear the word play, we associate it right away to early childhood education or early years. And it's sort of become this umbrella term that we use. But, you know, when we think about play, we're thinking about elements of play. So we're thinking about things like spontaneity, imagination, use of our bodies, you know, decision making, sensory experiences. And so I think, when we're talking to colleagues outside of an ECE setting, we might consider what do we mean by play and really tease out what kind of experiences we're aiming for.

So here again, let's go back to the chat and let's brainstorm some elements of play in our chat. I think that, you know, our brainstorm today will help you sort of think about play without using the word play to be able then to sort of situate it in different contexts. And again, such a good comment. You're right. Dr. William, when we sometimes say the word play again, it's so loaded that it almost gets taken not seriously. And so, the thought I had was really if we sort of think of different ways to describe what we're aiming for, you know, we can sort of destigmatize that word play beyond ECE sort of contexts. Oh, pleasurable learning. Yeah. Surprise. That's such a good one. Yeah, rhetorical play, such as memes. Yeah, really good. Movement. Agreed. Sure. Role play, Improv, 100%. Yeah, all of it. Crafting, building, exactly. Using bodies in the classroom Mm hmm. Going outside, so important, 100%. Maybe even I'm going to type in the word fun, you know. Using different senses. And I think, you know, these terms are so important because when we want to convey the idea of play, let's say, in secondary, post-secondary contexts, when we're talking sort of, you know, with adults, you know, we can sort of use these terms interchangeably alongside with play to convey just how important play is. So this is a great list.

We're going to move on to different types of play. We can keep these ideas in the chat and feel free to also take them with you. Different types of play. I wanted to include this because there are different types of play. There's many different types of play, but the two that I wanted to focus on today is in a nutshell, play as self and play as progress. Play itself is unstructured, student led, open-ended, and most importantly, not tied to any curriculum expectations. So this is play where children, students are most visible because we are engaging with them in a way that sort of really responds to and interacts with their identities and the social linguistic cultural capital that they bring. And this is where I situate culturally responsive play. Play as progress is often what we find in instructional approaches or our curriculum documents, and it's presented as learning through play. When we're learning through play, oftentimes this learning through play is tied to developmental milestones, knowledge acquisition, curricular expectations, and because we're situating it in a certain educational sort of lens, it makes the visible it makes the

unique identities of students and families invisible essentially. And so our work really is when we think about culturally responsive play to really begin from a place where we think of it as play as self and really just sort of before we even go into learning through play using culturally responsive pedagogy. The work is to first recognize and make visible the diverse identities of the students in our classroom through just play as self.

Okay, we're going to move on to loose parts. So loose parts play, traditionally focuses on, I think, two things. One is that it focuses a lot on if you're familiar with it, it focuses on, let's say, Western loose parts. I can say from my time in the classroom, and it's all well-meaning. So we would have loose parts that are, let's say, neutral. What I'd like you to consider is that when we engage with materials that are neutral, that neutrality is a positionality in itself. And so we can challenge traditional notions of loose parts play where we use things like non-print fabric or nature finds and we can actually incorporate other cultures through things like cultural fabrics, cultural utensils. You know, I have a few images here that I want to share with you. I'm going to go from the clay sculpture top left and then move across counter clockwise. This is a clay sculpture and the reason I'm incorporating this or sharing this photo with you today is because I came across this artwork at an early learning centre visit, and the teacher actually decided, so the student made a clay sculpture, it's a fox. But what she did was instead of just writing a fox as the label. She took the students home language, and so he spoke German, and she actually added in the German translation for Fox underneath it. And so, you know, I really challenged you to think of ways that we can make the identities in our classroom and the learners visible through our pedagogical choices. The first is even talking about materials, what they've built in their home language and including that alongside, let's say, our English translation. The second, again, is my point of, you know, fabric. So we use, you know, sort of fabric play a lot in settings. And what would that look like if we ask families or incorporate cultural fabrics into the materials that we use? And the bottom picture is that, during Diwali time, we'll, an activity, a common activity, is to decorate the diyas. And I thought, you know what? What about using those materials as loose parts outside of a cultural celebration outside of any sort of specific time of year, specific event, but really just to incorporate these cultural pieces into our everyday educational practices. The last picture is actually of a reading corner, and this reading corner is inspired by some students in this class who were from the South Pacific. So this reading corner uses South Pacific textiles and the woven mat, things like that. These are some ways that we can incorporate the unique identities of the children and families in our classrooms in a way that's not tokenistic. But really, again, acknowledges and demonstrates their own cultural capital within our educational settings.

Okay, so we're going to just about a minute, take some time for reflection. We have today for you a Google Doc and the Google Doc is meant to be a resource that we all contribute to. I'm going to just pause for about, let's say, 10 minutes and we are going to add to the Google Doc of possible loose parts that we might be able to use that are from diverse cultures. So I have a few ideas already listed for you. If you wanted to add to those. You have two options for this break. You can stay in the main room and work on the Google Doc on your own independently.

If you'd like to join a breakout room, you can also join the breakout room. So please feel free to decide on a choice that works for you, and we'll meet in a few short minutes.

HELENA PRINS:

There is a question in the chat that I wonder if you want to address that before we go into the... From Dr. Martin. Do loose parts ever risk being culturally misappropriate?

KAMINI:

Such a good question. Okay, so I was actually chatting with a colleague about this, and this is the thing. I think thank you for asking this. This is such a good question. I think sometimes we are so afraid to be offensive that we again stick to this position of neutrality. I think it's not offensive if you are working with the students and families in your classroom or in your educational setting, and they are co-creating these experiences with you. So when we engage with families and children, and they are also involved in the decision-making of those loose parts, that is what takes it away from being tokenistic or inappropriate to the whole point of culturally responsive pedagogy, which is tapping into the actual capital of families and students.

Okay, great. Well, this was a great list. You know, when I was sort of looking at all the suggestions and I thought, you know what? The thing is true, the team work makes the dream work. This is really, really amazing. I hope that you take this list and I know I will as a resource moving forward. There's so many good ideas here from spices instead of sparkles to photographs, language, vocabulary, musical instruments. So here we can see that we can really when we think again in new ways that are innovative, we can think outside the box for something that seems so sort of traditional as loose parts and really begin to think of them in a way that is culturally responsive.

I thought, while this list was being made and sort of we're all working on it, I guess one of the things I wanted to sort of maybe throw out there in the chat is to ask, maybe if you're in a secondary context, how might you incorporate loose parts in a secondary context? So I know we talk a lot about loose parts, let's say, at the elementary level. But what are some thoughts that you have in terms of being able to incorporate loose parts, which we can say again, we call it loose parts play. That is a form of play. How might you incorporate that into a secondary context? And just feel free to type your thoughts in the chat.

So I think something like movement. Oh, yeah, to complete scenes. Sure. Yeah, artifacts. Let's say movement in music. Oh, that's so great to use loose parts as part of an assignment. As a submission. Yeah. I agree. Dance steps, jokes. Jokes that's such an interesting idea too, because often jokes are very cultural, even sayings and proverbs. That's really interesting. Oh, that's so nice. Yeah, this picture of the students themselves, the children's pictures of the students as students. Yeah. I just want to pause here for a quick second to highlight the importance of our brainstorming and our thinking around culture responsive pedagogy.

You know, in 2007, there was a researcher. His name is Steven Vertovek and he coined a term called superdiversity. And, you know, in the early 2000s, he really noticed that migration and immigration is changing and becoming more complex. So, you know, now we have, let's say, families that travelled through several countries before they reach Canada, or, you know, there might be one parent in the home country and the families in the host country or, like, involuntary migration. So we know that, you know, the cultures that our students come from are increasingly diverse, and so are their pathways. So it's, you know, great that we're able to sort of brainstorm our list today and our thinking around culturally responsive pedagogy and play to really sort of mirror the complexities that are going on in the world that we see then reflected in our classrooms. Okay, we're going to just move on. These are great suggestions. Again, I hope you take all of these. I know I will take all of these thoughts as resources for the future.

Okay. So we're going to go just really quickly into Identity Affirming Resources, Connecting with Families. And here, these are just some photos from my own classroom, one of the things that I was tinkering with when I thought about how to make these identities of children their cultural, ethnic, linguistic identities visible in things like play, these are some of the snapshots. So some of the things that I tinkered with is having name tags. So sometimes, you know, we'll have, let's say, in early years, we'll have the name for door window, sort of things that are in our everyday classroom, but to ask families to contribute labels in their home language and then place them around our classroom or cubbies or name tags. This is something that I think goes beyond elementary, where we acknowledge a child's name or a student's name is not just in English. You know, there might be another linguistic way of writing it. And so what does it mean to really honour these languages, cultures, pronunciations in our educational settings. And then speaking to that point about, when we involve children and families in the work, it becomes authentic and we don't then need to worry about sort of offending anybody or being tokenistic because the work is organic and it's with each other and it's in relation to your classroom community and the family community. And so again, we have here similar to our loose parts list, cultural newspapers could be cut and paste. It could just be to sort of have the backdrop or to look at them, fabric, music. So one of the things that I started doing in my classroom was asking parents what was your child's favourite song in their home language? What did they like to play at home? And then bringing their favourite songs into our classroom and using that in place of background music. So really making those pedagogical decisions to, again, make visible the identities of the families and children that are in our classrooms. Yes, name stories. Agreed. Because oftentimes if someone says, Helena says in the chat, name stories, right? So I agree. Names are, they're very deep at the same time. We can just say each other's name, but they also have stories, meaning, language connected to it. So that in itself is a whole little path to explore.

Okay. In the next slide here is Identity-affirming play Ideas. So, you know, thinking about cultural games, allowing families to share games that are in their culture that they play at home with their own community. And I'll give you the example of tag. So in Vietnam, tag is a game called Catch the Elephant. And so they're so again, thinking about returning, asking and



returning some of the or inviting families to engage in learning by asking them what are some of the games that they played as children or they play in their home country, and then playing those in our classroom. Music, same thing. What are the child's favourite songs, and playing those during movement breaks, classroom games and as background. And then drama centre or in drama class in general, if it's not elementary. You know, I was thinking about sort of a non-elementary perspective of drama, and that could even be folk tales, right? So oftentimes, you know, in drama, maybe we sort of lean towards traditional ideas of drama or stories. But again, we can sort of think about what are some other cultural stories that we'd like to sort of involve in either drama centre or drama activities, and even props for drama, right? They can come from different cultures. This comes to the end of our workshop today.

I have just a little space here for questions or comments or any other thinking that you have around this topic? That's a good question Helena has in the chat. What happens if you hardly make direct contact with families of adult students? So for those of you that teach in post-secondary settings, how might we if you don't make contact with your families, how do you see this playing out or how might you connect to gather those cultural resources? Oh, yeah. As a practice tool to teach students, yes, we'll be engaging with families in their professional work post-graduation, 100%. Again, going back to learning about the work of Geneva Gay, culturally responsive pedagogy is innovative. These are all the things that we're grappling with. It's innovative in terms of us thinking about how are we going to connect with families if we don't have direct contact with them, or for pre-service teachers or future students that will work with families.

There's a question here. I'm curious about what resources you've encountered that support culturally responsive play as pedagogy in post-secondary? So, I would like to say it's a relatively new field that we are all going into together, in this time of not only diversity, but let's say superdiversity, it's new thinking. I think the resources really come from conversation, dialogue with each other, or colleagues, thinking about how we might play around with this with the learning that we learn as educators. I haven't found a specific resource. I think this is the thing. It's sort of in action and with each other that can make any sense. Ask students to brainstorm their unique ethnicities in class and share them with each other. Mm hmm. Oh, yeah, custom background in Zoom. That's great. So you know what I will say, though, is, in terms of resources for readings, you know, the work again of Geneva Gay is great. There's Dr. Ladson-Billings. She does a lot of work on culturally relevant pedagogy, similar, but looking at sort of social and structural inequities that families experience.

So, if I were to think on it, I think, if you're interested in thinking more about this topic, I know, Dr. Ladson-Billings, for example, has a really good video series on PBS that you can find on YouTube, and she really sort of talks about the like, sort of not how to do it, but some thoughts about how we might engage in this work. She actually has a very good article. It's called Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. "Yes, but how do I do it?" That's the question. So it's all of us thinking together. Sure. So it's Steven Vetavek. It's really interesting his work. And so he coined it in 2007 and he has another publication 2023. And also interestingly enough, Canada was

recognized as a superdiverse nation in 2014, so not every country in the world is recognized as a superdiverse nation, which really speaks to the diversity in Canada. He calls it the diversification of diversity. It's just such an interesting time that we live in. Oh, yes, the work of Ladson-Billings is on the reference list exactly. Those are great. These are great articles if you'd like to just take a look at and read. The Ladson-Billings, "Yes, but how do we do it?" is a great one. Then the work of Geneva Gay is great. The culturally responsive teaching. Both of those resources are great because she goes into sort of the six pillars a little more in depth. Oh, you're welcome. So the link I'm going to share with you in the chat here is really good. It's called Building Culture Relevance Schools. It's a great video and it talks about the complexities post-pandemic, and then just during social movements. This is Dr. Ladson-Billings. Oh, you're welcome. Thank you to everyone for contributing and adding to our Google Doc. This is great. It's something that I know I'm going to take away and thank you for sharing your thoughts on this.

HELENA:

Thank you, Kamini for a very interesting session. It just sparks interest. I always tell people that in one hour, it's impossible for us to become experts on any topic. But I hope of FLO Fridays is that this is the start of a conversation and that you'll take it into the hallways of your institution, find some colleagues who are interested in this topic as well, and see what you can come up with. And it's definitely a topic that I would like to explore further.