

#theWork Before Community-Engaged Teacher Preparation

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Abstract: Many white cis-gender monolingual teacher candidates in teacher education programs, have negative perceptions of students and communities of color (Bertrand & Porcher, 2020). Teacher education programs struggle to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to interrogate these perceptions, and most importantly, their own identity before entering clinical experiences and/or service-learning opportunities. The article analyzes whether Photovoice is an effective pedagogical tool for students to interrogate their identities and perceptions of communities and students of color in preparation for a critical service-learning project in the New Brunswick community. More specifically, the key elements of the Photovoice project is to advance teacher candidates abilities to engage in an archeology of self (Sealey-Ruiz, 2018) in order to avoid enacting harm upon the community during critical service learning.

KEYWORDS: Archeology of Self, Community-Engaged Teacher Education, Photovoice

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

- 1) A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, anti-racism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners.;
- 2) A PDS embraces the preparation of educators through clinical practice.;
- 4) A PDS makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation, and generative knowledge.
- 7) A PDS is built upon shared, sustainable governance structures that promote collaboration, foster reflection, and honor and value all participants' voices.
- 8) A PDS creates space for, advocates for, and supports college/university and P-12 faculty to operate in well-defined, boundary-spanning roles that transcend institutional settings.

Introduction

As we prepared for the community learning walk with our resident artist of the New Brunswick community, I could see the fear on my teacher candidates' faces. I asked the teacher candidates blankly, "How many people are fearful of walking around the community?" More than half of the teacher candidates raised their hands. My eyes darted toward the one teacher candidate whom I knew was a resident of the community. She attended K-16 in that community, including the teacher education program, and her face demonstrated disappointment, anger, and frustration. One teacher candidate stated, "Dr. P., we are told not to venture past the train station in orientation. It is not safe." Another teacher candidate chimed in, "Yeah, it's almost like we all live in two New Brunswicks! It's the Rutgers side and the resident side." I looked at the teacher candidate who had grown up in the community, and it immediately dawned on me, *if they feel that way about the community, how do they feel about her? Do they believe that she is an anomaly?* Furthermore, when I am in the New Brunswick community and schools, it feels like home and the community I grew up in. *If they feel that way about the community, how do they feel about me as one of their few Black professors?*

This sentiment that teacher candidates expressed before our community learning walk is not new. A community learning walk is led by a community pillar, where teacher candidates walk through the community learning about, from, and alongside the community. Working at a white-dominated institution, more specifically, a teacher education program, I expect that many white cis-gender monolingual teacher candidates have negative perceptions of students and communities of color (Bertrand & Porcher, 2020). Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2020) argue that anti-Black violence in schooling impacts white students because they receive messages of Black inferiority Black omission, and inaccurate historical representations, thereby developing negative attitudes about Blackness.

The teacher candidates were told in their orientation that the community where their university is located is "unsafe." Latinx and Black people populate this community. Even after five years of attending school, the teacher candidates were not aware of the community's assets and conditions. What was most frightening and humbling is that the present course, *Students, Communities and Social Justice*, was the last that teacher candidates would take before entering the classroom. Their perceptions of the students and communities that they served were neither interrogated nor unpacked.

Course Context: Students, Communities & Social Justice

The *Students, Communities, and Social Justice* course is the capstone course for the Urban Social Justice Teacher Education Program. The course learning objectives are that teacher candidates:

- Work alongside community members to jointly develop a program of engagement,
- Engage in meaningful interactions with members of a community other than school personnel, and
- Interact with students, community members, family members both with a Graduate School of Education (GSE) instructor and independently, without GSE instructor mediation (Porcher et al., 2020).

University administration gives professors who teach the *Students, Communities, and Social Justice* course the flexibility and creativity to design the course in the way they choose, as long as they adhere to the course objectives (Porcher et al., 2020). I worked collaboratively with the Collaborative Center for Community-Based Research Service, New Brunswick Community Organizations, and New Brunswick community members to design and teach one section of the *Students, Communities, and Social Justice* course in the New Brunswick community. We connected as a result of my explicit commitment to model critical service-learning (Mitchell, 2008), develop authentic relationships, and reposition power and privilege as a faculty member. When designing the course, we leaned on Mitchell's (2008) three components of critical service-learning: redistribution of privilege and power, societal change, and authentic relationships (Porcher et al., 2020). With the assistance of the Collaborative Center for Community-Based Research, we partnered with four organizations over two year (Table 1).

The purpose of this article is to analyze whether the pedagogical tool, Photovoice, is an effective tool for teacher candidates to interrogate their identities and perceptions of communities and students of color in preparation for critical service-learning projects in the New Brunswick community (listed in Table 1). The research question that guided the analysis is: in what ways does the Photovoice project allow teacher candidates the ability to engage in an archeology of self (Sealey-Ruiz, 2018) in order to avoid harming the community during critical service learning? The purpose in sharing the analysis is to inform and support fellow teacher educators and teacher education programs to engage in the foundational work (#theWork) of teacher candidate identity *before* they engage with students in clinical experiences, and/or critical service learning in school-university partnerships, and/or community-engaged teacher education.

Table 1. *Community Organizations & Critical Service-Learning Projects*

| Organization | Background Information | Critical Service-Learning Project |
|--|--|---|
| <p>New Brunswick Healthy Housing Collaborative (NBHHC)</p> | <p>An organization that seeks to improve health outcomes by mitigating housing issues facing residents within the Esperanza and Unity Square neighborhoods. The NBHHC works with other public, private, or non-profit institutions and organizations “to implement healthy housing assessments, consumer training, lead, and asthma testing and environmental changes that will produce safer and healthier home environments, provide additional opportunities for a healthier lifestyle and behavior change, and advocate for housing policies that promote community health and well- being.”</p> | <p>The project involves teacher candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning about the assets and conditions of the Esperanza & Unity square communities; • Evaluation of landlord-tenant rights workshop; • Analyzing the home assessment data; • Developing infographics to illustrate the data for the Esperanza & Unity square residents; • Creating videos for the Esperanza & Unity Square residents for support with issues found during the home assessments; and • Support with developing the first tenant-landlord association. |
| <p>New Brunswick Gifted & Talented (G&T) program</p> | <p>The academy for the Gifted & Talented program aims to “nurture [students’] multiple intelligences and allows students to demonstrate skills... that include the different modalities of learning.” Thus, the program provides differentiated instruction for students with exceptional abilities in intellectual ability across multiple domains, specific aptitudes in mathematics, English language arts, STEM disciplines, or the visual and performing arts.</p> | <p>This project involved teacher candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveying G&T students, teachers & parents to determine needs to transition to the public high school; • Organizing vertical articulation meetings for the G&T teachers and the high school teachers to support G&T students’ transitions; and |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating an infographic to present to the New Brunswick public school admin to support G&T families. |
| <p>Eric B. Chandler Health Center (EBCHC), Reach Out & Read Program</p> | <p>The health center focuses on providing a community-oriented approach to family medicine. EBCHC is federally- funded, owned, and operated by Robert Wood Johnson Medical school (RWJM). The health center is centered on meeting the health care needs of the New Brunswick community and the people it serves. One of the many services provided by the EBCHC is a family literacy program known as Reach Out and Read (ROAR). In this program, professionals will use health topics (e.g., nutrition, physical activity, bedtime routines, and social-emotional behavior) to introduce and promote early literacy skills for pre-K children and their parents in New Brunswick.</p> | <p>This project involved teacher candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing materials for Reach Out & Read workshops; • Reading to & with patients to demonstrate interactive reading skills; • Conducting a book drive for the reading corner at the clinic; • Developing strategies for volunteers when they read to & with patients; and • Creating training modules for volunteers to read to students in the literacy center. |
| <p>New Brunswick Senior Resource Center (NBSCRC)</p> | <p>The NBSCRC is a multi-purpose facility for independent seniors and is designed to provide a supportive and stimulating environment for New Brunswick senior citizens. The NBSCRC is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and serves a diverse population. The Center offers various cultural, social, educational, recreational, and health-related programs designed to enhance its members' quality of life.</p> | <p>This project involved preservice teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an agenda for the Cultural Heritage Day; • Locate community resources to support the efforts of the Cultural Heritage Day; and • Ensure that the Cultural Heritage Day spans 100 years. |

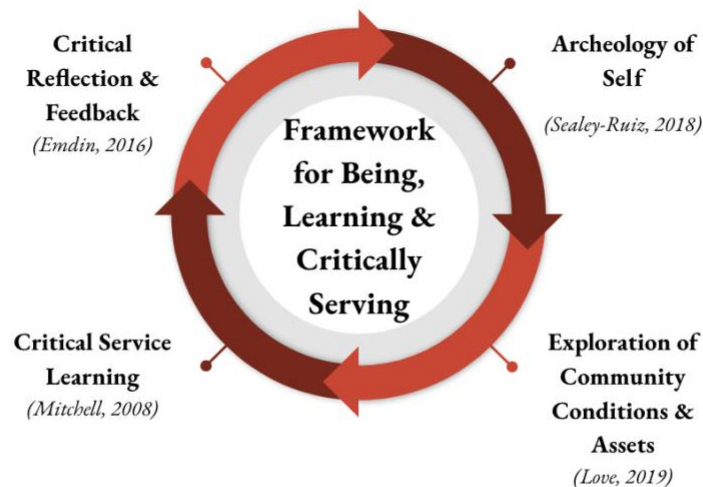
Conceptual Framework

Framework for Being, Learning, & Critically Serving

Reading the opening vignette, one may think two things, “*Why did teacher candidates feel comfortable saying those things?*” and “*Why would she send teacher candidates to work alongside the community with those negative perceptions? Could it possibly enact more harm?*” To be transparent, I have thought about this often, which is why I created a framework for courses to ensure that teacher candidates interrogate their identities and perceptions of communities of color called, the Framework for Being, Learning and Critically Serving (FBLCS). FBLCS allows current and future educators to engage in a continuous process; the work begins with self and continues through reflection (Image 1). FBLCS is also a framework for teacher educators engaging in school-university partnerships and community-engaged teacher education in preparing teacher candidates to unpack their racialized perspectives of self, students, communities, society, and the educational systems. #theWork is essential as many white teacher candidates enter teacher education programs with negative perceptions of Black and Brown communities (Bertrand & Porcher, 2020). Suppose these negative perceptions are left unexplored and dismantled. In that case, there is a strong possibility that preservice teachers’ engagement in school-university partnerships and/or community-engaged teacher education will enact harm.

There are four elements of FBLCS: archeology of self (Sealey-Ruiz, 2018); exploration of assets and conditions of students and their communities; critical service-learning (Mitchell, 2008); and critical reflection (Image 1).

Image 1. *Framework for Being, Learning & Critically Serving*



Sealey-Ruiz (2018) defines the archeology of self as a deep excavation and exploration of beliefs, biases, and ideas that shape how we engage in the work. The archeology of self is rooted in racial literacy. Using it in my framework, I engaged teacher candidates in necessary reflection about their racial beliefs, anti-racism, and practices. Sealey-Ruiz (2013) defines racial literacy as “a skill and practice in which individuals can probe the existence of racism and examine the effects of race and institutionalized systems on their experiences and representations in US society” (p. 386). Doing #theWork of racial literacy requires students to engage in deep self-reflection, along with moral, political, and cultural decisions about how teachers can be catalysts for societal changes (Sealey-Ruiz, 2011). Sealey-Ruiz (2021) argues that racial literacy can be sustained through the archeology of self.

FBLCS begins with unpacking and interrogating one’s identity. Unpacking and interrogating one’s identity is aligned to Sealey-Ruiz’s (2018) archeology of self. The self-work in this framework, known as “*being*,” is the foundation of learning and teaching. If left unpacked and unexplored, it has the power to negatively impact the lives of students (Sealey-Ruiz, 2018). The archeological dig requires teacher candidates to consider their own identity and explore whiteness in American society. The excavation is imperative because teacher candidates cannot understand others or their impact on others until they know who they are (Howard, 1999). Once teacher candidates begin the journey of archeology of self, then they are ready to explore the assets and conditions of students and communities of color.

Assets & Conditions of Students & Communities of Color

Once teacher candidates begin the journey of unpacking self, they are introduced to the importance of exploring the assets and conditions of students and communities that they will teach. The exploration of the assets and conditions of students and communities of color is known as the “*learning*” aspect of the framework. It is imperative to focus on the assets of students and communities of color because many white cis-gender monolingual teacher candidates have negative perceptions of students and communities of color (Bertrand & Porcher, 2020). Teacher candidates also explore the conditions that are systematic in society and schools that contribute to the conditions of Black and Brown communities. With the understanding that students enter classrooms with funds of knowledge, not in need of saving, but cultivating the genius (Muhammad, 2020) of who they are, they are ready to engage with the community through critical service learning.

Critical Service Learning

Critical service-learning is a redistribution of privilege and power, societal change, and authentic relationships (Mitchell, 2008). “*Critical service learning*” requires teacher candidates to engage with students and their communities before entering their own classrooms. Through critical service-learning, the goal is that teacher candidates will develop authentic relationships with their students and communities. Furthermore, they are taught to work alongside their students and communities to enact social change. The critical service-learning experience required that teacher candidates collaborate with a community organization or a school within the New Brunswick community (Porcher et al., 2020).

Critical Reflection & Feedback

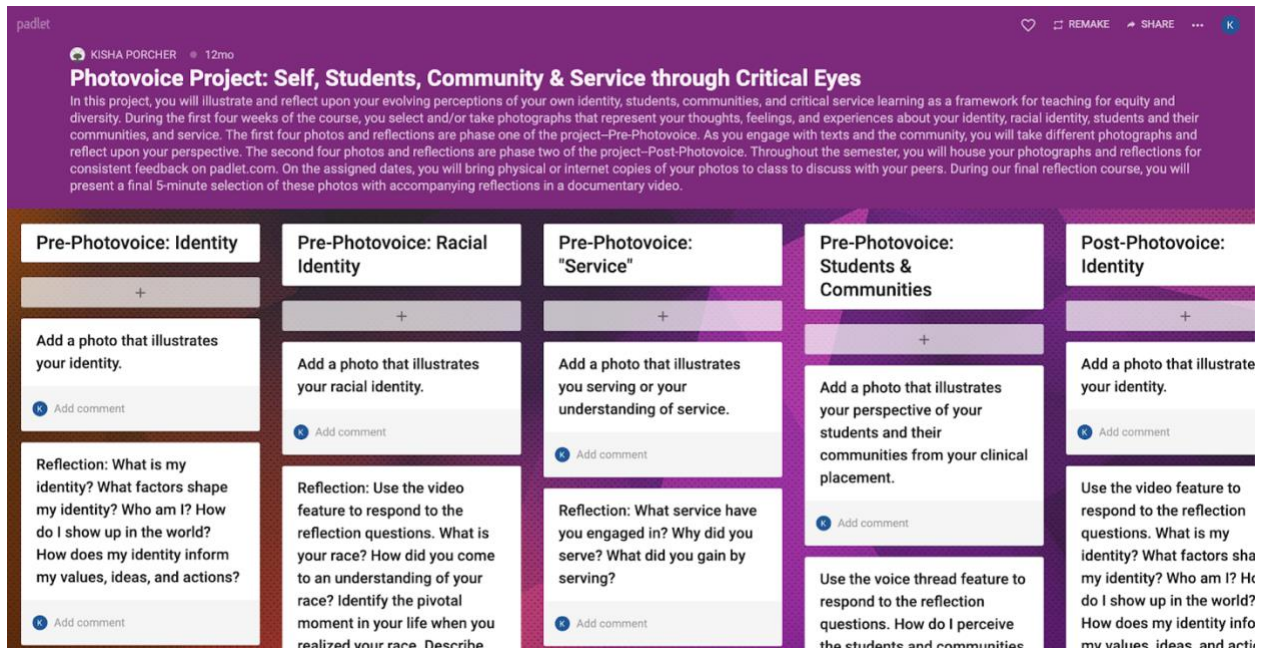
The final continuous effort of the FBLCS is “*critical reflection*.” This critical reflection requires both the teacher candidates and me to reflect upon the perspectives, mindsets, and beliefs we hold that shape how we approach our work as educators (Milner et al., 2019). This process involves reflecting each class period about what is going well and areas of change, interrogating ourselves and knowledge, and engaging in cogenerative dialogues (Emdin, 2016). FBLCS, as the framework for the course, is just the beginning of the work of teacher candidates interrogating their own identities and perceptions of students of color and their communities. It requires carefully curated pedagogical tools for teacher candidates to engage in “#theWork.” One pedagogical tool that I used in the course was Photovoice to push teacher candidates to engage in #theWork.

Photovoice as a Pedagogical Tool

The teacher candidates interrogated their identity, perceptions of students of color and their communities, and service-learning. The teacher candidates reflected using Photovoice (Bazemore-Bertrand & Handsfield, 2019; Wang et al., 1997; Zenkov et al., 2014) and created a mini-documentary to demonstrate how perceptions of their identity, students of color and their communities, and service-learning changed. Photovoice is a visual method used to assist adult educators in connecting their prior school experiences to their current attitudes and behaviors toward teaching (Bazemore-Bertrand & Handsfield, 2019). It is the use of photography, reflection, and discussion as tools for social change. Within the Photovoice assignment, the teacher candidates captured photographs and engaged in reflection (written, audio, and video) using Padlet, based on posed questions posed (Image 2). Photovoice is an example of multimodal learning. It utilizes video, audio, and sound elements as unique modes of communication and ways to interpret physical and virtual worlds, the relationships between people, and how teacher candidates experience certain spaces (Buckley-Marudas & Martin, 2020).

The reflection questions examined teacher candidates’ personal and racial identity, their perceptions of students and communities of color, and service-learning. This critical reflection brought commonly held beliefs about their identity and students of color into question (Sydnor et al., 2020). The Photovoice assignment created tension and cognitive dissonance for the teacher candidates. At the beginning of the project, teacher candidates were unwilling to confront the conflict between their purported beliefs about their identity and students and communities of color, which resulted in a critical service-learning project. Photovoice leveraged digital media as an important way to invite teacher candidates into critical dialogue with their own identities and histories, as well as their beliefs and assumptions of students and communities of color (Buckley-Marudas & Martin, 2020). The teacher candidates demonstrated their reflections and how their perspectives of their own identities and perceptions of color changed throughout the course to prepare them to engage in critical service learning.

Image 2. Padlet Photovoice Project



Methods

S-STEP: Self-Study in Teacher Education Practices

This study uses Self-Study in Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP), a practitioner inquiry undertaken by teacher educators with the dual purpose of improving their practice and acknowledging their role in teaching and learning in the larger project of preparing high-quality teachers to teach equitably (Sharkey, 2018). Self-study is a methodology for exploring professional practice (Appelget et al., 2020). There are five elements of self-study outlined by La Boskey (2004) to shape the study: self-initiated and focused, improvement aimed, interactive, qualitatively collected data sources, and validity based on the trustworthiness of results. This approach is appropriate for this study because self-study of teacher education practices is an inquiry approach well-suited to exploring the challenges of effectively teaching teachers about equity, diversity, and social justice (Kitchen, 2020). I served as a participant, teacher educator, and researcher (Appelget et al., 2020).

Data Collection & Analysis

The primary data source in this study is the teacher candidates' Photovoice projects. The teacher candidates worked on the Photovoice assignments throughout the entire semester. Twenty-three teacher candidates' Photovoice projects were examined throughout the semester. The teacher candidates were diverse in racial demographics (white 13, Asian 5, Latinx 3, Black 2). Through the Photovoice assignment, the teacher candidates self-identified their racial demographics. Although the teacher candidates' in this course were racially diverse, the students across the larger *Urban Social Justice* teacher education program mirrored the racial demographics of teachers in the US; majority-white cis-gendered women.

Throughout the semester, there was a routine for ongoing and recursive data analysis focused on inductively generated (Saldaña, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) codes. Data analysis included each element of the FBLCS within the Photovoice projects; four rounds of coding. The first round of coding occurred when teacher candidates completed pre and post Photovoice reflections focused on identity. The second round of coding occurred when teacher candidates completed pre and post Photovoice reflections focused on their perception of students and communities' assets. The third round of coding focused on their understanding of service. The final round of coding focused on how I pushed teacher candidates to dig deep in their reflections.

Findings: Analysis of Photovoice Projects

The purpose of this article is to analyze the effectiveness of the pedagogical tool, Photovoice, for teacher candidates to interrogate their identities and perceptions of communities and students of color in preparation for a critical service-learning project in the New Brunswick community. More specifically, I examine the ways the Photovoice project allows preservice teachers the ability to engage in an archeology of self (Sealey-Ruiz, 2018), to avoid harming the community during critical service learning. Four key themes emerged at each level of coding when I analyzed teacher candidates Photovoice projects:

- Archeology of Self: Lean into Race
- Exploration of Community & Students Assets: Shift from Deficits to Assets
- Critical Service-Learning: Root Cause of Service
- Reflection: Questioning to Further Thinking

Archeology of Self: Lean into Race

The archeological dig requires teacher candidates to consider and unpack their own identity and explore whiteness in American society. The Photovoice assignment required teacher candidates to explore their identity (Table 2). The teacher candidates explored their perceptions of their identity and racial identity. When reviewing the reflections, teacher candidates of color identified their racial identity upfront. The majority of the white teacher candidates separated their race from their identity. For example, one Black teacher candidate, Terresa (all names are pseudonyms) wrote:

In regards to being called intimidating, I believe this was done for many reasons. It could be because I am a strong African-American woman with bass in my voice. It could be because I am plus size and 5'8". It could also be because professors and colleagues might not be used to seeing African-Americans in an education program. There are various possibilities. I take the statement, "You intimidate me" with a grain of salt. I'm used to being referenced as intimidating, unfortunately. I'm used to those awkward moments where I am the only Black person in the room. I also believe that they say these things because they have not taken the time to get to know me.

Terresa's response is for the first Photovoice reflection entry focused on identity (Table 2). Terresa did not wait until prompted to acknowledge her race as an important element of her identity. White teacher candidates, however, did not mention their race until the Photovoice reflection prompted them to discuss their racial identity. For example, one white teacher candidate, Laura, reflected:

At the risk of sounding cliché, my identity is what makes me, me. It is a combination of my external and internal characteristics that I hold most important in defining who I am as a person. There are several aspects of my identity that always remain constant. For example, I am tall, I have straight, brown hair, I am a daughter, I am a big sister, and I am Catholic. I did not choose to have these things define me, but I do not believe that people should discount them. My height and my hair are my most prominent external characteristics that define my physical presence in this world. It is the image that all of the other pieces of my identity are attached to, and I feel that it is important to include who I am.

Another white teacher candidate, Edward articulated:

I like to think that, like most people, my identity is one that is unique and complex for many reasons. However, on a superficial level, there are factors that partly influence my experiences and development. I am a white male, and I grew up in a low-income household with a bevy of dysfunction, but I would be hesitant to say that this defines me. I am passionate about many things, such as animation, powerlifting, progressive metal, and physics. I am actively trying to find new information that reshapes the way I think about the world. I am always perfectly willing to grow and change.

Research shows that white teacher candidates struggle to have conversations about race (Porcher, 2020), which is why this finding was not a surprise. People of color do not have the privilege to separate how they see their identity from their race. Our skin color has been historically marginalized and oppressed. With this in mind, it was important for me, as the educator, to ensure that the teacher candidates would not be able to avoid interrogating their racial identity. The course readings provided the opportunity for teacher candidates to examine whiteness and apply it to their own reflection and interrogation of all elements of their identity. Furthermore, the teacher candidates were asked to identify the pivotal moment in their lives when they realized their race, which supported their ability to examine their race.

Table 2. *Identity photovoice reflection questions*

| Topic | Pre-Photovoice Reflection Questions | Post-Photovoice Reflection Questions |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Identity | What is my identity? What factors shape my identity? Who am I? How do I show up in the world? How does my identity inform my values, ideas, and actions? | What is my identity? What factors shape your identity? Who am I? How do I show up in the world? How does my identity inform my values, ideas, and actions? What text have we read that has challenged and/or affirmed your perceptions of your identity? Explain. |
| Racial Identity | What is your race? How did you come to an understanding of your race? | What is your race? How did you come to your understanding of your race? |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | <p>Identify the pivotal moment in your life when you realized your race. Describe your emotions and your actions during this moment. Be as descriptive as possible.</p> | <p>What benefits do you have because of your racial identity? In what ways can you utilize or minimize your racial identity to support the most vulnerable populations? What text have we read that has challenged and/or affirmed your perceptions of your racial identity? Explain.</p> |
|--|---|---|

Once teacher candidates engaged in the course readings and discussions, they could dig deeper into their racial identity. The teacher candidates were able to expand their lens to become more aware of their racial identity. One teacher candidate articulated in her post-photovoice racial identity reflection:

So, throughout the month of February, I have been thinking a lot about how I show up in spaces outside of work and school. After analyzing these spaces, I have come to the conclusion that the spaces that I choose to enter are usually majority white. Whether its a movie theater in my hometown, a venue in Brooklyn, a show in Montclair, or the Freehold mall, I am seeing ~75% white faces. I recently learned that even some of my hobbies are racially coded in whiteness, as running groups and races have a 90% white turnout. I have never noticed until learning this statistic that almost everyone I run with and at every race I have ever been to has mostly white people participating and competing. This makes me think about the knowledge and understandings that I am missing in life. In my day-to-day interactions with people of color, strangers, students, and/or coworkers, what am I ignorant about their lives and identities? What do they do and where do they go on the weekend? It almost feels embarrassing not to know. How can I truly know my students of color if I am unaware of how they spend their free time?

The teacher candidates were not allowed to avoid their racial identity. However, the course provided space for teacher candidates to engage in these reflections and engage in an archeological dig of their racial identity. Another teacher candidate reflected transparently:

In addition to the privilege of being able to pretend I am not a pawn in America’s palpable racial divisions, I have come to learn that I have unwittingly accepted the inequitable benefits of my racial identity my whole life. Through the illuminating lessons of this course, I have become cognizant of the statistical facts that as a person who is white, I am less likely to be pulled over by a police officer without reasonable suspicion, I am more likely to land a job interview with my “white”-sounding name, and, most painfully, I am more likely to receive respect from people I have never met before, who are predisposed into thinking I am a good person solely based on the color of my skin. While I blindly accepted those benefits without realizing it before, my newfound sobering realization of those benefits inspired me to leverage my undeserved white privilege to court allies into joining me in the fight against toxic racial stereotypes and help my compatriots transform their white privilege into an asset worth sharing rather than hoarding for selfish self-promotion.

It is important to note that teacher candidates were given the space to express their feelings and thoughts about their identity. Teacher candidates needed to unpack their own identities before engaging with the community through critical service learning. Without explicit instructions, white teacher candidates would not have leaned into their racial identity. They would not have examined the way whiteness shows up in their bodies, experiences, and communities. Without leaning into their racial identity, it has the potential to enact harm upon Black and Brown students and communities (Sealey-Ruiz, 2018). Once the teacher candidates began this journey, they were ready to explore communities and students of color. Shifting from a deficit to an asset perspective of students and their communities was unveiled in the second theme.

Exploration of Community & Students Assets: Shift from Deficits to Assets

The Photovoice reflections allowed teacher candidates to articulate their perceptions of the students and communities where they engaged in their clinical experiences and critical service learning. Many of the teacher candidates held deficit perspectives of the communities that they participated in during their clinical experience. It is important to note that many teacher candidates completed their clinical experiences in schools serving primarily students of color. One teacher candidate articulated in her Photovoice Thread Reflection:

QR Code 1. *Teacher Candidate Reflection on Rahway*



In the voice thread, the teacher candidate utilized words such as “city” and “crime” to discuss the city and community where her clinical placement took place. “City” is one of the code words for urban, which is associated with deficit perspectives of communities and students of color (Porcher, 2016). The teacher candidate also discussed how she was so happy and surprised that parents showed up for parent-teacher conferences. That parents do not care about their children nor are involved in the school community is also a deficit perspective of parents of color (Milner et al., 2019). This teacher candidate was not the only one with deficit perspectives of students and communities of color. Another teacher candidate highlighted deficits of the students that she taught during her clinical placement (QR Code 2).

QR Code 2: *Teacher Candidate Reflection on Neptune Students*



With the freedom to describe her students, she focused specifically on the racial demographics of students: Black and Hispanic. She also highlighted that the students did not live in the home with their parents and received free and reduced lunch. She stated that students came to school with dirty clothes. Most importantly, she articulated that teachers worked to make the students' lives better, alluding that the students' lives were not good in the current condition. The teacher candidates, when allowed, did not choose to describe the assets, brilliance, or genius (Muhammad, 2020) of their students and communities.

Research indicates that teacher candidates have deficit perceptions of the communities and students of color (Bertrand & Porcher, 2020), which must be addressed. It was imperative to engage teacher candidates in these reflections on their perceptions of students and communities of color prior to engaging in critical service-learning, because the teacher candidates would be engaging directly with communities of color.

Through the Photovoice assignment and course readings, teacher candidates explored the assets of the communities they served and the conditions that contributed to challenges that they viewed as deficits or stereotypes. The teacher candidates shifted from describing the communities and students from a deficit to an asset perspective. For example, one teacher candidate reflected:



The way that I view the New Brunswick Community has changed from being a “low socioeconomic town that faces a great deal of struggles,” to knowing it as a town that is rich in culture, has a great deal of unique resources, and has a collectivist attitude. After interacting with the New Brunswick community through our walking tour and learning about services such as Elijah’s soup kitchen, community gardens, the healthy homes collaborative, the Chandler health center, and the New Brunswick Senior Center, I have come to view New Brunswick as a town with a rich history and a lot to offer. The citizens that I have met from New Brunswick seem to have strong emotional ties to the town that

they live in, and it seems that the town cares for one another...During my clinical placement, I wish I knew more about all of the great things that this town offered and took more time to highlight the assets of the town. In my future classroom, I will learn from this by taking the time to learn about the town that I am teaching it and actively seek out experiences and people that defy stereotypes.

This teacher candidate intentionally articulated the assets of the community as opposed to describing all of the conditions that impact the community. The teacher candidate also noted that engaging with the community and the community members also helped shift her perspective.

Another teacher candidate reflected transparently:

I talked in my Pre-post that I felt I misjudged my students in Neptune. I feel like I had done that to the people of New Brunswick as well. I allowed myself to believe others and considered New Brunswick to be a “bad” city. I really tried to toy with this notion of “good” and “bad” cities - something I’ve come to realize is just a social construct to “keep the status quo” and ensure inequities would continue...The hard workers from The Healthy Housing Collaborative are prime examples of this. We are quite literally in an epidemic, and yet, they are still willing to put in work for the community...A Traffic Jam in Atlanta was really eye-opening for me. It’s not by chance that some areas are separated from another, and that’s really messed up. Knowing this, I can use this information in my future classroom and be an activist for my students... I wish I knew this when in my placement because I could have explored the inequities within the school system there.


Teacher candidates did not engage with the community until after they read different text and noticed that their perceptions lacked the context of the conditions that contribute to the challenges in the communities that they served in. Not only did teacher candidates change their perceptions about the communities that they served in for clinical experience and critical service-learning, but in their personal lives.

Through the data analysis, I noticed that I had to nudge teacher candidates to shift from deficit perspectives to asset perspectives. The teacher candidates were not aware of their perceptions until they were given the opportunity to unpack them in their Photovoice reflections. Along with exploring their own identities and exploring the assets of students and communities of color, they also had to interrogate their understanding of service. This truth was unveiled in the third theme of the analysis.

Critical Service-Learning: Root Cause of Service

Many of the teacher candidates enrolled in the course to engage in service-learning projects. In their Photovoice reflections, the teacher candidates highlighted their previous engagement with service learning. Many teacher candidates were not introduced to critical service learning and the importance of reciprocating power and privilege. The teacher candidates were also not widely aware of the systemic issues and conditions that cause people to need service. The majority of teacher candidates learned the difference between service-learning and critical service learning. Most importantly, teacher candidates who had deep service-learning experience still learned the root causes such as systemic racism that caused the need for service. One teacher candidate’s pre and post Photovoice reflection (Table 3) articulated that the need for service demonstrates that we have inequities in our society. This was a new perspective for teacher candidates that pushed them to look at the root cause of service.

Table 3. *Pre & Post Images & Reflections*

| Images | Reflections |
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|  | <p>... My junior year, I applied and was selected for an HC Alternative Break. This would be a week-long service trip during Winter Break, preceded by a few months of classes and preparation. The trip I attended was to Project Lazarus in New Orleans. Once a hospice for gay men dying of HIV/AIDS, it has grown and evolved with the advances in technology, and now serves as a transitional living facility for homeless individuals with HIV/AIDS of all genders... Originally, I had the same mentality as many people of privilege that are involved in service- I was going to go help people. Through the discussions I had with residents, with my fellow volunteers, and with my trip leaders and co-leader, I came to what I believe is the most fundamentally important aspect of service- it is not about you, or what you want to do, or what you think you should do, or what you get out of it...I developed the idea that service is not always inherently good during my first time in NOLA...Overall, my experiences with service have reinforced the importance of connecting with the community with which you are working and learning what kind of service they want you to do, rather than what you want to do. The photo above was taken at a local art display across the street from the facility. I feel as though it captures the peaceful yet strong dispositions of the residents I worked with.</p> |



...This was taken on a past service trip in an art gallery focused on the human impact of Hurricane Katrina in NOLA. As our own present-day situation tends toward terror, and I don't think that's an exaggeration, I believe that we must critically analyze our relationship with service on all scales. How do we show love for others, especially those who are systematically oppressed or underprivileged, at a time like this? I heard a recent quote from Joe Biden stating that the virus doesn't see color or some bullshit like that. His statement might be correct- I'm not a medical professional. But one thing is for sure- the economy, our healthcare system, landlords, local government officials, and our president certainly do see color, and evidence shows that people of color will be even more disadvantaged in these times of crisis. In a way, we can view this entire crisis through the lens of service... Unfortunate as it is, the last thing the Senior Center needs right now is a large-scale gathering of members and college students. However, this may be an opportunity. A key part of service-learning is listening to the needs of the body you are serving. If there is something else that we could be doing to meet a real need of the Senior Center, it is our responsibility to adapt to the best of our ability.

Reflection: Questioning to Further Thinking

The teacher candidates in this course engaged in critical thinking and interrogation of their identity and their perceptions of students and communities of color in their Photovoice project. As previously mentioned, this was teacher candidates’ final capstone course before graduating and entering the classroom as teachers. Many felt that they reached a point where they were just checking off the box of requirements and ready to enter the classroom. They had already passed their student teaching, so they felt that they were ready. Through the data analysis of the Photovoice projects, I found that I had to continue to push their thinking about their identity and perceptions of the students and communities before they entered the classroom. Some of the probing questions used to push their thinking through their Photovoice project are listed in Table 4. The teacher candidates were probed to think about their thinking, being, learning, teaching, and serving. Through the probing questions, they were able to uncover their biases and shift to new perspectives.

Table 4. *Probing questions by Photovoice topics*

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| <p>Identity</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you come to this understanding about race? • Please elaborate more on why you believe that you identify with elements of being a white male? Where did you learn how to be a white male? Do you believe that you are accepted within the white male culture? • How did you know to check white on a paper or application without any information about it? What have you learned about New Jersey now that you had to drive 40 minutes to see someone different than you? • Have you ever thought about why all of your friends are white? |
| <p>Perceptions of Students & Communities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the demographics of the students? What are the demographics of the teachers? How did you perceive the students and communities before you started your clinical placement? Did you ever challenge your teachers on how they were not showing up for students? • What were your thoughts initially about parents? Why were you so surprised that parents were present? • Did you and your cooperating teacher ever talk about ways that you can support students when they are discriminated against? How does this information inform your future practice as an educator? • Since you grew up in a low-income community, how was your schooling different from the schooling provided in the school of your clinical placement? Why do you think that there are differences? You spoke about the challenges in low-income communities. Did you notice any assets of the students and their communities? Also, in what ways could teachers that are different from their students build relationships with them? |

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| Service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you thought about ways to use your privilege as a white person to advocate for others in your personal life? • Can you explain more about how you make the connection between hardships and service? Are the only people that need service are people that have hardships? • How do we avoid coming into spaces and enacting our own agendas? Also, what connections do you find between critical service-learning and teaching? |
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Discussion

The opening vignette highlighted teacher candidates' open and honest perceptions about the community where they attended college and completed their clinical experiences. Based on the opening vignette and responses on the Photovoice reflections, it is evident that these were some of their first experiences interrogating their identities and/or perceptions of students and communities of color. The course reflections and the Photovoice project was effective in preparing them for the critical service-learning project and their future classroom (see Appendix A). After analyzing their Photovoice reflections, I recognized that this was the last course that teacher candidates engaged in before entering classrooms. Furthermore, although the Photovoice project was utilized as a pedagogical tool for teacher candidates to interrogate their identities and perceptions of students and communities of color, the teacher candidates completed their clinical experiences with deficit perceptions. This shows that while they were completing their clinical experiences, many of the teacher candidates had negative perceptions of their students, and because their identities and perceptions were left unpacked, there is a strong possibility that harm was enacted upon students.

This reflection is a mirror for teacher education programs, teacher educators, and school-university partnerships. We must ask ourselves: in what ways are we creating space in our courses for preservice teachers to do #theWork before critical service learning, and most importantly, before clinical experiences? What harm have we subconsciously enacted upon communities and students by not doing #theWork? The final section of this article amplifies what we must do as teacher educators to do #theWork to avoid enacting harm upon students and communities of color.

Recommendations & Conclusion

It is important to note that in the opening vignette, the teacher candidates talked about the ways in which they were told not to engage in or with the community surrounding the university. In many teacher education programs, there are not critical conversations about our own perceptions of the communities where our universities reside, the students and communities we are preparing our teacher candidates for, or the content that we are teaching. Photovoice was effective in starting the teacher candidates on the continuous journey of unpacking their racial beliefs, anti-racism, and practices. Yet the question of how we do #theWork as a collective remains. Following, are recommendations to continue #theWork.

Teacher educators must interrogate their identities too!

#TheWork is not just for our teacher candidates, but for us too. We cannot ask teacher candidates to do #theWork if we won't do it ourselves. Our teacher candidates are listening and watching us. They believe what we say, and if we have negative perceptions of the communities our universities reside in and students of color, it has the power and potential to impact teacher candidates' beliefs.

#TheWork must happen in all courses!

Many teacher educators depend on diversity, multicultural, and urban education courses to unpack teacher candidates' identities and understandings of racism. The methods courses focus primarily on subject-related content. #TheWork has to happen in all courses. The teacher candidates can interrogate their identity and their perceptions of what they believe is knowledge and how it should be taught. If teacher candidates have negative perceptions of students and their communities, the content they know will not matter, and they will not be able to teach their students.

#TheWork continues.

None of us arrive at this work. It is a choice that we must make each day to ensure that all students have an equitable opportunity to learn. We cannot just have teacher candidates complete a teaching philosophy and move on. We have to model this ongoing work and push teacher candidates to continue it. If we don't engage in #theWork, we put teacher candidates in front of communities and students, and they enact harm.

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Author Biography

Kisha Porcher, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of English Education at the University of Delaware and co-host of the Black Gaze Podcast. Her research focuses on four interrelated areas: interrogation of self; exploration of assets and conditions of Black students and communities; centering Blackness in pedagogical practices, and community-engaged teacher education.

Appendix A

Teacher Candidates Course Reflections

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| <p>Identity</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I’ve had to be very honest with myself, which is something hard. In my pre-padlets, I uncovered a few biases/hypocrisies in myself that were tough to swallow. If it wasn’t for this class, I probably would not have recognized them. I’ve also had to recognize the privilege I have inherited. With this, I’ve had to work towards finding a voice so I can use that privilege properly. It’s been eye-opening. In my post padlet, I talk a bit about becoming a more thoughtful person as well. This course has taught me to think about my words and actions a bit more. ● This course has given me an opportunity to reflect more on the way in which I describe my own identity and analyze it in such a way that I can see ways my whiteness is reflected in my description of identity, as well as how it relates to people of color describing their own identity. I address this more in my Padlet, but in particular, I began to think about the temptation on my part to identify as a “unique individual” distinct from immutable qualities assigned at birth. While I was already aware of my whiteness and how it relates to privilege, I considered it separate from my personal identity, and I really only mentioned my whiteness in the pre-photovoice identity section to fulfill what felt like a responsibility or obligation. However, this desire to separate my racial identity and personal identity into two discrete categories was already indicative of my whiteness, as I had not considered |
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| | <p>the luxury I had in my ability to do so and how marginalized people may not feel that same luxury.</p> |
| <p>Perceptions of Students & Communities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This class has reminded me of the importance of considering the assets of communities in addition to the ways in which a community may be disadvantaged. While teaching, we are always considering both the strengths and weaknesses of our students in order to modify our teaching and provide the best for them. But interestingly enough, I felt that this was not as obvious when talking about communities as a whole. I found myself sometimes immediately gravitating towards the ways in which communities were marginalized (and the class as a whole would often go down this rabbit hole together until Dr. Porcher asked specifically about the assets). This class has felt like a nice head bonk reminding me to consider both the strengths and weaknesses for not only individuals but communities as well. • Students and communities of color are often looked at as in need of saving, and students who are particularly successful are too often the anomaly – succeeding in spite of the systems that be (seen as having “grit”), as opposed to succeeding because of them. This can, unfortunately, create a white savior complex even in white teachers who are well-meaning because often they enter communities without checking their biases and may think of their students as less capable, sometimes even without meaning to. I think what’s important when it comes to working with students and communities of color (as a white person especially) is to get to know individual students and work to be an active part of the community, to identify the issues of inequity that are actually causing problems in education instead of assuming. |
| <p>Service</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I learned that critical service-learning is a reciprocal process. Instead of supplying what we think people need, we are asking what they need first. Understanding them as people and acknowledging their needs dismantles power dynamics. These power dynamics are dire. They most influential piece I believe I have learned from critical service-learning is the critical part. I better understand the value and importance of carrying that critical lens and using it to question if the service is actually benefiting who it is meant for. I plan to carry that critical perspective with me so I can best serve those I am trying to support. I now see it is vital to ask those who you are serving what they need, how they need it, and when. I think by having this lens, you learn about people in a completely different way and can grasp a better understanding of what inequities they may experience directly related to social inequities. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Similar to what I have discussed in my Padlet response, I have learned that critical service-learning is not what I can do for them but what we can do for each other. There should be an equal distribution of knowledge and respect between the two parties. No one should be greater than, and no one should be less than. This understanding has helped me reflect on what I know as social inequity through analyzing how society views the homeless, incarcerated, undocumented, etc. Society has taught us that these populations cannot offer anything of value to us, and we can only help them. From our readings, it is evident that these populations can offer more than what society is giving them credit for, but only if they are allowed the opportunity to do so |
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