Teacher Education Redefined:

Contextual Cognizance and the Potential for Community Impact

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Abstract

This study features a paradigm in teacher education that emphasizes the context in which children grow and learn as a critical cognizance for preservice educators. Through their teacher preparation program, 46 candidates participated in an immersive semester based entirely in the community, where they completed a practicum at an elementary school or early childhood program serving low-income families. When they were not in the school, the local community center was their classroom, where they learned from community mentors about the children's lives outside of school. Data collected yielded findings for three years of the program. Findings describe transformation of candidates and impact on the community through critical service-learning. Situated in Wenger's (1998) Community of Practice framework, the proposed model of teacher education has implications for replication based on its emerging impact on teachers, schools, and communities.

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Teacher education in twenty-first century America is at a crossroads. A national debate regarding the preparation of candidates continues to be fueled by a sole emphasis on student achievement, defined by limited assessment measures with high stakes consequences. Opposing forces present compelling rationales either to professionalize further teacher education or move towards deregulation of the field (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). Traditional teacher education certification is being juxtaposed with alternative means to licensure, which continue to balloon in scope nationwide (Feistritzer, 2005). How best to ensure that educators are prepared to engage students effectively and realize the promise and potential of all children is plagued by lack of consensus and shared vision.

Nationwide, schools are populated with an increasingly diverse student body while a majority of teachers' backgrounds reflect neither students' race, language, nor the communities from which they come (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Research suggests that 62% of graduates from teacher preparation programs feel their undergraduate programs failed to equip them to meet the realities of the children and families with whom they work (Levine, 2006). Levine contextualizes these findings, suggesting that "teacher education programs cling to an outdated, historically flawed vision of teacher education that is at odds with a society remade by economic, demographic, technological, and global change" (p. 1).

Gregory, Gregory & Carroll-Lind (2006) relate, "children-in-families-in-communities are embedded in social realities that provide the matrix in which they grow" (p. 65). While this rhetoric is common in programs of teacher preparation, our practices frequently fall short of respecting the context in which children are growing and learning as a critical cognizance.

Instead, teacher candidates frequently practice a form of "guerilla teaching" where they go into unfamiliar schools, deliver limited content to children who they have never met, and test theory in the absence of even a basic understanding of the community in which the school is situated (Zygmunt-Fillwalk, Malaby, & Clausen, 2010, p. 54).

An alienation between universities and communities results in preservice teachers "crossing over" to fulfill practicum requirements, without meaningful opportunities to engage their hearts and minds around the host of relationships that inform teaching and learning. This discontinuity is emphasized by hooks [Hooks] (2003) who finds that "colleges and universities are structured in ways that dehumanize, that lead [students] away from the spirit of community in which they long to live their lives" (p. 48).

Without knowledge of the context that informs students' experiences, teaching can be perceived solely as a skill set, with a naive perception that effective lesson plans with well-developed objectives will result in student achievement. Releasing new teachers into the field with this mindset is indeed a detriment to them and their future students. A strict transfer of knowledge regarding the techniques of teaching, however supported in past and current teacher education models (Hunter, 1994; Slavin & Madden, 2001; Tyler, 1949), can no longer be endorsed as adequate if relevant and lasting learning is our goal.

Notable reform over the last two decades has addressed the need to prepare new teachers for the challenges of 21st century teaching. Professional development/partner schools (Holmes Group, 1996; Osguthorpe, Harris, Harris, & Black, 1995) promote partnership between school personnel, universities, and teacher candidates, while offering extended opportunities for teaching and learning. While these partnerships emphasize collaboration between universities and schools, the role of the community is often ill-defined, if defined at all. The extent to which

professional development school (PDS) partnerships show promise in addressing the achievement gap has been examined critically (Valli, Cooper & Frankes, 1997). Findings from this research suggest that issues of context, culture, race, class, and power are neither integral to nor vital elements of the traditional PDS structure.

Urban teacher residency (UTR) programs offer candidates a longer term, mentor-based experience in urban schools, and these programs are showing positive outcomes relative to the preparation and retention of urban teachers (Berry, Montgomery, Curtis, Hernandez, Wurtzel & Snyder, 2008). A year-long residency experience can prepare candidates further for the transition from pre-service to practicing teacher through an emphasis on connecting theory and practice. However, descriptions of UTR programs seldom articulate the extent to which knowledge of community context is woven into such programs.

Professional organizations embrace the context of child development as a critical knowledge-base for highly accomplished educators (i.e., National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2001; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2008). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS] (2002) states the following:

> Model teachers cultivate knowledge about the character of the community and its effects on the school and students. They develop an appreciation of ethnic and linguistic differences, of cultural influences on students' aspirations and expectations, and of the effects of poverty and affluence (p. 20).

It surfaces, thus, that opportunities to learn in community settings, in addition to schools, would be a valuable contribution to the current climate of traditional field experience.

Theoretical Framework

Our investigation is situated within several theoretical frames. Fundamentally, our discussion is grounded in an ecological framework of child development set forth by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner's framework is based upon the notion that what happens outside the immediate experiences of the child influences the child's development as much, if not more than, direct forces encountered. Understanding these experiences outside of immediate experiences is critical to understanding the multiplicity of influences influencing the school experience. Similarly, Gould (2007) states the following: Our educational system is made up of a complex web of students, parents, educators, and community members. The system is influenced by politics, economics, and social norms. At the heart of the system is a child whose success in the world depends on the child's immediate surroundings as well as the cultural, social and political attitudes that influence the child's environment daily (p. 3).

Future teachers are well served by understanding the full impression these influences exert on children's development. Without this cogent understanding, a valuable piece of the puzzle required to maximize student learning, indeed, is absent. This knowledge can contextualize preservice teachers' experience in significant ways, leading to more accurate interpretation. In our experience, candidates' realization that failing schools often exist within the context of unsupported communities can decrease the destructive labeling of children and schools as deficient.

Bronfenbrenner's theory is animated decidedly by Murrell (2001) who states that "a community teacher is one who possesses contextualized knowledge of the culture, community, and identity of the children and families he or she serves and draws on this knowledge to create the core teaching practices necessary for effectiveness in diverse settings" (p. 52). The

community teacher, according to Murrell "actively researches the knowledge traditions of the cultures represented among the children, families, and communities he or she serves . . . and enacts those knowledge traditions as a means of making meaningful connections for and with children and their families." (p. 54). The desire to instill this ethic among candidates drives the pedagogy that informs a new paradigm in teacher education.

This article features a model through which "situated learning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in cultivated "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998) can scaffold the learning of new teachers through their authentic co-participation in cultural communities. Wenger (1998) notes that "as a locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises, such communities hold the key to real transformation—the kind that has real effects on people's lives" (p. 85). Lave and Wenger explain the advantage of this approach to learning in stating that "learning implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations. To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities" (p. 53). Through a community of practice framework, constructions of community, identity, meaning, and practice are positioned within the contexts of experience, doing, belonging, and becoming. It is within these contexts, according to Wenger, that learning is most personally transformative.

A community of practice, according to Wenger (1998), can be characterized by mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire among its participants. Mutual engagement suggests that members of this community connect meaningfully through each others' contributions and knowledge, and engage in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another. Joint enterprise results from communally negotiated processes that reflect mutual engagement in all its complexities. The development of a shared repertoire then develops, based

on the community coherence resulting from mutual engagement and the development of joint enterprise. A community-based paradigm of teacher education focuses on the joint enterprise of educational success for all children. The mutual engagement of university faculty, teacher candidates, school personnel, and members of the community results in negotiated, agreed upon strategies through which to achieve this enterprise. Zeichner (2010) describes similar structures as he discusses programs that strive to bridge gaps in teacher education:

> These efforts involve a shift in the epistemology of teacher education from a situation where academic knowledge is seen as *the* authoritative source of knowledge about teaching to one where different aspects of expertise that exist in schools and communities are brought into teacher education and coexist on a more equal plane with academic knowledge. This broader view about the kinds of expertise that are needed to educate teachers expands opportunities for teacher learning, as new synergies are created through the interplay of knowledge from different sources (p. 95).

This "conjoint collaboration of universities, communities, and schools" (Murrell, 2001, p. 3) positions our endeavor as a novel paradigm in teacher education, with promising potential for candidates, schools, their students, and the community, as detailed in the narrative that follows.

Method

Schools Within the Context of Community

For the past three years, faculty in elementary education, early childhood education, educational foundations, and educational psychology have collaborated with a local school and community in piloting a new program within Ball State University's Teachers College. The Schools Within the Context of Community program removes candidates entirely from campus and immerses candidates in a community setting for an entire semester's coursework. The

purpose of the interdisciplinary, immersive semester is to provide a new approach for preparing early childhood and elementary school teachers, an approach that introduces and involves future teachers in the complex interplay of factors that influence children's learning.

Integral to candidates' experience throughout the semester is a practicum placement in an early childhood program or elementary school serving primarily low-income, minority children and families. Candidates spend ten hours per week in their placement site, participating in classroom life and experiencing school culture. Candidates plan and teach lessons under the guidance of a cooperating teacher, and they participate in parent-teacher conferences and other family engagement activities. When they are not at their practicum placement sites, candidates meet at the local community center, where they complete their coursework and learn from community members about the richness of children's lives outside of school. At least one day per week candidates plan and implement enrichment experiences for children who attend the after-school program at the community center. The community center also affords candidates opportunities to participate in a variety of programs, which include sports and recreation, a women's oral history project, neighborhood community council meetings, and other community or family gatherings taking place throughout the semester.

Candidates' complete 18 credits of coursework under the direction of five faculty members. Coursework includes the practicum placement, classroom management, child development, family and community relations, integration of technology, and education for social justice. Throughout the semester, this curriculum is integrated in order to provide a seamless experience instead of discreet courses. Content is organized around themes, including the following: school, family, and community relations; child development within the context of community; diversity; planning for instruction; and knowledge about the community.

University faculty work together to plan an integrated experience for candidates through an intentional interweaving of interdisciplinary content; however, community expertise is privileged as a decisive element of candidate learning throughout the semester. As described subsequently, this expertise is engaged as course content is delivered in multiple contexts, by multiple "knowers" throughout the community (Palmer, 1997), broadening the definition of *teacher educator* beyond university faculty to include school administrators, local pastors, service providers, community elders, members of the local community council, and family members within the community.

Throughout the semester, candidates explore the strengths and challenges of the community surrounding the school through the lived history of its residents. This is accomplished through a variety of opportunities provided to candidates during the semester through which they develop relationships with community residents. At the beginning of the semester, each candidate is assigned a community mentor who serves as a cultural ambassador or host family. Along with their mentors, candidates participate in family and community events, gaining additional perspective on children's lives outside of school as well as gaining insight into the values of families within the community. Instead of passive observation, which is often characteristic of university students' experience in cultural communities, the mentor-candidate relationship affords the opportunity for authentic participation in community life, leading candidates toward cultural interpretation, which is key to their understanding of, and subsequent participation in, the community (Wolcott, 1987). This model provides the vehicle through which the typical "outside-in" view of a cultural community can be transformed.

Through their relationships with community mentors, preservice teachers are charged with uncovering community "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992) that

are the foundations from which children come and upon which their future learning can be built. Such "discourse of lived cultures" (Giroux, 1997) provides "an understanding of how [community members] give meaning to their lives through complex historical, cultural, and political forms that they both embody and produce" (p. 140).

Candidates experience the strengths inherent in the community through their participation in a variety of venues. Neighborhood community council meetings illuminate community mobilization efforts underway that underscore the extent to which the community is cohesively organized in efforts to effect change. Church services attended with mentors illustrate the religious foundation of the neighborhood and the strength community members derive from their faith. Candidates also engaged in readings that document the historical underpinnings of this community. One particular reading documents the last lynching in our state, and it tells that this community came together to hold vigil while the bodies were embalmed in order to protect them from a potential mob. In the Schools Within the Context of Community program, the intellectual, social, and emotional capital of communities (Apple, 1996) is emphasized as a critical consciousness in developing the relationships integral to successful teaching.

The Schools Within the Context of Community program is designed to provide candidates the opportunity to actively and authentically participate in community life while teaching in the school. Toward that end, candidates are charged with working toward understanding community conditions and mobilizing with members of the community to address identified need. Differentiated from more typical service-learning projects done as isolated events without more fully developed contextual understanding, candidates work not just cooperatively, but in collaboration with the community, to realize shared vision. This type of "critical service-learning" (Rosenberger, 2000) is characterized by work *with* community

constituents through which relationships are built and trust is established. Reflection on critical issues of race, culture, power, and privilege are natural outgrowths of these interactions, and these reflections form the basis of preservice teachers' increased appreciation for a community orientation toward teaching (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008).

Traditional community service-learning connects students and institutions to communities and instills the value of social responsibility (Neururer & Rhoads, 1998). Critical service-learning, according to Mitchell (2008), goes beyond this as it "encourages students to see themselves as agents of social change" and "develops authentic relationships as central to the classroom and community experience" (p. 51-52). While the benefits of service-learning are extolled often on campuses throughout the country, Mitchell also provides caution:

> Without the exercise of care and consciousness, drawing attention to root causes of social problems, and involving students in actions and initiatives addressing root causes, service-learning may have no impact beyond students' good feelings. In fact, a service-learning experience that does not pay attention to those issues and concerns may involve students in the community in a way that perpetuates inequality and reinforces an "us-them" dichotomy (p. 51).

In the Schools Within the Context of Community program, critical service-learning is integrated into the semester so that candidates can authentically participate in community mobilization, while examining the contextual and systemic structures that challenge the work of social change in marginalized communities.

Candidates' experiences throughout the semester are enhanced with structured opportunities through which to reflect and interpret their interactions with the school and community. Weekly written reflections provide a personal conversation between candidates and

program faculty. Weekly written reflections also provide daily opportunities to process observations and interactions, allowing time and space to wrestle with the disequilibrium that is a frequent response to novel "encounters" (Gay, 1985). A weekly "courageous conversation" (Singleton & Linton, 2006) is structured between all students and program faculty, providing time and safety for the deconstruction of prior schema relative to new experience. Throughout the semester, faculty focus on negotiation of such experiences, moving candidates toward the construction of a new lens through which to view teaching and learning. This mediation of candidate experience by faculty has been a decisive element of our program design. Our efforts have been informed by multiple studies which confirm that without negotiation and left to their own interpretation, candidates' stereotypes can be further cemented as a result of such experiences (Garcia, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Gallego (2001) comments, "Indeed, without connections between the classroom, school, and local communities, classroom field experiences may work to strengthen preservice teachers' stereotypes of children, rather than stimulate their examination, and ultimately compromise teachers' effectiveness in the classroom" (p. 314).

The Schools Within the Context of Community program is a decidedly collaborative model of teacher education, capitalizing on the community-school-university triad. Our success lies in bridging bureaucratic entities such as universities and schools with more socio-organic community agencies and neighborhood associations—a certain challenge, but one well worth undertaking (Murrell, 2001).

The relationships that have been forged over the last three years of work in this community represent an inseparable and collaborative commitment to teacher preparation,

community mobilization, and school improvement. As candidates authentically participate in school improvement and community mobilization, they develop a distinct sense of empowerment and agency. According to Murrell (2001), this "community partnership model" provides an important extension of a traditional university-school structure "by refocusing the purposes of education and teacher preparation on the mobilization of resources for the development of the community" (p. 56-57). Similarly, Wenger (1998) posits that engaging students in "primary active participation in social communities" is at the root of true learning. Wenger also points out essential ingredients in students' authentic engagement, personal transformation, and subsequent impact: "providing access to resources that enhance their participation, opening their horizons so they can put themselves on learning trajectories they can identify with, and involving them in actions, discussions, and reflections that make a difference to the community they value" (p. 10).

Teacher Candidates

The participants in the Schools Within the Context of Community program are typically undergraduate students who are majoring in either early childhood or elementary education. Over the past three years, a large majority of these teacher candidates have been female and white. Of the 46 students who have participated in the program, 45 have been female, and all have been white. This reflects, to a great extent, presence of mainly white, female teacher candidates in the preparation program for elementary and early childhood education and also is reflective of the field in which large numbers of white female teachers work with increasing numbers of students of color (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). All of the participants in the Schools Within the Context of Community program have been admitted to the teacher education curriculum, which typically occurs after their sophomore year. Five of the forty-six candidates have been non-

traditional students, in that they were coming back to school after participating in the workforce or raising children.

Elementary education candidates complete a practicum experience at the local elementary school, while the early childhood candidates complete their assignment at either the adjacent early childhood center or the nearby Head Start program. The elementary school is a Title 1 school in which 95% of the children are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program, and the school had been identified as “In Need of Improvement” under Title 1, Section 1116 from 2006-2010. The early childhood center is a nationally accredited program serving low-income children and families, with 90% qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The Head Start program, per federal mandate, serves exclusively low-income families.

Candidates participated in their practicum sites from 8:00am – 10:30 am, Monday through Thursday, during the 16-week semester. During their time in the classroom, candidates assisted teachers, prepared and facilitated individual and small-group instruction. Candidates also designed and taught formal lessons for the entire class. Lessons were developed in collaboration with classroom teacher and university faculty, with both supervising and critiquing candidate performance.

As mentioned previously, when candidates were not in the school, they received their coursework at the local community center. Five faculty members representing three different departments, delivered courses in an interwoven fashion. In addition to coursework, candidates participated in critical service-learning as well as other experiences alongside their community mentors. These collective endeavors yielded important opportunities for our candidates to learn about the community and incorporate their emerging schema into their teaching.

The Community

"Whitely" is the historically African-American sector of Muncie, Indiana in the city's northeast corner. Current census records indicate that approximately 75% of Whitely's residents are African-American today, compared with Muncie's overall black population of 9%. Residents of Whitely have a lower income than the city profile, with 95% of elementary school students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

Whitely has a population of approximately 2,530, and there are ten churches, exemplifying the faith-base of the neighborhood. A centrally located house of worship boasts a congregation of approximately 800 members. Additional strengths of the neighborhood are shown through an active community council, which has mobilized community members to effect change. The Whitely Community Council has been touted as one of the most organized in the City of Muncie. Notable accomplishments of the community council include the raising of funds to maintain programs and personnel at the local community center, planning regular neighborhood clean-up efforts, obtaining grants for beautification projects, and organizing advocacy for the neighborhood with the city and county councils.

Whitely has an emerging history of commitment to children's education. Longfellow Elementary School serves approximately 300 children in kindergarten through fifth grades, and the school provides two early childhood education programs, which collectively serve approximately 300 children. Additionally, a variety of after-school tutoring and enrichment programs for children are located at the school, churches, community center, and at other venues. The neighborhood has formed an educational alliance of all the programs serving children, with program representatives meeting monthly to align their efforts. The community council recently

voted to designate Whitely “an education first community,” and the slogan is prominently displayed on gateway signage.

Focused school improvement efforts have been underway over the past five years, with notable success. In 2009, Longfellow Elementary School showcased an attendance rate of nearly 98%, yet students’ pass rate on state standardized exams was a mere 38%. With a new building administrator and targeted efforts at the district level, the rate of success climbed to 54% in 2010, and 72% in 2011, nearing the state of Indiana’s average.

Huffer Memorial Children’s Center is situated adjacent to the elementary school, and it serves approximately 200 children from birth through age five, while also providing before- and after-school programs for school-age children. Huffer is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and it has recently received the highest ranking in Indiana’s voluntary child care quality rating and improvement system. Huffer and the other early childhood program in the Whitely neighborhood employ intentional efforts to ensure a smooth and seamless transition to kindergarten. These efforts have been implemented over the last decade, and efforts continue to be refined in order to maximize children’s successful entry into formal schooling.

In close proximity to Longfellow Elementary School and Huffer Memorial Children’s Center is the Roy C. Buley Community Center. Roy C. Buley Community Center serves as a long-standing educational and recreational venue in the neighborhood. Erected in 1974, the Center bears the name of a local pioneer in the civil rights movement, whose work resulted in the integration of the public pool in Muncie.

Whitely is an exemplar of a neighborhood united in faith and in vision. Collective efforts have begun to emphasize a college-bound culture for children and families. Additionally, a narrative of shared responsibility of *all* residents for children's success continues to be underscored throughout the community.

Methodology

A case study approach was employed in order to examine how the Schools Within the Context of Community semester provides preservice teachers opportunities to learn and contribute through authentic joint participation with community members. As a systematic inquiry into an event or set of related events (Bromley, 1986), the case study approach was optimal in exploring the outcomes of preservice teacher and community member co-participation, with the Whitely neighborhood as the context for exploration. Yin (2003) states that "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). In the present study, preservice teacher and community member co-participation within the historical, social, and political context of the Whitely neighborhood presents a web of complex, evolving, and interconnected variables which merit investigation. As such, data related to the Schools Within the Context of Community program have been collected over the past three years in order to measure the meaning candidates have derived from their co-participation as well as the outcomes of collective work related to school and community conditions. Specifically, the following research questions are addressed throughout this inquiry:

1. To what extent does candidate co-participation engender a critical contextual cognizance, and what specific meanings are derived?

2. What are the tangible outcomes of candidate and community member co-participation relative to community conditions?
3. What is the impact on student learning as a result of community member and candidate joint participation to address and change community conditions?

Data Collected

One part of the data collection made it possible to examine candidates' understanding of and participation in the community, and we collected candidates' written reflections, transcripts of weekly "courageous conversations," and personal interviews. Candidates submitted required weekly written reflections, which frequently spoke to their emerging understanding of community, how this impacted their teaching, and their co-participation in the community leading to their development of agency relative to social change. "Courageous conversations" were held for one hour each week, during which time all program faculty and all participating candidates would meet to "unpack" weekly events, frequently focusing on issues of race, culture, power, and privilege. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were held with candidates at the beginning, middle, and end of the 16-week semester in order to document their emerging understandings. These interviews were videotaped and transcribed by a graduate student assigned to the program.

Another part of the data collection made it possible to understand school and community impact, and this data included a variety of sources to measure records of accomplishment. We documented special events co-organized by candidates, faculty, and members of the community through photography and written narrative. Additional data focused upon documentation of grant funding to the school/community as a result of candidate co-participation. We reviewed narrative and accompanying photography relative to special events/grant funding within the community,

and we shared this with community members and mentors at the end of each semester. We then recorded and transcribed reflections of community members and mentors who shared their thoughts about the impact on the community. We also conducted informal interviews with community members throughout the three years of the program, and we analyzed transcripts of these interviews to provide evidence of community impact.

Finally, we measured the impact on the learning of students in kindergarten - third grade as a result of the Schools Within the Context of Community program, ascertaining the extent to which special programming, which originated by a grant to the community as a result of candidate co-participation, would increase student academic performance in school. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment was administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year, and the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) administered at the beginning of the kindergarten year. DIBELS are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills. They are designed to be one-minute fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills. As a result of the assessment, test-takers receive a rating of "red" (high risk), "yellow" (some risk), or "green" (no risk—at or above grade level) relative to their early reading skills. The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) is administered to all kindergarten children in the first month of the school year. Areas assessed included being attentive, behaving, performing academically, being motivated, and getting along with others. For this assessment, standard scores were obtained for positive social skills and problem behaviors.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data collected from teacher candidates, community members, and the elementary school. In the sections that follow, we present our analysis of the data. More

specifically, we present the analysis of data from teacher candidates, the community, and the school.

Data from teacher candidates. Using a constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), each of three investigators separately read and coded student journals where candidates wrote weekly reflections. After the initial reading, investigators compared codes and identified similarities and differences in coding. From this discussion, a set of coding categories was created, noting the diversity of dimensions within each category. These coding categories then were used to examine and code transcripts of student interviews and "courageous conversations." These artifacts were coded by each researcher independently and compared for agreement. From the final coded transcripts, two themes were identified that related to teacher candidates' understanding of and participation in the community, those of understanding community priorities and the candidate's role in critical service-learning. These themes are integrated throughout the results section as we delineate community impact.

Data from the community. In order to analyze community impact, archives of community events were reviewed by all five program faculty. Additionally, transcripts of community members' reflections relative to these events were reviewed by three program faculty and analyzed using the same constant comparison (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) method of analysis as was performed with candidate reflections. Themes that emerged from this coding were 1) the valuing of community expertise, 2) equal partnership, 3) community mobilization, and 4) sustained effort in the community.

Finally, grant funding to the community was reviewed and categorized according to source, amount, and proposed project. A funding table documenting these grants served as an artifact of philanthropic activity during our three-year tenure in the community. These three

sources of data provided a means to survey a record of accomplishment and subsequent level of community impact.

Data from the school. In our second year in the community, our community collaborative received a grant from the state department of education in order to address the community-identified need for after school, summer, and weekend educational enrichment for children in kindergarten - third grade, the MuncieP3 Program. As part of MuncieP3, an independent evaluator was commissioned to track participating children's progress on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment and the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). With approximately one half of kindergarten children participating in the first year of the MuncieP3 Program, and with the school's voluntary release of data (which was unidentified for non-program participants), we were able to compare program participants against their non-program peers as one measure of program effectiveness relative to student learning. This data is provided in the results section below.

Narrative and Findings

Our three years of learning from and participating in this community, alongside its members, has resulted in substantial community impact, which continues to emerge based on changing community conditions and expanded opportunities. Authentic participation in the development of initiatives to further community-identified need has been transformative for teacher candidates in terms of their personal agency, as well as their connection to a dynamic community that welcomes them in mobilizing for positive change. Each year of our being in the community presents valuable opportunities for engagement and meaningful contribution, which define our joint participation. In the subsequent paragraphs, specific examples will be highlighted

within the context of candidate reflections, which situate their emerging understandings of true engagement in affecting change.

Year One

Immediately prior to our arrival in the community, political decisions at the city level presented some unique challenges. The library immediately adjacent to the elementary school was closed due to lack of funding, despite active pleas from the community to the city to uphold its promise of maintaining the community landmark that bore the name of a cherished member-activist. Additionally, the city announced that there were no funds to maintain the city's community centers, compromising the hub of community activity for which the local community center was known historically. Presented with this news, the neighborhood community council, having recently lost its battle to restore the local library, refused to let the center close and began a campaign to mobilize community volunteers to keep the doors open. Our arrival in the community followed an unprecedented eight months of programming for children and families based on volunteers' efforts alone. Our use of the community center as our classroom was granted enthusiastically by members of the community, who perceived our presence as potentially beneficial to the operations of the center and further public justification to sustain the center in the community.

Our first semester in the community was characterized by developing relationships—by listening to and learning from community members. The community we were working with has a rich history of being "studied" by the university, and we exercised great caution in not replicating the work of past cohorts of professors and students who "crossed-over," proposed great things, and then retreated to the academy with projects left unrealized. One community member characterized this "town-gown" divide as "a few rickety foot bridges strewn with broken dreams

and hollow promises." Our goal was to counter this traditional university/community narrative with a new paradigm of collaboration and partnership, founded in the strength and conviction of the community in establishing its own agenda for growth and development.

In distilling the multiple layers of information obtained throughout the semester, a key message that permeated almost all conversations was the importance of "welcoming spaces" for children and families within the community. Families frequently expressed a desire to have low-cost or no-cost activities in the community when children were out of school to support and enrich their learning. Families underscored the importance of these activities taking place in a supportive, safe, trust-worthy environment that welcomed and respected their children and families. They clearly articulated the value of education to their children and their community. One candidate's reflection shows the key message of the community members:

> When we asked what the community wanted for children, almost everyone said that kids need after school events. They want their students to be able to get tutored after school, to be able to play different sports, and to be able to interact with other students in a positive and safe environment. (M.K. journal entry, week 5)

Another candidate's reflection also underscores concern of families in the community, noting "A big concern of families for their children seems to be not having a safe place to go to keep them off the streets. There are programs, but families say they need to stay open longer" (H.T. journal entry, week 5). A similar sentiment was shared by a third candidate who wrote "When we asked them what children in this community needed, the three biggest things they focused on were partnership with schools, minimal cost child care, and after school activities (M.D. journal entry, week 5).

Because we had asked what children in the community needed, we felt compelled to do something with the information that had been generously shared by community members. Appreciating the extent to which out-of-school time represented a critical component of children's educational experience in the community, candidates joined community members in embarking on a massive fundraising endeavor to ensure the community center's future existence through leveraging funds to support paid staff. One candidate reflected on the import of this co-participation in community mobilization:

> Being here this semester has been a great honor. I feel very privileged to be part of such an inspiring community. I am very pleased to see the community come together to try to preserve this wonderful resource and am thrilled to be involved in the process. I feel that we can truly make a difference in this community and the children will reap the benefits. This is a wonderful opportunity to get involved with the community and to help the children receive the educational resources they deserve! (A.T. video interview, week 8)

Together with their mentors, candidates organized a campaign to "sustain the change" at the center. They placed piggy banks throughout the community to solicit donations to assist with the operational needs of the center. They organized campus-based awareness days to raise additional funds. They worked with community volunteers to solicit donations through direct mailings. They were integral in working with media to promote the fundamental need for the center within the community. Most importantly, together with their mentors, candidates organized a "community walk" where, with members of the community, candidates canvassed the neighborhood, speaking individually with residents, leveraging social and economic support for the community center. In an eight-week period, candidates and members of the community not only raised awareness and commitment but also raised over $107,000 required to sustain the

community center for the coming year. Candidates participated in an unparalleled act of community mobilization, and they personally experienced the change that can transpire when people come together with a commitment to a shared vision. Candidates reflected on the impact of this collaborative effort, such as in the following:

> Although I am not a member of Whitely, the Buley Center has meant a lot to me over the past semester. Buley has not only provided a classroom for me, but a community of people, working to create a better future for our city. As a future teacher, it is wonderful to know that there will be a safe place for my future students to go. (S.D., video interview, week 15)

Another candidate remarked "This community is made up of loving, caring, and compassionate hearts that want to help children succeed in their education and in their life. I am honored to be a part of that" (K.M., journal entry, week 13). A community member addressed the candidates' engagement by noting "They've learned that you don't have to fight city hall when the group is determined to proceed without city hall. They have witnessed what a small army of dedicated volunteers can accomplish—peacefully and positively" (K.M., interview).

In addition to successful fundraising for the community center, candidates' endeavors during our first year resulted in further impact. The community-identified needs collected by candidates served as impetus for members of the community to write a grant which was funded by the State Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Center Fund. The grant was co-written by members from the local community center, the neighboring early childhood center, the local school, and university faculty. The grant provided a four-year, $758,000 proposal to provide no-cost after school, Saturday, and summer enrichment programs for children in kindergarten-third grade. The MuncieP3 Program was proposed as a phased

implementation, beginning in its first year with a cohort of 30 kindergarten students. In each of the subsequent three years, a new cohort of 30 kindergarten students would be added to the program, until at year 4 when the original 30 kindergarten children would reach third grade, and there would be a total of 120 children enrolled in the program.

Year Two

As previously mentioned, the Whitely neighborhood is an over-studied sector of Muncie. As we built relationships within the community, we heard in no uncertain terms about the limitations of past university/community partnership efforts and how trust had been eroded through what the community perceived as unmet promises. The echo of well-intentioned projects, ending with predictably unrealized outcomes, had led to hesitancy on the part of the community to engage again with the university. A sentiment of community exploitation for university gain characterized much dialogue in which we engaged. This discourse solidified for us the imperative of re-conceptualizing the traditional university/community partnership model —capitalizing on the initial relationships we had developed—and getting it right. We were affirmed at the beginning of our second year through responses of the community, such as the comments of one community member who said "There's something really different about this program. They didn't come in with an agenda to impose. They honestly wanted to listen and learn. They said they would come back, and they did" (W.S., interview).

In addition to "coming back," our second year in the community was characterized by the challenge of birthing the program for which we had been provided considerable funding to address the community-identified need for out-of-school, complementary learning experiences for children. Prior to our reentry into the community with candidates, an esteemed member of the community was hired as the program director. Additionally, a summer kindergarten readiness

program was developed and implemented in partnership with teachers from the elementary school. As we began our work in the fall, we needed to develop curriculum for our first year of kindergarten afterschool and Saturday school, and these efforts provided an excellent opportunity within which to engage candidates. With the focus of the program on shared partnership between the school, family, and community, this "cord of three strands" (Hong, 2011) provided an authentic means through which candidates would participate in a truly collaborative endeavor.

Dialogue between candidates, grant personnel, elementary and early childhood teachers, and members of the community resulted in a program focus on the construct of "community" as a launching place for our kindergarten curriculum. While candidates continued to participate in their practicum experiences in the elementary school and early childhood programs, they also developed and implemented curriculum in the after school and Saturday kindergarten enrichment programs, in partnership with program personnel, university faculty, members of the community, and elementary and early childhood teachers. Their exploration of community led to the planning and implementing of field trips and culturally-relevant experiences, through which to follow and respond to children's inquiry. All experiences were aligned with the state learning standards, and the experiences were interwoven intentionally with the kindergarten curriculum of the school. At the end of our first year of program operation, children who participated showed significant social and academic gains, in contrast to their non-program peers, as evidenced in Figures 1 and 2.

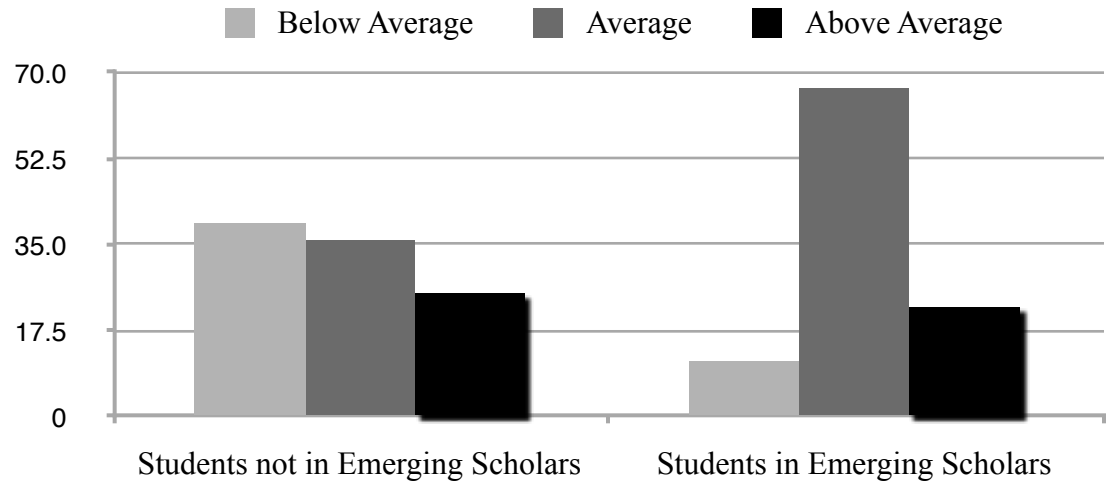

Figure 1. Percentage of students enrolled in Emerging Scholars program and not enrolled who were reading at grade level at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year

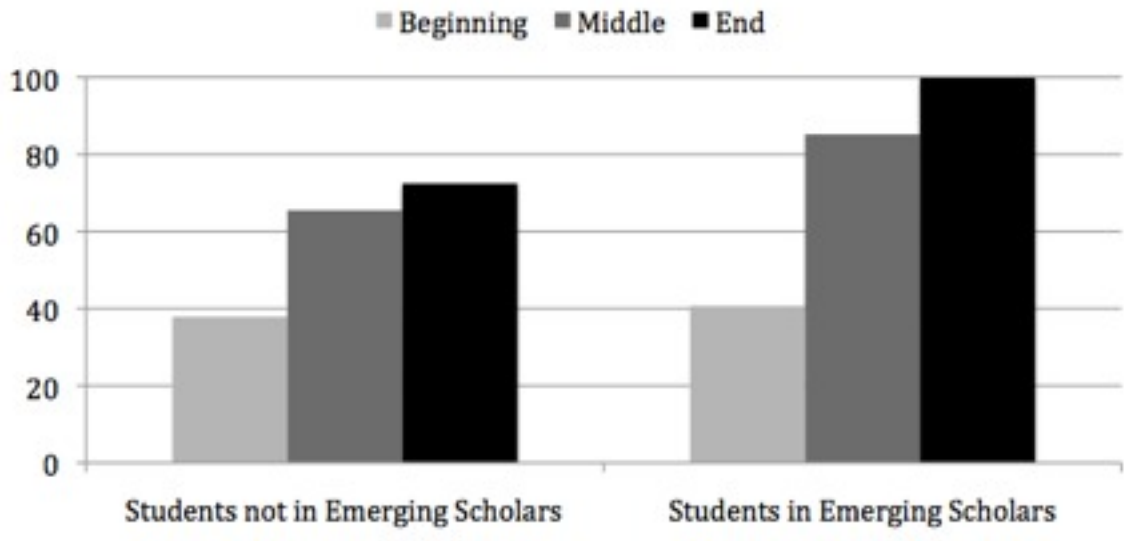

Figure 2. Percentage of students enrolled in Emerging Scholars program and not enrolled in each of the behavioral levels for positive social skills

Year Three

With a record of positive collaboration and joint contribution, our third year in the community afforded opportunity to build upon our success and increase impact. Candidates continued to participate in practicum placements at the elementary school or early childhood

program. Candidates also developed and implemented after school enrichment experiences for children in the MuncieP3 program. In addition to these enterprises, joint ventures between the school and community presented additional opportunities for candidate engagement.

Throughout our tenure in this community, the elementary school has continued to emerge in its presence as a "community school" as "both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources, with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, leadership, and community engagement" (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2012). Collaborative dialogue between the school, local health resources, and the community council throughout the year resulted in an emerging conversation about development of school property into a shared school/community 'wellness park' featuring a variety of apparatus to support the physical health of children, adults, and seniors within the community. With funding for such an initiative not yet identified, the potential for our candidates to commence an investigation into the project components, as well as potential benefactors, was timely.

Candidates began the parallel process of dialogue with community council members, school officials, and community health personnel, while embarking on a search for donors. Their identification of a local private patron led to the logical next step of securing an architectural design and budget for the targeted space, collaborating with the school principal and a local landscape architect firm. Upon completion of the design and presentation to the community council for approval, candidates constructed a proposal and presented it to the local grantor for consideration. By semester's end, we received notification of a $27,000 grant for the first phase of the project. Candidates were enthusiastic about this outcome. The reflection of a candidate speaks to the impact of personal engagement in such a process:

> I've realized that if you set your mind to something and do it, that anything is possible . . . after seeing the representation of the plan, I can see this dream becoming a reality . . . and I had a part to play in it. This is so empowering. I always thought that I could make a difference, but now I am really seeing that. . . . I actually believe it. Something amazing is happening here and I am so lucky to be a part of it. (A.L. journal entry, week 10)

Community members' reflections of our tenure over the last three years provide testimony to the nature of the reciprocal and collaborative nature of our community of practice:

> I feel like the community members are being treated like educators. This teacher education program asks the questions, "What does this community value? What does it need? What kinds of things do people want for their children?" and it enlists the expertise of community members in answering these questions. We feel validated that our voice is heard. (Y.T. interview)

Residents learned to trust and appreciate the university as a viable player in their community:

> To remain a community of pride, who identifies their own needs and leads the way to change, we need mutual partnerships in order to feel empowered. . . . this teacher education program has been different . . . it has continued over several years and has remained, unlike other university initiatives. It continues to serve alongside members of the community as it collaborates, partners, and helps. We feel like we have new family here. (W.S. interview)

Discussion

Candidates' critical service-learning of this teacher preparation initiative has proven transformative for the community in which we work. Importantly, this work also has encouraged meaningful change in candidates' understanding of and orientation toward teaching and learning. Learning throughout the semester can be situated in Wenger's (1998) framework of *experiencing*, *doing*, *belonging*, and *becoming*. Through mediated experience, coupled with authentic membership and participation in a true community of practice, candidates are well on their way to becoming community teachers. This transformation situates the Schools Within the Context of Community program as an exemplary manifestation of teacher education. Sleeter (1996) underscores the importance of this type of community-based learning and resulting transformation:

> Cross cultural community-based learning involves learning about a community that is culturally different from one's own by spending time there, equipped with learning strategies such as active listening and guidance in what to observe. Most White teachers have had little experience learning how to learn about someone else's community, yet this is exactly what they will need to do in order to build pedagogy that is culturally and contextually relevant to students from backgrounds different than their own (p. 563).

The Schools Within the Context of Community program semester offers a transformative experience for preservice educators, with evidence of their appreciation for the contexts from which children come holding promise for enhanced relationships with students, families, and communities. Experiences and interactions throughout the semester encourage candidates to reconsider previous conceptions, deconstruct prior schema, and build a new framework with which to approach teaching and learning. Outcome data is promising within the context of

reform in teacher education. In support of the paradigm detailed in this study, Sleeter (2001) reports the combination of "extensive community-based immersion, experience, coupled with coursework, seems to have the most promise" in such post-secondary teacher preparation initiatives (p. 102).

A growing research base supports the impact of community-based, immersive learning in teacher education (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Cooper, 2007; Giroux & McLaren, 1996; Harding, 2005; hooks, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Sidle & Friend (2002); Sleeter, 2001; Zeichner, 2010; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). This form of "engaged pedagogy" for preservice teachers encourages "learning as a whole process rather than a restrictive practice that disconnects and alienates them from the world" (hooks, 2003, p. 44). Zeichner (2010) expands this concept, as he discusses nonhierarchical "hybrid spaces" where academic, practitioner, and community expertise are equally valued and indeed elevated as essential in the education of preservice educators.

Rothstein's (2004) analysis of the achievement gap between low-income, racially diverse students and their more affluent peers offers an important perspective relative to reform in teacher education. According to Rothstein, the issue is not one of poor school quality or ineffective policies, but rather, the issue is the disconnect of cultural knowledge and social contexts between schools and low-income families. The model showcased suggests that these worlds can be bridged by encouraging teachers to examine factors outside the school that are equally significant to children's academic development. The imperative of this interaction is stressed by Li (2010) who argues that "direct contact with and systematic study of students' families and communities should become the basis for instructional planning" (p. 173). Supporting this counsel are Zeichner & Melnick (1996) and Moll et al. (1992) who advocate that

teachers' appreciation of local wisdom can increase the extent to which culturally relevant curricula are developed and implemented.

Reorienting the pedagogy of teacher education, and shifting the focus from teacher-expert to teacher-learner is at the heart of the Schools Within the Context of Community program semester. Long, Anderson, Clark, & McCraw (2008) stress the importance of elevating community wisdom and expertise in teacher education, offering that "spending time in homes and communities for the purpose of enlisting family and community members and children as teachers in *our* education" is critical to teacher preparation (p. 267). Becoming a "community teacher" (Murrell, 2001) thus requires the marriage of theory *and* experience with successful teachers, families, and community members. In fact, the "right" context for teacher development, according to Murrell, is "community-dedicated, practice-oriented, urban-focused field work" (p. 7). In light of Murrell's counsel, redefining teacher education requires the academy to extend itself beyond traditional boundaries—to share its patent on power and to recognize the contribution of the community to the body of knowledge required to best prepare our future educators.

Wenger's (1998) "community of practice" framework, thus, surfaces as an ideal vehicle through which to realize such vision. With the "joint enterprise" of culturally responsive teacher education and school improvement, characterized by the "mutual engagement" of the school, families, community and university, and a "shared repertoire of strategies" through which to accomplish its work, the Schools Within the Context of Community program is truly redefining the potential of teacher education toward important community impact. The transformative nature of participation in such a community is articulately captured in one candidate's final reflection:

> I draw some parallels to learning this semester, and running a race . . . Normally at this point I feel like I have used up all my energy, I am panting out of breath, my muscles are screaming, and I could care less what interesting landmark I will see around the next bend in the path—I am just focused on my feet hitting the pavement, one in front of the other. But this semester I have been running just as long, but I have a second wind, I have more energy left, my breathing is even, my muscles are being challenged but they are ready to keep going, and I can't wait to see what I will find around the next bend in the road! I usually have better stamina and endurance when I have someone to run with, especially someone who is encouraging. And this semester, I have my peers, instructors, and members of the community running along with me. This is how learning should be all of the time. Learning should not tire us out to the point of exhaustion, it should fuel us on to keep discovering and learning. When I am a teacher, I want to create this kind of learning environment for my students. An environment where the whole class is running together, excited to see where we will go next on our run, and excited to run with the people we are with. (K.C. journal entry, week 16)

According to Wenger (1998), "participants [in a community of practice] have a stake in their investment because it becomes part of who they are. From that standpoint, practice is an investment in learning" (p. 97). Our work continues to inform us that membership in such a community provides the opportunity for meaningful, transformative, situated learning, which generates the identity and agency required to continue the race. As our candidates move forward in their professional transformations, we eagerly anticipate what is around the next bend.

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