Using Critical Race Theory, Paulo Freire’s Problem-Posing Method, and Case Study Research to Confront Race and Racism in Education

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In this article, the authors use critical race theory (CRT), Paulo Freire’s problem-posing method, and case study research to introduce an alternative instructional and pedagogical methodology in teacher education. These approaches attempt to get at deep-rooted ideologies by creating a space in a social foundations course for teacher candidates to unlearn their stereotypical knowledge of race while analyzing and theorizing what it means to teach a diverse student population. When using such a methodology, the authors recommend that teacher candidates have access to a variety of cultural immersion and field experiences in communities of color. These experiences are critical to learning why they should and how they can talk about race and racism.

In recent years, the discussions about improving teacher education have focused on preparing all teachers to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to teach diverse learners effectively (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996) and to become culturally competent (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; McAllister & Irvine, 2000). These ideas have made rapid headway in teacher education programs. In learning how to teach a diverse student population, several paradigms prevail in teacher education (Zeichner, 1991). Of all the traditions (e.g., academic, social efficacy, developmentalist, and social reconstructionist), social reconstructionist is explicit in its multicultural and social justice relevance. As Zeichner (1991) puts it,

A social reconstructionist tradition emphasizes teachers’ abilities to see the social and political implications of their actions and to assess their actions and the social contexts in which they are carried out, for their contribution to greater equality, justice, and humane conditions in schooling and society. (p. 4)

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The belief that teachers need a new kind of space to construct their knowledge of practice as well as their knowledge of race has gained currency in the teacher education community. Such an agenda is vital toward a movement of social justice and equity.

According to Sleeter and Grant (1988), education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist deals more directly than other approaches with oppression and social structural inequality based on race, social class, and gender. These principles embody different kinds of curricular and instructional strategies that cultivate an oppositional stance to an inequitable educational system. However, despite the rhetorical commitment to the notion of social reconstruction, implementing such a teacher education program is difficult and complex.

The challenge that continues to face most teacher educators is how to integrate a multiplicity of skills and dispositions that are illustrative of a social reconstructionist approach. The reality is that prospective teachers typically go through courses that focus only superficially on teaching diverse populations. Immersion experiences are usually competing with courses that are emphasizing subject matter expertise, instructional technologies, and classroom management. As a result, prospective teachers are provided with limited educational experiences that can help them understand the central role of race and racism in education. Moreover, teacher educators tend to discover that teacher candidates are typically uncomfortable acknowledging students’ differences, particularly racial differences (King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This colorblindness masks what King calls a dysconscious racism, “an uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (p. 135).

Drawing on King’s concept of dysconscious racism, how do we integrate a theory of race that matters in teacher education? How do prospective teachers learn to confront the dilemmas of race, culture, and language diversity? How do we prepare teacher candidates to become more culturally relevant teachers? To answer these questions, some teacher educators are attempting to confront the dilemmas of race and racism in teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995; D. Solórzano, 1997).

In this article, we present a theoretical framework for preparing teachers for cultural diversity. To accomplish this goal, we reflect on our pedagogical approach in teacher education to examine the linkages between an emerging theoretical framework in education—critical race theory (CRT), along with Paulo Freire’s problem-posing methodology and case study research. The reasons for blending these paradigms are twofold. The first is to describe how they present an alternative approach to raising the critical consciousness of prospective teachers. The second is to discuss how prospective teachers can confront issues relating to race and racism. This discussion will offer an analysis of CRT and Freirean pedagogy in education. We will then show how case
study research in education is a methodological approach that can be used to merge these frameworks (Barnes, Christensen, & Hansen, 1994).

CRT IN EDUCATION

Recognizing the power of race as both a social construction and as a powerful reality in structuring people’s lives is not new. Although traditional social science has tended to reify the salience of race in U.S. society, many critical race theorists (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995) are going beyond the view that race is a dichotomy based on social construction or biological factors. They recognize that race is central to people’s lives. In particular, they are delegitimizing racism by placing it under scrutiny and forcing themselves and others to grapple with the undeniably real impact that racism has had and continues to have within American society.

CRT draws from a broad literature base in law, sociology, and history. It is being extended in areas such as education (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; D. Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Tate, 1997) and women’s studies (Wing, 1996). Indeed, for our purpose, we introduce some of the tenets of CRT to the discussion on teacher education. CRT represents a paradigm shift in discourse about race and racism in education. CRT consists of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that seek to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom (see Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Tierney, 1993).

CRT in education has at least the following five elements that form its basic model: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) a transdisciplinary perspective (D. Solórzano, 1997, 1998; D. Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, in press; D. Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002 [this issue]).

Although these themes are not new in and of themselves, together, they represent a collective challenge to the existing methods of conducting research on race and inequality. Using CRT in teacher education is different from other critical frameworks because it simultaneously tries to (a) foreground race and racism in the curriculum; (b) challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to affect communities of color; (c) help us focus on the racialized and gendered experiences of communities of color; (d) offer a liberatory and transformative method when examining racial, gender, and class discrimination; and (e) use the transdisciplinary knowledge and methodological base of ethnic studies, women’s studies, soci-
ology, history, and the law to better understand the various forms of discrimination.

**MERGING CRT, FREIREAN PROBLEM-POSING METHODOLOGY, AND CASE STUDY RESEARCH**

Although the five elements of CRT are relevant to teacher education, an alternative methodology is needed to help prospective teachers to see how they can promote equity, ask questions, examine assumptions, and question cultural myths regarding the social order and their place in it. This article demonstrates how we have chosen to challenge racism as we prepare prospective teachers to go into urban public schools. Specifically, we have taken each of CRT’s five themes and combined them with both Freirean problem-posing methodology and case study research in education.

Freire’s (1970, 1973) work provides teachers with the foundation for a theory of democratic schooling that is linked to methodologies that aim to liberate those who are forced to exist on the margins of society. His problem-posing methodology starts from the premise that all education is political and thus schools are never neutral institutions. Freire asserts that schools either function to maintain and reproduce the existing social order or they exist to empower people to transform themselves, their community, and/or society. He further argues that when schools domesticate, they socialize students into accepting the ideology and values of society’s dominant class as legitimate. Freire (1970) firmly believed that schools use the “banking method” to domesticate students. From his perspective, when this approach is practiced, students are viewed as passive receptacles waiting for knowledge to be deposited from the teacher. They are taught in a monodirectional or lecture format whereby the teachers communicate with the students in one-way monologues. This approach often leads students to feel their thoughts and ideas are not important enough to warrant a two-way dialogue with teachers. Consequently, students are also dependent on teachers for their acquisition of knowledge. Finally, teachers are seen as conduits through which the ideology and values of the dominant social class are transmitted to the students.

In contrast, Freire argues that for schools to become liberatory institutions, we must consider the traditional view of students and begin to acknowledge them as participants who are willing and able to act on their world. He developed the problem-posing methodology to facilitate movement toward a liberatory education. His problem-posing methodology includes three general phases: (a) identify and name the social problem, (b) analyze the causes of the social problem, and (c) find solutions to the social problem (Alschuler 1980; Freire, 1970, 1973; Smith & Alschuler, 1976; D. Solórzano, 1989). In the
naming phase, educators enter the community or social setting where they will be working. While in the community, they learn about the major issues and problems of the area by listening and speaking to the people and observing community life. After gathering the needed information, the educator, research participants, and community members develop generative codes. These codes are visual and/or material renditions—as in pictures, drawings, stories, articles, or films—of the significant themes or problems that have been identified. These generative codes are at the heart of the problem-posing process because they are used to begin critical dialogue among the various research participants. In the second or analysis phase, the educator takes the codified theme and describes and analyzes the causes of the problem through a dialogue with the research participants. In the solution phase, research participants—in collaboration with the educators and/or researchers—find and carry out solutions to the problem.

With the problem-posing methodology, students are viewed as active agents engaged in the discovery and development of their own knowledge. Students co-construct knowledge with their teachers and others. To achieve this objective, students are taught in a multi-method, dialogical format. This approach leads students to feel that their thoughts and ideas are important enough to warrant a multi-method dialogue with teachers and others. Finally, teachers are seen as facilitators who students can challenge, just as they would challenge the ideology and values of the dominant social class.

Freire’s message remains more relevant than ever. The process of reflecting and acting on one’s reality by describing and defining a problem clearly, analyzing its causes, and acting to resolve it are key elements in the problem-posing methodology. Through this process, student teachers can develop the critical skills necessary to make effective decisions about their classrooms, their students, and their work in the field. In and out of the classroom, prospective teachers can be encouraged to view issues as problems that can be resolved, not as a reality to be accepted. In turn, teacher candidates can feel that their ideas are recognized as legitimate and that the problem posed can be resolved in a constructive manner. In their training, prospective teachers can become dependent on each other for the creation of their knowledge. The problem-posing process has three interrelated goals as follows: (a) to provide the teacher candidates with opportunities to critique the culture and structure of schools, (b) to develop teacher candidates’ critical consciousness about the social order, and (c) to ultimately have teacher candidates participate in making meaningful changes in the social order.

Likewise, critical race theorists are working toward the end of racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression such as racism, classism, and sexism. In essence, CRT and Freirean pedagogy are forms of resistance to oppressive social relationships. These efforts challenge the traditional claims of the educational system’s neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness. These traditional claims are viewed as a camouflage for the
self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society. Both frameworks recognize that the experiential knowledge of people of color is critical to understanding and analyzing issues pertaining to race and racism. Indeed, both traditions suggest that the experiences of people of color should be examined for their ability to influence how teacher candidates think about learning and interacting with their students.

As a theoretical framework, CRT provides a way to expand our examination of race that moves beyond cultural deficit models (Banfield, 1970; Bernstein, 1977; Lewis, 1968; Valencia, 1997; Valencia & D. Solórzano, 1997). In addition, as a methodological approach, CRT and the Freirean problem-posing method offer teacher educators a way to initiate prospective teachers into discourses and pedagogical approaches that meet the needs of students of color while the prospective teachers learn how to examine their notion of social justice and how it connects to excellence and educational equity. The case study methodology is complementary to the Freirean problem-posing methodology because when combined, they become pedagogical approaches suitable for deconstructing and reconstructing teaching. Judith Shulman (1992) reminds us that case-based teaching is one way to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Because of their inherent complexity, case studies stimulate those learning to teach to consider alternative forms of practice that are rooted in what can be called good teaching (Shulman, 1992).

Case study research calls for researchers to systematically investigate a problem within a real-life context and answer questions of “How?” and “Why?” instead of simply “What?” This approach pushes the study beyond description alone (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989). In turn, case study research challenges student teachers to ask questions rather than make assumptions about what it means to be culturally and/or linguistically different.

The combination of CRT, Freirean problem-posing method, and case study research is different from other instructional strategies used to train prospective teachers. Collectively, they (a) foreground race and racism in the research design, data collection, and analysis; (b) challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, and texts as a way to engage in a discourse on race that is informed by the actual conditions of people of color; (c) help prospective teachers focus on the racialized and gendered experiences of communities of color; (d) offer a liberatory or transformative method when examining racial, gender, and class discrimination; and (e) use the transdisciplinary knowledge and methodological base of ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, and the law to better understand the various forms of discrimination and contest negative stereotyping of students of color.

Educators need to find ways to identify the resources and strengths of people of color and place them at the center of their research, curriculum, and teaching. For instance, there are numerous educational and legal research questions, literary and artistic issues, and related curricular and pedagogical materials associated with people of color. These topics are sources of informa-
tion that can be used to provide services to the students and their communities. In fact, they are also rich sources of material in an individual’s epistemological stance, ideologies, individual and family oral histories, institutional and community studies, and cultural artifacts. Student teachers must use these resources in a critical fashion to create, recreate, and recover knowledge that can empower people of color to better understand and resist their subordinate status. Indeed, Freirean problem-posing methodology and CRT are about challenging the dominant mind-set of society and building shared understandings of the strengths within communities of color. Case study research provides the methodology for this to take place.

OUR EXPERIENCE WITH BRIDGING THEORY, METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES, AND PRACTICE

For the past 5 years, we have taught separate sections of a social foundations course in a university-based teacher education program. Most of the students in the program come from relatively privileged backgrounds. The social foundations course we teach serves teacher education programs in two essential ways. First, it is a cross-cultural language and academic development or bilingual cross-cultural language and academic development foundation course that focuses on the role of cultural diversity in U.S. schooling and what this means for educators oriented toward social justice. As such, the course exposes teacher candidates to literature focusing on teaching different racial-ethnic groups (Lee, 1996; Sleeter, 1996; R. Solórzano & Solórzano, 1999; Valdés, 1996), democratic education (Darling-Hammond, 1996), multicultural education (Sleeter, 1996), social reproduction (McLeod, 1995), racial and cultural identity (McIntosh, 1989; Ogbu, 1992), notions of pedagogy (Bartolome, 1994; Delpit, 1988; Giroux, 1985; hooks, 1993, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1996; D. Solórzano, 1989), and knowledge about race (Banks, 1995; D. Solórzano, 1997). The course is a foundation for helping teacher candidates learn why they should and how they can talk about race, racism, equity and inequity, social activism, oppression, and privilege. It also offers student teachers a practical experience in understanding manifestations of cultural and racial diversity among students in local public schools. Second, the course is at the master’s level and is intended to engage graduate students in exploring a variety of theoretical perspectives on the impact of economic structures, political arrangements, and deep-seated norms about race, class, culture, and language on the schooling and social opportunities and outcomes for low-income, minority students in U.S. schools.

In developing our course, we conferred frequently with each other to discuss its focus and purpose. Quite often, we found ourselves expressing our political standpoints. As an African American woman and a Chicano male, our experiential knowledge of race, class, and gender had a significant role in
our discussions. Like most people, we were taught in classrooms where the teaching styles were constraining and reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience. Consequently, we were concerned about the quality of instruction for low-income children and ethnic and linguistic minorities, the erroneous assumptions teacher candidates may have about diverse youngsters, and the ability of teacher education programs to promote an appreciation for diversity and equity among teacher candidates. We were also concerned about the quality of education the teacher education program students receive. It was clear that we needed to learn new ways to creatively approach the preparation of teachers for cultural diversity. We considered how we might address this issue.

Through our discussions, we discovered how Freire’s work influenced our thinking about teaching and learning. We recognized that teachers are in a strategic position to invite their students to liberate themselves as they learn to read both the text and their world as well as transform their present realities. We proceeded from the standpoint that the nature of teachers’ work is transformative and liberating. We needed to help prospective teachers see their students, families, and communities as resources and sources of strength. Indeed, for this to occur, they had to learn how to talk about race, to understand how the knowledge of race has been constructed and reconstructed through time, and to unlearn racism.

In our social foundations courses, each student is responsible for conducting two case studies (a) on a community and (b) with a student of different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds than themselves. The case studies are designed to develop the teacher as a researcher. In this process, the student teachers learn how to use narratives and stories to maintain a consistent focus on social justice and equity issues.

Recognizing the complexities of conducting a case study and the biases that prospective teachers bring with them, our challenge was to prepare them to examine longstanding assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and practices about schools and how cycles of oppression are maintained. To begin modeling Freirean pedagogy, we engaged the student teachers in a dialogue about social issues (e.g., poverty, racism, and illiteracy) of concern to them and discussed how these issues affect the schooling experiences of students.

THE INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY

In preparing our students to conduct a case study, we aligned our pedagogical approach with Freire’s problem-posing method to delineate six elements of the individual case study. These elements include the following:

1. Begin with a question. For example, how does race affect the way students “make sense” of their schooling experience? What are the differences and
similarities between the home and school culture? In what ways are students “biculural” or “multicultural”?

2. **Examine assumptions.** In selecting a student for the study, consider why you selected the student. What assumptions do you have that led you to select this student? Why do you think this may be true? How are you thinking about your racial identity in relation to the selected student?

3. **Guide your work in the “field” by plan.** Take time to:
   - develop the questions you want to be able to answer about the student,
   - determine the settings that you will need to observe (e.g., school, home, community),
   - list the activities you will need to observe firsthand by “shadowing” (e.g., classroom interactions, lunchtime experiences, bus ride or walk to or from school, after-school experience, interactions with family and neighborhood friends), and
   - determine the information you will need to obtain through conversations (informal interviews) with students, teachers, parents, and others.

4. **Design your data collection protocols (e.g., interview questions, observation guides) and methods for recording data (e.g., audiotaping interviews, recording field notes, sketching settings).**

5. **Analyze your data.**
   - Decide which “facts” capture the essence of what you have learned.
   - Read carefully “between the lines” for themes that emerge (themes beneath the surface meanings that either the student or you derive from the particular incidents).
   - Revise your themes in light of your further reading of the data.

6. **Write your narrative using the following 3-part format.**
   Contextual description of the student you have studied: This section should provide a description of the student you have studied supported by “evidence” from the student’s own words or your field notes describing particular events.
   
   From the data collected, describe patterns and/or themes that you discovered. This descriptive narrative organizes the data through conceptual categories or explanatory concepts.
   
   Lessons learned: Use the theories presented in the course or your own to explore the meaning of what you have learned from and about the student. As you address each of the following questions, cite the relevant readings and support your response with “evidence” in the student’s own words or your field notes.
   
   - What are the messages about race and culture conveyed in the student’s classes?
   - What “social resources” does the student’s cultural context provide that help the student negotiate the school and classroom environment?
• How does this case study help you to understand issues relating to race and education? Given what you have learned from this student, what structures and practices would you advocate to promote more “socially just” schooling?

After reviewing the various elements of the case study, we suggest that the teacher candidates begin planning their study with a classmate. This process typically yields several ideas for data collection protocols, data analysis plans, and relevant literature. Moreover, in our weekly classes, we set aside time to discuss the status of the case study research. We found some common issues and concerns across our classes. For example, many students thought the process was intrusive and exploited the case study student. Some student teachers discovered that they had limited knowledge and understanding of social inequity. Others wondered how they could give back to the case study student and his or her family as a result of invading their family’s privacy. Some students could not see the merit of such an assignment. Many students were critical about their inexperience with case study research. One student teacher expressed doubt about her process by pointing out “how inept I was at making observations for a case study and how I ought to have paid more attention to what was going on.”

The student teachers frequently discussed the difficulties in selecting a student. Selecting the student for the study was based on a range of strategies. Some students took real interest in the presence of student teachers in their classroom and self-selected themselves for the study. In some cases, the master teacher recommended a student for the case study. Other student teachers were committed to doing the assignment but wanted to know specifically how to negotiate access to the research context or what decision-making criteria they should use for selecting a case study student.

When the student teachers were placed at the same school site, they sometimes competed for the same student sample. Some student teachers did not get the parent’s approval. Teacher candidates who found themselves in this predicament grappled with notions of cultural invasion. Other students recognized they had a certain amount of discomfort interacting with people who are culturally and linguistically different from themselves. One student indicated that he decided to “go ahead and face my fears and discomfort and ask the parent for permission to do the case study on her child.” He discovered that the parent “was more than happy to help me with what I had to do.”

Using our students’ case study reports, next we present their understanding of diverse learners and their lived experiences. The patterns and relationships they have identified, the conclusions drawn that link their findings to classroom practice, and the implications of their work for themselves and the broader community are illustrative of how case study research can help student teachers confront dilemmas of race and racism. The prospective teacher candidates had a variety of experiences. Some of them met a student who immigrated to the United States without her parents because of the perceived abundance of educational and professional opportunities. Others became
aware of the struggle that biracial students faced in trying to understand and
deal with their racial identity. Many student teachers witnessed how teachers
discouraged critical inquiry and classroom dialogue among their students.
Their case studies also raised questions about what teachers can and should
be doing to promote success for students of color.

In their case study reports, the student teachers revealed their understand-
ing of community, identity, and ways of becoming effective teachers. The case
study elicited a lot of concern and criticism, especially when the student
teachers began to understand how students are disadvantaged. Candid
descriptions about dysfunctional home life and classroom teachers’
unawareness of the problem and its impact on students’ school performance
caused the teacher candidates to raise many questions about the moral and
ethical dimensions of teachers’ work. The student teachers not only inte-
grated relevant literature to summarize what is known in the field but also
used various concepts and perspectives to interpret the data collected. For
example, some lessons learned from Catherine Miller, an Anglo-American
prospective elementary school teacher, are as follows:

Coming to the realization that people are different from one another in many
ways was especially difficult for me to accept. It would be so much easier to
lump everyone together and pretend that ethnicity and skin color really don’t
separate people into racial categories. However, this notion doesn’t match up
with the reality that different groups of people are indeed different from one
another and have distinct insights. In addition, suggesting that color doesn’t
matter represents a form of dysconscious racism and perpetuates the pattern of
low expectations for minority students (Ladson Billings, 1994). I can now accept
and acknowledge that African Americans are different than Asian Americans,
and that Latinos and Caucasians differ from one another in more ways than just
skin color. Different groups of people from various ethnic backgrounds all expe-
rience life uniquely. Students entering my classroom will bring with them
unique traditions, past experiences, cultures, and family structures. With this
reality in mind, I realize that differences between people can be seen positively. I
see the necessity to celebrate our differences, rather than condemn one another
for them. Viewing difference as a strength instead of a weakness will be critical
to my success as a social justice educator.

For this student teacher, the individual case study allowed her to wrestle with
her notion of difference. Her interrogation of deeply held beliefs and assump-
tions was an indication of her ability to pay careful attention to issues of race
and its relationship to being an effective teacher. This student’s testimony
illustrates how the case study is an explicit process of self-reflection and criti-
cal inquiry. The case study helped her construct a comprehensive description
of her fixed notions of difference and diversity. At the same time, it showed us
the ways in which student teachers could understand how race is an organiz-
izing principle of individual identity and collective consciousness.

Nearly all of the students expressed ambivalence about teachers’ agency
and power in altering the life chances of the children they studied. They
struggled to define what they might do as they negotiated their respective pedagogical journeys to help children realize their potential. Some comments are as follows:

While I will never give up on my students and resign them to a self-fulfilled prophecy of failure, I question the wisdom behind arming them with high self-esteem and expectations to match, knowing that the dominant culture still controls many facets of their success. Is it fair to capitalize on [his] innocence and not warn him of the dangers to come? If I were to present such warnings to an 8-year-old boy, how would I do so, and what are the possible implications of my actions?

Despite a broken home, despite discipline problems, [he] is just a regular kid, meaning that he should be expected to succeed just as much as any other kid. The reams of statistics might not agree, but a teacher’s expectations must outweigh those statistics.

Although the teacher candidates’ case studies were typically thorough and provided insights into the lived reality of the individuals under study, many of them avoided an explicit discussion of race. Their narratives, however, demonstrated how case studies could influence their awareness and sensitivity to cultural and racial diversity. The written feedback we provided our students gave us another opportunity to push their thinking on their knowledge about race.

**THE COMMUNITY CASE STUDY**

The community case study starts from the premise that communities of color are places with many strengths. In fact, these strengths provide the tools and guidance that help students and parents navigate through the social problems that beset their communities (D. Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). We must help prepare new teachers to identify these strengths and be able to use them in their classrooms with students and in their interactions with parents and other members of the community.

Drawing on the work of Freire (1970, 1973), Lawrence (1992), and other critical race theorists, we approach the case study by centering on the experiences of people of color. To guide our approach, we adapted Kretzman and McKnight’s (1993) strategy for asset-based community development called *asset mapping*. Kretzman and McKnight argue that historically, the research approach to understanding and empowering communities has focused on their needs, deficiencies, and problems. Asset mapping counters deficit-informed or majoritarian approaches to research. According to Delgado and Stefancic (1993), majoritarian approaches to research begin with the “bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdom, and shared cultural understandings [of] persons in the dominant race” (p. 462). Yet, it is important to remember that majoritarian approaches to research can also be conducted by
people of color. In any case, “majoritarian methodologies” tend to draw on
deficit notions of communities of color and often end up with deficit mapping
under the guise of “race-neutral research” (see D. Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Asset-based research is grounded in the recognition that a unique combi-
nation of assets exists in each community. Specifically, these assets can be
found in at least four places: (a) with individuals in the community, (b) in
community associations, (c) within community institutions, and (d) in indig-
genous forms of knowledge “native” to the community. Indeed, an asset-based
strategy emphasizes the development of policies and practices grounded in
the capacities, skills, and assets of people and their neighborhoods.

To accomplish this asset-based or strength-based community case study,
we divided our student teachers into research teams. Each team was assigned
to or chose a community research site. Each research team was responsible for
an ethnographic case study of their site based on the assets of the community.
For example, each team was responsible for (a) providing an empirical,
ethnographic, and visual description of the community; (b) identifying the
strengths or assets of the community from the point of view of the senior resi-
dents, middle-age adults, young adolescents, children, community associa-
tions, and institutions; (c) determining the most salient issues or problems in
the community from these same groups; (d) deciding how the groups
would—or are—solving the community problems; and (e) identifying and
inventorying the various forms of indigenous knowledge in the community.

The following are examples of the different forms of asset mapping that our
students found.

Individual assets. To begin an asset-mapping approach, students are asked
to take an inventory of individual capabilities in a community. This can
include identified and unidentified local leaders, community activists, and
other individual resources. For example, in one of the sites, our students
found an African American woman who owned a hair salon. Her salon was a
daily hub of community activity. The students were able to interview her,
other hair stylists, and clients to develop a local history and list of additional
resources for the school. From this resource, the students also identified and
worked with a local barbershop to gather similar community, social, and cul-
tural capital.

Associational assets. The teams enter the community and develop a list of
citizen associations and nonprofit organizations and determine the services
and resources they provide to the community. For instance, one of the teams
identified an ethnic student organization at a local university that was
involved in tutoring and mentoring at the local elementary school. The col-
lege students were also tutoring and mentoring at the local high school. As
part of their program, the high school students worked with the university
students in tutoring the elementary students. With the help of our team, the
university students were able to identify a local Big Brother organization and
university alumni organization to volunteer with the tutoring and mentoring project.

**Institutional assets.** In this phase of asset mapping, the teams collect information regarding all the institutional assets in a community. This could include private businesses, local churches, public institutions, and nonprofit organizations. In one of the sites, the students found a retired dentist who had accumulated a personal library of books and other teaching materials. He was interviewed and in time agreed to donate his collection to the local elementary school. The students used this donation to convince a national bookstore chain to donate books to the local school. In addition, we found some local African American churches deeply involved in providing information and classes on college access, retention, and scholarships.

**Indigenous assets.** Throughout the previous three levels, asset mappers search for various forms of indigenous knowledge or knowledge that is “native” to the community and its people. Indigenous asset mapping is intended to preserve and honor knowledge held by the local people as individuals as well as in their associations and institutions (see Lawrence, 1992; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). For instance, after talking to many people in the community, one of our teams identified a local historian. This self-trained person had lived in the community for more than 40 years and knew many of the people in a five-block radius of the school. This community historian had kept old newspapers, maps, and other archival documents that he shared with the research team. He was an invaluable resource that the school had not known about. In addition, the team created a Web site for this community-based information (see http://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/projects/cypress/home.html).

Currently, many teacher education programs explain educational inequity through a cultural deficit model and thereby pass on beliefs that students and communities of color are culturally deprived and in need of cultural rehabilitation to become academically or socially successful (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994; Persell, 1977). These asset-based community case studies expose the deficit-informed research and methods that silence and distort the people and communities of colors’ experiences and focus instead on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences as sources of strength (D. Solórzano & R. Solórzano, 1995; Valencia & D. Solórzano, 1997).

Overall, case study research in our social foundations course provides student teachers an opportunity to name problems, identify relations among the problem elements, and recombine them into new patterns of strategies and solutions. In addition, the case study approach develops a pedagogy for social foundations that facilitates achieving its objectives. From a CRT perspective, the case studies provide a vehicle for listening to individual and family oral histories and observing community life. This personal and cultural knowledge gives student teachers insight into the ways in which their
prospective students think, interact, and communicate with others and how student and family culture often clash with those of school and its personnel. These stories allow student teachers to pay attention to the contextual reality and its impact on traditional victims of social injustice while reflecting on the moral and ethical aspects of teaching and learning rather than exclusively focusing on technical competencies such as lesson planning, test construction, and assessment strategies. This process of creating stories is not only a method of constructing knowledge about race but also the basis for learning how to teach diverse students (see D. Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

CONCLUSION

In this article, we use CRT, Freire’s problem-posing method, and case study research to introduce a new form of methodology and pedagogy in teacher education. Perhaps the most important contribution this framework makes is that it addresses the ideological blinders prospective teachers may have developed as a result of their own cultural and educational experiences. The framework attempts to get at these deeply rooted ideologies by creating a space in the curriculum for teacher candidates to unlearn their stereotypical knowledge of race while analyzing, problem solving, and theorizing what it means to teach a diverse student population. Embedded in this framework is a pedagogical approach that uses Freire’s problem-posing method and case study research as tools for helping student teachers to identify and name the societal and systemic problems students of color face, analyze the causes of the problem, and find solutions to the problem. With such a methodology, student teachers are able to have an immersion experience in communities of color that is critical to understanding and analyzing the societal and systemic problems that people of color confront. The case study allows teacher candidates to examine their knowledge of race, racism, and culture. This approach also provides a learning experience that creates the conditions for student teachers to examine the moral and ethical dilemmas of teaching and learning while challenging their own intrinsic assumptions and learning to talk about race. Undoubtedly, it is very difficult to change the tacit beliefs, understandings, and worldviews that students bring to a teacher education program. We contend, however, that an emphasis on learning how to talk about race and racism is possible and essential. The methodological and pedagogical approaches we outlined in the preceding pages are promising strategies for teacher learning. Prominence of such approaches throughout the teacher education curriculum rather than containment in a single course will require teacher candidates and teacher educators to consistently examine their epistemological orientation and understand the values and practices of students and their families as well as the racial, cultural, and language differ-
ences they represent. Failure to do so will limit their ability to use this knowledge to meet the challenges and opportunities diversity presents.

NOTES

1. Unlike traditional definitions of diversity, we define diversity and pluralism synonymously. Therefore, diversity or pluralism in education exists in a situation where underrepresented racial and ethnic groups are not only present at the school but are also considered and treated as equal to Whites at the school. In a diverse, pluralistic educational setting, teachers and students are willing to affirm one another’s dignity, are ready to benefit from each other’s experiences, and are willing to acknowledge one another’s contributions to the common welfare of the school.

2. In the context of urban teacher education programs, we define a critical consciousness as a person who (a) holds a critique of the social structures in urban schools and (b) is willing to engage in social action to effect change.

3. For three comprehensive annotated bibliographies on critical race and Latino critical race theory, see Delgado and Stefancic (1993, 1994) and Stefancic (1998).

4. For this study, the terms people, community, persons, and students of color are defined as those persons of African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American ancestry. It should be noted that each of these terms has a political dimension that this article does not discuss.

5. These elements have evolved over a 3-year period.

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