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Undoing Negativity and Deficit Racial Narratives in Preservice Teacher Education at a Hispanic Serving Institution

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## Abstract

The quest to prepare teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse schools is the focus of this paper. We describe what we do in one Chicana/o Studies course required for students seeking a teaching credential in the state of California. A Chicana/o Studies Informed Activist pedagogical model is used to enable preservice teachers to undo and challenge deficit racial narratives that some educators have of Latinx/Chicanx students. We focus on the high leverage teaching practices of a K-12 Latina Teachers Support Group using participatory classroom events and performance activities. We solicited lesson plans and pedagogical practices used by these teachers to demonstrate to our preservice teachers the powerful ways practitioners facilitate the productive capacities of their students to learn, while simultaneously infusing Chicana/o Studies, funds of knowledge, community cultural wealth and *ventajas y conocimientos* into the classroom.

## UNDOING NEGATIVITY AND DEFICIT RACIAL NARRATIVES IN PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION AT A HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION

The year 2018 will be the 50th anniversary of the Chicano/a Student Walkouts. On March 1, 1968, more than 15,000 high school students walked out of several Los Angeles high schools calling for an end to the inferior quality of education Mexican American students were receiving. The students and community protested for one week, packing school board meetings, holding rallies and shutting down several high schools. Student activists developed a list of demands including the demand that the history and culture of Mexican Americans be recognized and become a viable part of the curriculum. Soon after, school districts and colleges began to design ethnic studies programs. Given the dearth of curricular materials on the subject, teachers and faculty engaged in a desperate effort to design lesson plans, secure texts, and implement Mexican-American Studies in schools and colleges throughout the Southwestern United States. Students, K-12 public education teachers, and university faculty were critical partners in the development of the first courses in Chicana and Chicano Studies. On college campuses, Chicana and Chicano Studies became part of the larger sociopolitical movement that would facilitate the transformation of teacher education programs to reflect a broader multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual, and critical curriculum. As a consequence of the struggle, Chicano and Chicana Studies and other Ethnic Studies programs became vital components of many teacher preparation programs. In truth, however, the battle to establish a presence for Chicana and Chicano/Raza<sup>1</sup> Studies in public schools and colleges were only partially successful.

Recent battles<sup>2</sup> in Arizona, California, and Texas are stark reminders that 50 years later, we are still engaged in a struggle to adopt Ethnic Studies as a course requirement for graduation from high school. Even though research proves that Ethnic Studies boosts student attendance, increases student's grade point average, and improves academic achievement (Altschul, Oyserman & Bybee, 2006; 2008; Wentworth, Carranza & Stipek, 2016) the struggle to legitimize Ethnic Studies persists. The purpose of this paper is not to debate the question of Ethnic Studies as a curricular or educational justice matter, but to postulate that, as a content area, it can engage the most disengaged students in the productive process of learning.

We teach at 4-year comprehensive state university in Southern California. Our undergraduate program in teacher education is situated in the department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Our goal includes preparing future educators to teach Chicanx and Latinx students who comprise the majority of the student population of our state. To that end, we use a Chicana/o Studies Informed Activist pedagogical model to enable our preservice teachers to undo the deficit racial narratives that some educators have of Chicanx/Latinx students. We use this opportunity to describe what we do in one Chicana/o Studies course required by students seeking a teaching credential in the state of California. We challenge our preservice teachers to identify and undo the deficit racial narratives prevalent in our classrooms and our schools and to replace them by tapping and affirming the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) of Chicanx and Latinx students in urban communities of Southern California.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, if we are speaking about those of Latin American (Latinx) or Mexican-American/Chicano(Chicanx) students in the current sociopolitical context, we will use the gender-inclusive way. If we are describing historical issues, such as the walk-outs, the name of our department or the field of study, we will use the term used at that time like Chicana/o or Chicana and Chicano.

<sup>2</sup> In 2010, former Governor Jan Brewer signed HB2281 blocking schools from teaching ethnic studies in Arizona. Seven years later, a federal judge found the ban unconstitutional (Deppenbrock, 2017). In 2015, California Governor Jerry Brown vetoed ethnic studies bill AB 101 only to sign a more modest bill two years later (Planas, 2017). The efforts to secure ethnic studies as a graduation requirement continues in California. In 2018, The Texas Board of Education gave its final approval of ethnic studies classes after years of bitter debating on moving the classes forward (Swaby, 2018).

## **Our Philosophy**

While it is true that educators must connect the cultural, familial, historical, and linguistic (CFHL) knowledge of students inherent in their homes and social networks to teaching and learning, schoolwide services must also be adapted to include this knowledge. Moreover, challenging deficit ideology and racial narratives cannot be done without connecting this knowledge to improving the academic performance and knowledge that Latinx and Chicanx students need to navigate the educational pipeline, from pre-kindergarten to university.

Herein lies the challenge. In our course, we ask our students to tap the CFHL knowledge of Latinx/Chicanx communities and to infuse this knowledge into the production of culturally responsive lessons and/or schoolwide action projects. We ask them to design units, lesson plans, or projects which incorporate learning activities that promote biliteracy, multicultural history, and culturally relevant science or math activities. Sleeter (2016) argues that textbooks, history and literature instructional materials, and statewide content standards continue to acknowledge the contributions of white people at the expense of people of color. Our challenge is to graduate educators who are equipped to infuse community cultural capital and the cultural and linguistic knowledge of Latinx and Chicanx students into their lessons and programs. Thus, if they know very little about the community, have never taken a Chicana or Chicano Studies class, or are influenced by deficit ideology, then a well-rounded, rigorous education for Latinx and Chicanx students will remain a dream deferred.

## **The Relevance of Chicana/o Studies**

As the nation's school-age population becomes increasingly diverse, Ethnic Studies has become the rallying call for educational activists. In California, Assembly member Jose Medina, a former Chicana/o Studies faculty member introduced AB 2772 that requires every student graduating from a California high school to take an Ethnic Studies course. Many large urban school districts, including El Rancho Unified School District, Los Angeles Unified School District, Montebello Unified School District, and San Francisco Unified School District, and others have already required an Ethnic Studies course for graduation from high school. As we write this article, teachers and educators are working diligently to draft curriculum for implementation throughout the state of California. We deem that an important part of the Ethnic Studies curriculum is for students to see themselves in literature and history textbooks. Recent studies suggest academic benefits to ethnic studies courses (Dee & Penner, 2016). Also, we agree that Ethnic Studies should be a stand-alone graduation requirement across the United States. There are many disciplines integrated into the field of Ethnic Studies, namely Asian American Studies, Afrikana Studies, American Indian Studies and more. While we agree that the teaching of Ethnic Studies is a critical element of a holistic education, in our case we focus on a Chicana/o Studies. For historical, cultural, demographic and political reasons, we maintain that in the Southwest United States and California, every educator at every grade level must be able to infuse Chicana/o Studies into the standard curriculum.

Our university houses the oldest and largest Chicana and Chicano Studies department in the country. We happen to be faculty in this department and therefore, this paper uses the definition of Chicana/o Studies from the department located at our university. It is as follows:

Chicana and Chicano Studies is an Area Studies field that advances a common understanding of the Chicana/o and Latina/o experience in the United States. Courses reflect a multidisciplinary approach to the understanding of Chicana/o histories, politics, culture, language and education (Chicana and Chicano Studies Website).

Rodolfo Acuña, historian and founder of the department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, began by recruiting faculty who were knowledgeable of Chicana/o Studies as well as fields like history, politics, culture, language or education. Courses were initially designed to bring awareness to students of the Chicanx/Latinx experience and to offer a counter critique or perspective to the dominant narratives in traditional disciplines. In later years, the changing demographics convinced members of the department that it was necessary to expand and

prepare future educators to teach in schools that were predominately Chicana/Latina. Two Chicana/a Studies Teacher Preparation programs have been offered to meet this need.

### **Chicana/a Studies Teacher Preparation**

Establishing a presence for Chicana/o Studies in teacher preparation has not been easy. Dr. Rudy Acuña (2011) documents the battle to establish such a presence at the California State University Northridge. In the 1970's, after years of struggle, the department established "Operation Chicano Teacher" and developed an undergraduate major for prospective elementary school and secondary Social Studies teachers.

Today we are the largest Chicana/o Studies department in the nation and have several courses for undergraduate and graduate students entering the teaching profession. Many of these courses are aligned with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, the California Teaching Performance Expectations, and the California Teachers of English Learners Program. Our courses are cross-listed with the academic programs for prospective teachers offered by the College of Education including the elementary, secondary, and special education credential. Prospective teachers in other disciplines may also take our course to fulfill a course required for meeting the aforementioned standards.

We teach Chicana/o Studies 417: Equity and Diversity in Schools. The course is designed to introduce students to the Chicana/o education experience and to prepare teacher candidates to educate this growing demographic. We embrace our obligation to teach our students the historical and contemporary experiences of Chicana/as in education. With this in mind, we embarked upon our journey to "move our students beyond open-mindedness and towards a critical understanding about what it means to be Chicana/a in today's world. Part of this course requires our students to complete service-learning hours in the "It Takes a Barrio" (ITaB) Project.

### ***The "It Takes a Barrio" (ITaB) Project***

The ITaB project is a recursive pipeline into teaching. The project seeks to increase the numbers of Chicana/o and Latina/o college students, both undergraduate and graduate, who choose to enter the teaching profession. The program uses experiential learning strategies such as academic service learning, service to the community, and designing and implementing ethnic studies focused lesson plans. In field placements, the preservice teachers also collaborate with credentialed teacher mentors while working with students in K-12 schools. Our students also work with parents, partner with local community colleges and nonprofit organizations, and become members of the Student California Teachers Association.

The project is driven by a comprehensive view of student success premised on the belief that students require a diversity of opportunities to: learn culturally relevant content and theory; apply knowledge in real-life professional settings; give back to communities via service learning; engage in campus, community, and union activities that inform and promote a view of teaching as a meaningful and honorable profession; and involve parents and community members in the development of future teachers. (ITaB Project Evaluation Summary, 2016, p. 1).

In 2017, the ITaB project grew to include a successfully designed, single-subject credential program for teachers wishing to teach social studies. An innovative bilingual program for prospective bilingual elementary school teachers is currently under development. Our program is unique in that we recruit undergraduate students from different disciplines and graduate students from the Department of Chicana/o Studies.

For many of our students our classes are the first courses they have ever taken in Chicana/o Studies and for others who are Chicana/o Studies majors, it is not. As a department, we believe that curing Latina/Latinx students of "historical amnesia" is vital when tackling the negativity associated with deficit thinking. As Rudy Acuña (1990) wrote, "a consequence of historical amnesia is that it encourages the invention of a false reality, perpetuating the illusion of social and political equality" (p.1). This perpetual illusion impedes the education Latina and Chicana students deserve. Therefore, we use Chicana and Chicano Studies as a teaching tool for challenging deficit views prevalent in our schools.

## Undoing Deficit Racial Narratives through ITaB and Chicana and Chicano Studies

A critical component of the work with our preservice teachers is to challenge deficit views and negative racial narratives present in our schools and in society. We explain in great detail later in this paper our definition of deficit thinking and the process we used to “undo deficit racial narrative” coupled with knowledge and some practice of high leverage teaching skills. In addition to the content of Chicana and Chicano Studies, we maintain that the affirmation of funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth are critical for engaging Latinx/Chicanx students in the learning process.

In our effort to demonstrate to our prospective teachers what the components of Chicana and Chicano Studies, funds of knowledge, and community cultural wealth look like in a classroom, we asked members of a Latina Teacher Support (LTS) group to assist us in our endeavors. We began by asking these practitioners to infuse these important components into a student learning activity and to document the process so that we could “make it real” for our preservice teachers. We explained that their classroom practices would help our future teachers to see the abstract or theoretical concepts used in our course as possible and doable. In this case, we focused on the TeachingWorks high-leverage practice of *specifying and reinforcing student behavior* through literacy development by using three important components of our work: Chicana and Chicano Studies, funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) For the remainder of this essay, we will combine the three elements into two: **Chicana/o Studies** and **ventajas y conocimientos**. We will describe in greater detail later an explanation for our choice.

We combined the realistic demonstration provided by the LTS Group and incorporated them into the activities that we use with our preservice teachers to undo racial negatives, challenge deficit racial narratives, and reproduce high-leverage teaching practices.

### It Takes a Barrio (ITaB): Our Extensive Community of Practice

#### Latina Teacher Support Group

In an effort to connect our theoretical models, participatory classroom events, and performance activities to actual practice, we focus on the **high leverage teaching practices** of Latinx/Chicanx classroom teachers from various cities in California. These educators teach in districts where the majority of students are Chicanx/Latinx students. Two of the teachers teach in dual-immersion programs, two are elementary teachers, two are secondary teachers, and one is a part-time instructor at a local university.

Table I



We solicited lesson plans and pedagogical practices used by these teachers to demonstrate to our preservice teachers the powerful ways that practitioners facilitate the productive capacities of their students to learn, while simultaneously infusing Chicana/o Studies and *ventajas y conocimientos* into the classroom.

Since our work advocates infusing CFHL knowledge inside and outside of classrooms and schools, we also present our students with schoolwide, community, and university models, such as It Takes a Barrio (teacher pipeline project), Student CTA (Student California Teachers Association), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Collegiate, Ethnic Studies Now Ventura County, and other social projects our department or the teachers union is engaged with,

including but not limited to the California Teachers Association California Reads, the National Day of Action on Gun Violence, and Immigrant Rights Demonstrations.

### ***A View into the Classroom***

We began this semester by asking our mentees in the Latina Teacher Support group to describe how they engaged the most disengaged of students in the active process of learning. We specifically asked them to select a single learning activity where their students' funds of knowledge and/or the community cultural capital were incorporated into the process of lesson development and the student learning activity. We asked them to use Ethnic or Chicanx/Latinx Studies as the content area. We asked them to consider how they turned a disengaged student into an active and engaged learner, a disinterested student into a full participant, or a struggling student into an exemplary student. We explained to the LTS group that we were looking for pedagogical practices that we could present to our preservice university students as examples of how teachers can use cultural, linguistic, historical or familial knowledge, community cultural capital, and Chicanx/Ethnic Studies to promote productive, active learning and undo deficit racial narratives of Latinx/Chicanx students.

**Table 2**

***All of our teachers selected literacy development in the target language (English) as the teaching practice. Each teacher highlighted a different mode of language development: listening, speaking, reading and writing; but all modes were infused into the lesson.***

The teachers recorded the learning process in the classroom. We analyze the data and documented the high leverage learning activities associated with the lessons. We used the work of the LTS group as models to engage our preservice teachers in the development of their course activities and projects.

The information noted in Table 2 are the K-12 student learning outcomes emanating from the LTS lessons.

#### What do students do?

- Students interview parents, teachers and others to uncover the cultural and historical knowledge untaught.
- Students listen to teachers teach a lesson on a topic related to Chicano/a-Latino/a Studies.
- Student engage in productive exchange of knowledge learned by completing a specific task such as reading a story, writing a story, face painting or a presentation.
- Students share their cultural and historical counter stories with peers and families.

### **The Context**

#### ***Latinx and Chicanx Students***

As Latinx and Chicanx students make up the majority of the student population in California, it would be impossible to grow the economy of the state without focusing on the educational outcomes of these students. According to Education Trust West (2016), unless “we accelerate the pace of change, our state is sending a disturbing message about the contributions, worth, and potential of Latino students” (p.8). Latinx/Chicanx students continue to attend segregated schools, navigate an educational system that denies them access to coursework in college prep, and are often considered less capable students than their counterparts (Education Trust West, 2016). Moreover, according to the same source, Latinx/Chicanx students feel less connected to their schools. Given these stark realities, how are Latinx and Chicanx students expected to engage in the productive learning process necessary to succeed in schools? Chicanx and Latinx children and youth are conscious of their incongruity within the educational system. They are astute listeners and cognizant of the deficit ideologies inherent in an educational institution that denies them a legitimate space in history books, suppresses their language, and considers them less capable of learning.

Let us be clear. The inability of Latinx/Chicanx students to succeed in school is not about culture, language, or socioeconomic status. It is not because Chicanx/Latinx students are poor or do not speak fluent English or because Latinx/Chicanx parents do not place education in high regard. On the contrary, in our experience, even under the worst situations, Latinx/Chicanx parents continue to believe that access to a quality education can guarantee their offspring the economic stability of which many could only dream. Many pursue this dream for their children while laboring under the worst working conditions, earning relatively low wages and often with little or no opportunity for advancement. Chicanx/Latinx parents earn as little as 24,000 dollars per year and many work at low-skilled, non-union jobs. Yet, while 20 percent of Latinx families still live in poverty, the majority of Latinxs are employed with the hope of one day securing economic stability and social mobility (Flores, López & Radford, 2017).

The pursuit of this dream is damaged by the deficit ideology present in our schools. We argue that if CFHL knowledge and community cultural wealth are integrated into teacher preparation programs that they can be practical tools for undoing deficit racial narratives. Furthermore, the content of Ethnic-Chicana/o Studies are fundamental components to any discussion about high-leverage teaching practices or productive student learning. Specifically, students become disengaged in the classroom when they cannot see a connection between themselves and what they are learning (or their learning environment) (EdTrust, 2017). Chicana/o Studies lessons elevate the culture, language and history of a marginalized, often invisible group, in U.S. society. Students see themselves in lessons resulting in deeper engagement with curriculum and instruction. Chicana/o Studies as a content area can ensure that Latinx/Chicanx students have a foundational understanding of the Chicana/o cultural, history and experience.

One of our course objectives addresses the high-leverage teaching practice of teacher knowledge of students' cultural, religious, family, intellectual and personal experience. In this case, we add the high-leverage teaching practice of ***specifying and reinforcing student behavior*** to create the counter-stories necessary to give an authentic voice to Latinx/Chicanx student learning experience and to aid our students in challenging deficit racial narratives present in their schools.

### ***Deficit Ideology about Chicanx and Latinx Students***

Gorski (2010) argued that deficit ideology often casts a “scornful gaze” of power upon those not of the dominant culture. In effect, the power structure uses deficit ideology to explain that the root cause of poor educational achievement is due to a cultural deficit in students whose phenotype, language and class are not reflective of the dominant culture (Brandon, 2003; Gorski, 2008). The problem with the deficit ideology or thinking is that it blames the discrepancies in achievement by pointing to the results of the inequity and blaming the student or their parents. The problem in the deficit perspective is that it does not recognize that the true deficit is the failure of the educational system to invest in our students (Barton 2003, 2004; Rank, 2004; Carey, 2005).

Ahlquist (2016) argues that “deficit ideology is used to rationalize providing some children with less than an equitable education” (p. 8). We agree and believe that deficit ideology, when applied to the construction of educational programming, is used to create programs and policies that favor those who speak English, those from wealthy families, and those who otherwise represent the upper classes of U.S. society. Most of the K-12 students living in the area surrounding our university do not fall into this category.

Deficit ideology can also be by-products of racial narratives. Deficit racial narratives are not simply utterances whispered in lunch rooms, interactive exchanges at family gatherings, or “off the cuff” remarks written by a president in a series of tweets<sup>3</sup>. On the contrary, they can have very real consequences. Deficit racial narratives, in practice, can also impact the individual student. In our work, we witness the negative impact deficit racial narratives have on students. Latinx/Chicanx students become demoralized, dejected, and depressed. Some simply give up on

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<sup>3</sup> See: Trump Tweets, May 2015; January 2018; March 2018; April 2018.

learning. Members of the LTS group echo this sentiment. Maestra Martiza said, “Teachers see our kids as *pobrecitos* (poor little things) or worst like ‘failures’. Our kids, in turn, think they can’t read, write or speak in public. They don’t think they are capable of success”.

In fact, through a structured activity in our classroom, our preservice teachers recently developed a list of racial narratives and deficit “talk” overheard about Latinx/Chicanx people in Los Angeles schools from teachers, staff and administrators, they included:

- “They are uneducated and simply don’t care about education.”
- “They don’t belong here.”
- “The reason they aren’t included in any textbooks or library books is because they don’t sell.”
- “Parents don’t care what their children do after school. They don’t watch them anyway. So, the kids don’t do their homework.”
- “They are all the same. I don’t see color. My classroom reflects what I consider important and accurate. So, if you don’t see minorities, it’s because I don’t have the information.”
- “Don’t go over there, the Mexicans hang out there.”

These are vivid examples that deficit ideology and racial narratives about Latinx/Chicanx students are still a living and breathing part of the dominant discourse. In the remainder of this paper, we will use the term “deficit racial narratives” to describe the racial narratives attached to deficit ideology applied to the Chicanx/Latinx community.

The practices that result from deficit racial narratives not only label students as “deficient” but spur educators to design educational programs aimed to remediate the “problem”. Although the teaching of English to English Language Learners can be approached using non-deficit instructional practices such as promoting the biliterate development of language throughout the United States, teachers are often engaged in the forcible process of subtractive schooling (Anzaldúa, 1987; Montañó & Sarellana Quintanar, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). This form of schooling systematically erases the students’ home language and replaces it with English. In like manner, educational policy developed from a deficit perspective addresses “deficits” by attempting to “fix” struggling students. Thus, if a student does not speak the dominant language of English, the student’s home language is considered problematic; an obstacle to learning and that language must be replaced. In many instances, deficit ideology leads to the adoption of deficit policies that impede student learning (Valenzuela, 1999, Montañó & Sarellana Quintanar, 2010; Valdes, 2001; Shapiro, 2014; Wiley & Lukes, 1996). Menken & Kleyn (2009; 2010) posit that English Language Learners typically have limited literacy skills in English or in their native languages due to the overwhelming emphasis on English and maintain that English dominant programming is a significant factor in the length of time it takes them to acquire academic English, and particularly to develop literacy skills. When applied to policy and programs “deficit ideology” can have a long-term effect on the psyche & learning of English Language Learners.

We contend that what is needed is to move educators from a deficit view to an asset view akin to the ***ventajas y conocimientos*** (Rendón, L.I., Nora, A. & Kanagala, V., 2014) perspective. The process we use challenges our students to begin by naming the deficit racial narratives prevalent in their schools and society. In our courses, we ask our students to think about (and analyze) the dominant public discourse evident from the White House, in the media, or in our schools. We ask them to consider the “soul wounds” (Valenzuela, 2008) felt by Latinx and Chicanx students and to discuss the impact on their educational experience.

### Chicana/o Studies Activist Pedagogy

### ***Making Connections: Chicano/a Studies as a Driving Force***

Chicano/a Studies can be used as a vehicle to interrupt the dominant discourse prevalent in our society. Given the contentious nature of discourse on race, we, as instructors, utilize various activities to create an environment that will communicate the complexity of the Chicano/Latinx experience in a comprehensible and often more palpable way to potentially resistant Latino and non-Latino educators. We recognize the dissonance and resistance that we inevitably encounter as we engage our teachers in difficult discourse. Like Lea and Sims (2007), we acknowledge, “knowing that one’s acts are leading to the oppression of others is painful” (p.15). However, we maintain that the effective use of instruction can ease the pain involved when the realistic narrative of marginalized communities is discussed in a less pointed fashion. We hope to move our preservice teachers from a surface-level understanding of the Chicano lived reality to a recognition that the experiences of Chicano/as are shaped by positionality or social order based on race, gender, immigrant status, history, and language preference. In essence, positionality is determined by who wields power. We want our teachers to understand that power is “differentially distributed in society and that social institutions are organized to advantage the most powerful (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As future educators, we hope our teachers not only reflect upon the positional reality Chicano/as encounter, but to engage in critical dialogue with others about injustice and to ultimately take action to eliminate the inequality and injustice. For this reason, we ask our preservice teachers to begin by reciting a deficit racial narrative they have heard or experienced.

Chicana/o Studies can be used to humanize the curriculum and to teach young people to relate to one another, but if stereotypes are pronounced, if we reject the linguistic realities, or minimize existing inequalities, if our course material does not reflect the socio-cultural, historical, political worlds of the Chicano/a student, or if it does not represent the Chicano/a social realities in authentic or meaningful manner, then the racial deficit narratives that many of our students have about Chicanos/as will persist unchallenged. For these reasons, we have also devised a series of assignments used by our preservice teachers. We use these individual and collaborative activities to connect *ventajas y conocimientos* and Chicana/o Studies. Our ultimate goal is to involve our students in an effort to counteract racism and other forms of oppression in their classrooms.

In our course, preservice teachers become involved in a process of:

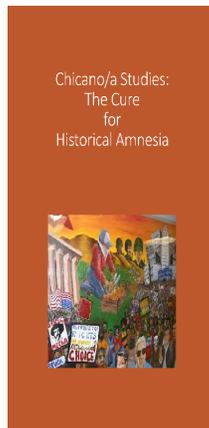
1. Understanding their own identity and positionality through a project of self-discovery
2. Uncovering the lived reality of an individual who identifies as Chicano/Latinx
3. Identifying existing deficit racial narratives in schools and communities
4. Discussing the extent to which the deficit racial narratives impact the Chicano/Latinx educational experience
5. Learning and applying about critical concepts of funds of knowledge, community cultural capital and *conocimientos y ventajas*
6. Listening to a careful demonstration by educators who have connected *ventajas y conocimientos*, high leverage teaching practices and Chicano Studies in California Classrooms
7. Undoing the previously generated deficit racial narrative and applying non-deficit ideologies to a social action lesson plan or schoolwide project

As Chicanas, we understand the critical role Chicana/o Studies has played in teacher preparation, especially at this Hispanic Serving institution.

### **Table 3**

Table 3 is a comprehensive overview of the key components of an undergraduate/graduate program in Chicana/o Studies teacher preparation (Montaño & Cruz, 2018a).

We will use this writing opportunity to describe our efforts to ensure that future teachers are both prepared to teach Chicana/Latinx students and possess the skills necessary to affirm the cultural and linguistic knowledge these students bring into the classroom.



- Chicana/o Studies (CHS) Holds a Prominent Role in Teacher Preparation
- The Chicana/Latinx Experience is Informed by Racism.
- CHS Challenges Dominant Ideologies.
- CHS Applies Community and Social Justice Frameworks into Coursework and Programs.
- CHS Promotes Voice, Activism and Agency.
- CHS Is a Viable and Rigorous Academic Discipline.
- CHS Prepares Future Educators to Practice Social Justice Unionism
- *Chicana/o Studies is the Counter Narrative*

This article presents what two teacher educators do to infuse the concepts and frameworks of **ventajas y conocimientos, Chicana/o Studies, and High Leverage Teaching Practices** to our *Chicana/o Studies 417 Equity and Diversity in Schools* course.

### **Funds of Knowledge and Community Cultural Wealth Defined**

We begin by incorporating the funds of knowledge theoretical framework (Moll, Amanti & Gonzalez, 2001). We affirm the cultural, linguistic and familial knowledge that underlies the productive and exchange activities of our homes; the intellectual, social and emotional resources that empower our families to negotiate with the dominant community with dignity and respect; the knowledge often overlooked by teachers inherent in homes of children who are “different” that help children and youth negotiate the often unfriendly terrain of school.

**Table 4**

The funds of knowledge approach to teaching and learning can also help mediate Latinx and Chicana student learning. Funds of knowledge refers to “the knowledge base that underlies the productive and exchange activities of households” (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004, p. 700). The goal of the funds of knowledge work is to “interrupt and subvert the present hegemony in schools characterized by extreme coerciveness” (Moll, 2003).

We use Table 4 to facilitate a discussion on funds of knowledge attributes found in Latinx and Chicana homes and communities.

**\* Cultural, linguistic and familial knowledge**



- \* Familial/household social and historical stories (dating, discipline, hierarchy)
- \* Music, art and culture
- \* Family gatherings (birthdays, meal time, foods)
- \* Family/cultural stories (dichos, mitos y tonterias)
- \* Home language and experiences with new language (translation, social language, etc.)
- \* Lessons learned (practical and intellectual lessons)

Through the discovery of the funds of knowledge existing in our schools and communities, social relationships between students, families and educators are established. Teacher incorporation of these funds of knowledge helps mediate the constraints of sociocultural and sociopolitical differences. The approach builds on anthropological methods and centers on visiting student households for the purpose of developing social relations with family members that will allow for concrete documentation of their knowledge. Students engage in a respectful

collaboration with families and communities. This collaboration equips them with theoretical and methodological tools through a process of authentic engagement with families and their everyday life conditions

As practical construct, the funds of knowledge method encourages educator action research. For example, funds of knowledge action researchers (classroom teachers) might form study groups. In these study groups, teachers as researchers collaboratively think about the meaning and implications funds of knowledge can have on classroom practice. The process involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. The data set will provide intellectual direction for the teacher providing the educator with enough information to make any lesson culturally relevant. The theoretical orientation of the approach is based on empirical research with families who collaborate with teachers. This collaboration helps teachers and other educators to re-present the student households in their lesson plans or schoolwide projects. The social and cultural resources found in Latinx and Chicanx homes, schools and communities assume an elevated position when imbued in the classrooms of our preservice teachers and can lead to increased interest in learning. The social and cultural resources become the primary pedagogical characteristic of instruction.

The process in our course involves placing our preservice teachers in social settings in communities and schools. In our program, we require 10-20 semester hours of service learning in classrooms, in family settings, community events, or union activities. We also want our students to move outside of the classroom; therefore we utilize a practice whereby our students develop an action plan.

Another outcome of the work is to help preservice teachers and educators recontextualize their own learning based on new knowledge gained by connecting with the families and their communities. Teachers and preservice teachers become aware of resources, hone their research skills, and increase their knowledge base by establishing social relationship with families. The student in the classrooms of the preservice teachers and teachers is now understood as a person who partakes in a broader social life. A life that contains ample resources for thinking and a life includes schools and classrooms.

We also utilize Yosso's (2005) theoretical paradigm of community cultural wealth and the critical race theoretical framework. Critical race theory posits that each students' experience is informed by their positions in the societal hierarchy, particularly their encounters with racism. For instance, the learning experience of Latinx or Chicanx students would be informed by the status of culture and language knowledge. Moreover, the improvement in the quality of the educational experience for marginalized students is somewhat dependent on challenging structures in education and society that maintain societal inequities. Critical Race Theory also requires students to reflect on the current sociopolitical realities facing public education.

Critical race theory uses the process of counter stories or counter-narratives. The discipline of Chicana/o Studies is a leader in developing the counter-narrative necessary to counteract the negative education experiences of Latino students. Chicana/o Studies emphasizes critical theories that challenge dominant ideologies; integrate community and social justice frameworks in coursework (Montaño & Cruz, 2018b).

We add Yosso (2005) community cultural wealth to the funds of knowledge theoretical and practical framework. Yosso's framework includes six forms of cultural wealth.

1. Aspirational capital (the hopes, dreams and desires for a better future)
2. Linguistic capital (languages, communication skills)
3. Familial capital (cultural knowledge, traditions, historical memories, social cultural skills)
4. Social capital (community networks)
5. Navigational (the ability to navigate "social institutions" including educational spaces)
6. Resistant capital (knowledge and skills acquire through negotiating unfriendly social and political structures or oppositional behavior) of specific racial identity groups.

We explain concepts of race and racism in society. For example, we use Bonilla-Silva (2015) to describe new racism. We follow the explanation of Critical Race Theory by asking our students to identify examples of racism in schools today. We solicit examples of community

cultural wealth found in the Latinx and Chicanx to construct a counter-narrative to the previously identified deficit racial narratives. Using an activity called “talking back”, we they move from deficit to asset narratives (see undoing racial narratives and dialogue poem below).

We maintain that careful exchange of community cultural wealth between teachers and students can facilitate the joint production of knowledge in the classroom.

**The Context: Undoing Deficit Racial Narratives**

We recognize that deficit ideology hampers the efforts of future teachers to humanize the curriculum, honor student voice and identity, and to integrate the cultural, familial, historical, and linguistic (CFHL) knowledge of our students. It is particularly unfortunate that teaching students to value and perceive other cultures as equal, affirm their own linguistic and cultural identity, and/or think critically about their own social, cultural, and political realities is sometimes reduced to one course, workshop or reading. We are lucky to be in a department, where teacher preparation is of primary importance.

As such, we ask our preservice teachers to envision a different reality. We ask them to collectively re-imagine the public education classroom as a space of joy, creativity, and cultural responsiveness for our students; as an educational system where schools and colleges embrace the collective nature of our culture and history. Where parents are treated with respect and dignity. Where unions run parent universities<sup>4</sup>, family literacy projects, and provide child care so that parents can be actively involved in our schools. Classrooms where students are taught that Americans reside on both continents. Where students develop a sense of pride in their history of resilience and resistance. Where the persistence and desire to develop proficiency in two languages is respected. Where every student has the right to a free public education.

Upon establishing our “envisioned different reality” upon which our students add their own visions, we proceed to the development of the action plan.

**Table 5**

We challenge our students to move the quotes from the deficit view to the assets view. We ask our students to consider a negative racial narrative that contributes to the inequitable learning conditions experienced by Latinx/Chicanx students. Students are then asked to change the deficit racial narrative to an assets quote.

In other words, our students create the counterstories needed to challenge deficit racial narratives.

<b>Challenging Deficit Views</b>	
<b>Deficit View:</b>	<b>Assets View:</b>
Culturally and Linguistically Deprived	→ Untapped Cultural and Linguistic Knowledge
Unmotivated and Uninterested	→ Unrecognized Talents, Potential for Growth
At-risk and Remedial	→ Resilient, Creative and Persistent
Troubled	→ Resister, Bicultural Negotiator
Othering, Blaming	→ Community Engagement, Becoming an Ally

Culture, Abilities, Resilience, Effort (C.A.R.E.), Darder Bicultural Sphere

Our students write a two-voice, dialogue poem challenging the deficit views of Latinx/Chicanx students by offering a counter narrative using an assets view and to identify the community cultural wealth and funds of knowledge existing in the community.

We begin with group dialogue where the students share teacher and staff conversations about students and their families from a deficit mindset. We briefly explain Critical Race Theory

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<sup>4</sup> Parent University, in conjunction with the Inglewood Teachers Association and National Education Association, is a program that connects parents to their children’s education. The goal of the program is to create partnerships between parents, teachers and community in ways that increase parent involvement and keep parents informed about their child’s education.

and the use of counter narratives as a method of challenging the deficit views they shared to construct an assets view narrative.

Next, we distribute a copy of “Two Women,” a poem written by a working-class Chilean woman in 1973 shortly after Chile’s socialist president, Salvador Allende, was overthrown. The poem was originally published in Sojourners magazine (Christensen, 2015).

The poem is read aloud by two people with one reading the regular-faced type of a rich woman and the other reading the bold-faced type of a poor woman. We stand on opposite sides of the room and read the poem out loud.

Next, they are instructed to interview a person different from them (e.g. gender, race, economic or immigration status) as part of their take-home assignment. We ask them to use the information from the interview to create a poem of their own. We share two preservice teacher’s examples. Their story is in boldface type. The poems go:

*Poem 1:*

I am from the family of two teachers

**I am from the family of two factory workers**

My parents read to me every night before bed

**My parents had to work every night while I went to bed**

I went to a brand new school, the first year it opened

**I went to a school that looked like it would fall apart at any moment**

I was given private music lessons at the age of 7

**My school couldn’t afford music classes**

I received my first trombone when I was 7

**I was happy when I received a toy car when I was 7**

I was successful in school and always had people to help me

**I did ok in school, but did most of it on my own as my family couldn’t understand my homework**

I was praised for knowing music at a young age

**My teachers and friends told me to speak English more**

I slacked off in high school and still went to a four year university

**I worked really hard in high school, but could barely get into community college**

I graduated a semester early

**I graduated after working eight years for a four-year degree**

I got a head start on my career

**I got my career job a few years later than normal**

*Poem #2*

I was born in the United States

**I was born in another country**

I was raised in a wealthy family

**I was raised in a poor family**

My father has a bachelor’s degree

**My father barely finished high school**

My mother has a bachelor’s degree

### **My mother did only a few years of elementary school**

I had everything I wanted when I was a kid

**I had only a few, cheap toys when I was a kid**

I could go anywhere I wanted when I was in high school

**I could not afford to go anywhere when I was in high school**

During high school, I got plenty of support to get a successful education

**During high school, I was completely on my own**

In high school, I traveled to Europe for pleasure with my friends

**I immigrated as a teenager with my siblings to the US for necessity.**

I got accepted to one of the best universities in the country

**I got accepted to a community college and signed up at an English Learner school to study English at night**

I had my schooling financed by my parents

**I had to work three jobs to pay for my education**

I got into drugs, gambling and alcohol

**I got into sports**

I ended up dropping out of the university to go into rehab

**I was the first in my family to get a bachelor's degree**

I became resentful and racist

**I valued diversity**

I hate my life

**I'm thankful for what I have**

I realized I always took everything for granted

**I'm glad I never took anything for granted**

### ***Curing Historical Amnesia***

A critical analysis of the list of characteristics identified in Yosso (2005) reveals that historical knowledge is a missing ingredient in funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth (see previous list of funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth attributes). In Chicana and Chicano Studies, historical knowledge is a central element of the discipline and an essential element of Chicana/o Studies Activist Pedagogy.

We ask our students to consider the fact that many Latinx and Chicanx students experience "historical amnesia" because they have not been taught their history. Like many living in the United States, the history taught and learned in our classrooms continues to be a one-sided and reduced version of historical events. A history presented that often ignores and dismisses centuries of colonialization, racism, discrimination, and exclusion experienced by the Chicanx and Latinx people in the U.S (Darder, 1992; Montañó & Cruz, 2018b). Two examples of unwritten narratives are the following summaries that we share with our students:

In 1939, an all Mexican-American high school basketball team from Lanier High School in San Antonio, Texas made history when they won the city championship. After their victory, a riot ensued with the all-white players from the opposing team (Latimer, 2016).

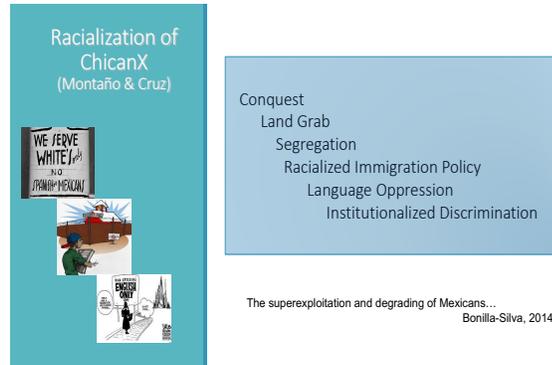
In 1945, Private Felix Z. Longoria, a Mexican-American soldier serving in the United States Army was killed during the Philippines War. Upon the return of his body to family, the only funeral home in his hometown denied the family wake services because he was Mexican-American (Navarrette, 2010).

Currently, the narrow view of history is countered only by ethnic studies programs whose role it has been to document the diverse histories and contributions made by Chicanx, Latinx and other ethnic groups (Sleeter, 2011; Tintiango-Cubales, Kohil, Sacramento, Henning, Agarwal-Rangnath, & Sleeter, 2018).

**Table 5**

Many fail to consider issues of race and racism when discussing the Chicanx-Latinx educational experience. Therefore, while working with our preservice teachers to “undo deficit racial narratives”, we briefly discuss the history of the Chicanx people in a lecture, we call **“How did it get this way?”** describing the historical legacy of the Chicanx people in the U.S., beginning with the conquest of 1848 to the present time. We concentrate on the systematic inequitable educational system (Table 5).

We likewise address the racialization of Chicanx people. We utilize historical deficit racial narratives in our discussion of the history of Chicanx education.



The importance of situating our work in a historical context is critically important to our work as faculty in the content area of Chicana/o Studies. The idea of challenging deficit racial narratives must be situated in a culturally responsive sociohistorical context, otherwise a decontextualized implementation of the TeachingWorks high-leverage practice of “specifying and reinforcing student behavior” may change student behavior, but it can also promote, rather than challenge deficit racial narratives. Antonia Darder (1995) once wrote that any serious consideration of racialized people must never be decontextualized, otherwise cultural attributes will be seen as arbitrary classifications of individuals or accidental. Our students’ responsiveness or lack of responsiveness to a lesson presented by a well-intended educator, if left to interpretation by those unfamiliar with the students’ culture, maybe be trivialized or misunderstood. Darder describes the importance of raising the “cultural consciousness” of marginalized students. This consciousness is partially grounded in the collective memories of a people and of their own history. In other words, the failure to teach Latinx and Chicanx students their history has resulted in students who do not know their own story, causing our students to suffer from “historical amnesia.” The historical legacy of the Latinx and Chicanx people in this nation is one of significant contributions to the growth of the U.S., but it is also a rich history of oppression, resilience and resistance. This history has given way to the survival of a vibrant culture, language and a collective consciousness, often unknown to our students. It has been our experience that equipping educators with the wherewithal to uncover these stories can lead to active engagement in student learning, as evidenced in the classrooms of the LTS group. These classroom practices have led to the instructional participation of many disconnected students.

After spending a significant amount of time in our course uncovering deficit racial narratives about Latinx/Chicanx students, we engage in a deeper dialogue about race and racism. Surprisingly, our students sometimes compartmentalize or simplify the racism directed at Latinx/Chicanx as decontextualized incidents or examples of xenophobia or English language dominance, but a recent study by Latino Decision demonstrates that race and racial relationship are for foremost importance (Nuño, 2017). We spend a lot of time discussing the impact of

racism on our children and communities, including discussing the instructional practices associated with deficit ideology. We then move to undoing the racial narratives and deficit talk by focusing on a strength-based approach using the framework of funds of knowledge, community cultural wealth and Chicana and Chicano Studies. Most recently, we have selected to also described a new framework, that of **ventajas y conocimientos**.

### **Ventajas y Conocimientos**

The research on the strengths, resiliency, and knowledge originating in Latinx and Chicanx homes and communities are well documented. In a recent paper, Rendon, Nora and Kanagala (2014) integrated the strengths and knowledge of many strength-based frameworks into one calling them **ventajas y conocimientos** (assets and knowledge). The authors captured the major work of Delgado Bernal (2010), Elenes González, Delgado Bernal & Villenas (2010), Moll, Amanti & González (2001), Yosso (2005) and combined them with Gloria Anzaldúas (1999) 'conocimientos' creating a cumulative framework called **ventajas y conocimientos**. In researching a small group of college students, the researchers uncovered four additional strengths and added the elements of *ganas*<sup>5</sup>, ethnic consciousness, spirituality/faith, and pluriversal<sup>6</sup> to the construct. Appreciating the cumulative construct, we shall use the terms **ventajas y conocimientos** to describe the strengths and knowledge emanating from Latinx and Chicanx homes, from this point on.

### **Beyond Ventajas y Conocimientos**

While we acknowledge the importance of engaging preservice teachers in the process of identifying the *ventajas y conocimientos* of Latinx/Chicanx students, we also critique an assets only approach. First of all, using strictly a *ventajas y conocimientos* approach to affirm values, strengths and culture can lead to compartmentalizing the Latinx and Chicanx experience into a series of identified "cultural nuances" or "traits" demeaning a varied and rich cultural heritage. It can also assume an essentialist understanding of the Chicanx and Latinx lived reality, by creating a list of attributes that Latinx and Chicanx possess which might create new stereotypes.

This approach can also be problematic if teachers simply add *ventajas y conocimientos* to the curriculum with minimal or tangential academic goals in mind. Sometimes well-meaning educators will develop simplistic "multicultural lessons," like changing the language of instruction, but utilizing instructional material that promote whiteness. In other cases, simplistic multicultural lessons are presented with less rigor, such as multicultural assemblies or cultural fairs. Schoolwide presentations of *ventajas y conocimientos* absent high-leverage teaching practices will most definitely result in the production of practices with the power to harm (Loewenberg-Ball, 2016).

Conversely, a focus on high-leverage teaching practices decontextualized or from ahistorical perspective can result in producing students, who instead of questioning dominant historical narratives, simply regurgitate them. For example, a recent visit to a school in Los Angeles, where the majority of students are Latinx, an award-winning teacher used technology to carefully explain and model a lesson on explorers. Throughout the lesson, the teacher checked for student understanding, praised student work, and adjusted instruction throughout the lesson plan. Students were engaged in learning, carefully producing a newsletter about their favorite explorer, but what did *not* happen was a critical discussion about colonialization and Indian genocide. A more critical approach would have been to question the motives of the explorers, to quiz the students about how explorers changed the lives of indigenous peoples or discuss colonialism.

In other words, teachers who take an essentialist approach may not possess the high-leverage teaching practices needed to interrogate the power structure or institutional racism. They may likely take an ahistorical approach to the teaching of history. They may not be adept at

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<sup>5</sup> Ganas is a Spanish word and translated means determination, self-reliance and inner confidence.

<sup>6</sup> Pluriversal is the ability to make identity, language and behavioral shifts while moving successfully in and out of multiple social and intellectual spaces.

responding to deeper analytical questions about structural inequality, privilege, or power. We must prepare future educators to become culturally responsive teachers who utilize high leverage teaching practices. The simple inclusion of *ventajas y conocimientos* is not enough to disrupt privilege or injustice. Therefore, our intent is to move our students beyond the simplistic affirmation of *ventajas y conocimientos*. We want our students to gain a deeper understanding into the sociohistorical and sociocultural realities of Latinx and Chicanx people, both the aesthetic beauty of their culture and the "ugliness" of poverty, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. Moreover, we hope our teachers become skilled in the high leverage teaching practices necessary to disrupt the existing social order and challenge the practices that create the inequities our students face in schools. In our opinion, this is where Ethnic Studies steps in.

**Table 6**

In addition to *ventajas y conocimientos and using high leverage teaching practices*, we require our preservice teachers to develop a lesson plan in Chicana/o Studies or to design an action plan focused on the Chicanx experience.

Preservice teachers begin by changing counter narratives into an educational goal. They must place the lesson plan or critical project in the Chicanx educational reality of the community where they will teach. Since they are working as a team, only one school or community is selected for the project.

Having completed additional service learning activities, preservice teachers are somewhat familiar with the community.

**Action Plan**

- Provide evidence of existence and impact on the quality of education provided to Chicana/os & Latino/as (review current and academic knowledge).
- Discuss the context, structure, and history of the issue (demographic trends, linguistic diversity and features of migration and immigration and the impact on the school community)
- Chicana/o & Latino/a intersectionality such as race, gender, sexual orientation, language or immigration status.
- Select a Pedagogical Practice/Critical Project to improve the education experience of Chicanx & Latinx students in California.

Preservice teachers also research the historical and current sociopolitical context of their selected theme and describe the demographics of the school and/or community where the project would be located. Each group must also make a concrete connection to the *ventajas y conocimientos* of the community carefully describing the exchange of *ventajas y conocimientos* between educators & community. Preservice teachers must make an explicit connection to Chicana/o Studies.

**Summary List and Chronology of Activities**

1. Positionality and Identity
  - a. Demographic presentation of Los Angeles' Latinx/Chicanx community with a focus on education
  - b. Preservice teachers focus on their own identity and positionality as it relates to the majority community
  - c. Faculty define culture as dynamic, importance of identity, and introduce Librito project
2. Identifying Deficit Racial Narratives, Part 1
  - a. Preservice teachers describe their first experiences with racism and the role racism plays in their lives
  - b. Using a Critical Race Theory lens (LatCrit) faculty define terms race as a social construct, the new racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) and the historical experience of Chicanx/Latinx people
  - c. Preservice teachers identify deficit racial narratives and describe everyday racism may impacts Chicanx and Latinx students

3. Unpacking Deficit Racial Narratives, Part 2
  - a. Preservice teachers begin to counter the racial narratives identified in Part 1
  - b. Faculty introduce preservice teachers to the frameworks of community cultural wealth and funds of knowledge
  - c. Preservice teachers write a Dialogue Poem as a counter narrative to the deficit racial narratives previously identified
4. Moving Beyond Racial Narratives.
  - a. Preservice teachers focus on the classroom
  - b. Preservice teachers take a deficit racial narrative and turn it into a strength-based instructional goal
  - c. Preservice teachers are introduced to Gloria Anzaldua's and Andre Lorde's intersectionality, high-leverage teaching practices are presented and discussed and the concepts of diversity and social justice (Hackman, 2017) and *ventajas y conocimientos* explained.
  - d. Faculty introduce preservice teachers to the instructional practices of the LTS
  - e. Using the Strength-based instructional goal, preservice teachers infuse Chicana/o Studies and *ventajas y conocimientos* into an instructional activity
5. Librito
  - a. Case study approach to an individual who identifies as Latinx/Chicanx (if the student is Chicanx/Latinx the case study participant must be of a different gender, orientation, or ethnicity)
  - b. Preservice teachers are provided guided questions and a rubric.
  - c. Uncovering the lived reality of Chicano and Latino children, preservice teachers create a children's book about the person interviewed.
6. Language. Immigration, Ethnic Studies and Social Justice Unionism
  - a. Faculty challenge deficit racial narratives by presenting concrete examples of social justice practices
7. Action Plan
  - a. Preservice teachers create an action plan to challenge an inequity emanating from the deficit racial narratives identified in class
  - b. Preservice teachers complete this highly-structured activity by selecting a pedagogical practice or a school-wide project that will improve the education experience of Chicanx and Latinx students
  - c. Faculty use Michael Fullan's Model of Change (2001) and Coherence Framework (Fullan & Quinn, 2016) as framework for instructional practice
8. Students present pedagogical practice or action plan
  - a. Research based collective project
  - b. Preservice teachers present their action plan to their classroom peers as if they were presenting to an audience of high school students, teachers, administrators, board members and/or community leaders. The purpose of the project is for our students to convince this imagined audience that their project or lesson plan is worth implementing at a school or to the community.

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