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Using Community as a Resource for Teacher Education: A Case Study

Mari E. Koerner with Najwa Abdul-Tawwab

This is an account of a teacher education program's attempt to connect with a neighboring community in order to better prepare faculty to teach about the urban context in which their preservice teacher education students practice. Taking a feminist perspective, the two authors discuss their goals—the processes of using a community organization to lead the discussion and obstacles inherent to university settings. Knowledge about urban communities is an area that is often neglected in teacher preparation and one that needs to be more fully considered.

"We do not really see through our eyes or hear through ears, but through our beliefs."—Delpit (1988, p. 297)

Most teachers in urban classrooms instruct students who are very different from themselves, and often teach in communities that they have never previously even visited (Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Hussar, Povasnik, & Hampden-Thompson, 2005). It is important that teacher preparation programs address these issues of diversity by helping their education students understand the value of making connections with their PreK-12 students' families and communities. The following study, written from a holistic and feminist perspective, tells the story of a teacher education program and a community organization working together to institutionalize a partnership whose main objective is to improve teacher preparation.

In the Graduate College of Education at the University of Massachusetts—Boston, those of us who prepare students to be effective urban school teachers, know that many of our students have never visited the communities in which they will student teach and (perhaps eventually) work. Yet, as Delpit (1988) points out, they do come to their preparation programs with beliefs about children and families who live in urban neighborhoods. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 84% of U.S. teachers are white and middle-class with limited experience with people of backgrounds different from their own (Wirt et al., 2005). A new teaching reality for which we need to prepare students in the 21st

century is that "multiculturalism is simply a fact" (Oakes & Lipton, 2003). Another fact is that children spend only 1000 hours per year in schools as compared with 5000 hours spent in their communities and with their families (Berliner, 2005). These sheer numbers alone speak to the issue of the strong impact of the neighborhood. It is a force influencing children's learning that has to be recognized.

When these new teachers face a classroom of children who may be different from themselves (for example, in race, ethnicity, or language) how do they see and relate to the students and their families? Ayers (1996) believes that school people need to understand and respond to the conditions that shape students' lives rather than trying to "fix" community and family problems. It is important that these teachers be prepared to work effectively with children they may perceive to be "at risk" and therefore, perhaps unteachable (Haberman, 1995). They have to be prepared to be effective in teaching children from a wide range of diversity. This is contrary to the idea that the culture of the students is irrelevant. As Ladson-Billings (2001) points out, in a "middle-income, white, English-speaking school community, teachers *do* use student culture as a basis for learning" (p. 99). That culture is invisible. It is only when the children's home culture is different from the school norms and school culture that it becomes visible and often seemingly problematic. In order for all teachers, and especially teachers in urban areas to be successful, they have to take responsibility for learning about the culture and the community of the children they teach (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Prospective teachers, particularly those who are white and middle-class, need cross-cultural opportunities with families and students who are neither white nor middle-class and who often

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speak a language other than English at home. It can be argued that without connection to diverse schools and local communities, bias and stereotyping of children by teachers may go unexamined (Cochran-Smith, 1995) and interfere with the success of the children in school. Schools cannot work successfully in isolation from students' families and communities (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Comer, 2005; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansom, & Van Voohis, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Taylor & Adelman, 2000). Epstein (1995) talks about the overlapping spheres of influence determining a child's achievement. Teachers play the central role in the overlapping spheres of family, community, and school. It is clear that teacher candidates must learn about the inclusion of children's social context in the school experiences.

We are arguing that teacher education programs need to take the lead in showing how to build a bridge between the school (in this case, the university) and the families and cultures of PreK-12 students whom their preservice teachers will be instructing. Teacher education is under constant scrutiny (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Fullan, 1998; Goodlad, 1990) because there are doubts that it can meet the needs of teachers who are coming into schools.

Although most new teachers have positive things to say about teacher education, and they believe it is a necessary part of becoming a teacher, many feel that teacher education needs to be rethought and reconfigured to provide prospective teachers with opportunities to spend more time in classrooms and communities. (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 3)

It is not surprising that these teachers "are often ill-prepared to connect with students, families, and communities" (Oaks & Lipton, 2003, p. 432). This is especially true for those teachers who work in schools where there are students of color who live in poverty.

[Changed] social and political circumstances mean that for teacher education to matter it too will have to change. It will have to offer new teachers a fighting chance to both survive and thrive in schools and classrooms filled with students who are even more dependent on education to make the difference in their life circumstances. (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 6)

It is clear that teacher education faculty, the people who plan and create the curriculum for would-be teachers, need to see the big picture of how to relate to families. They also need to know about the specific communities in which they place their students and where many of their students will work and some may live: What are the names of the schools? Where do families shop? Go to church? Play?

Often, in responding to issues of diversity, teacher education programs offer courses about sociocultural per-

spectives, multicultural education, and anti-bias curriculum with no consistent focus on the role of the community (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Clearly, there is a need for teachers and teacher educators to connect with the communities where the children and their families reside. Historically, it has been difficult to find a way to connect communities and public schools (Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2002). These links are ill-defined and often put the parents in a "helping" role rather than in a full partner position (Ayers, 1996). If we extend the notion of community involvement to university programs, it becomes even more of a stretch. However, the practicum experience within the school-community setting is a good starting point and may be the most important element of teacher education (Bullough et al., 2002; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Knowledge of the community in which schools reside and in which our students will work is an obviously important element in the success of preservice teachers.

There is very little incentive for teacher education programs to change (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Even teacher licensure, which drives much of what is taught in preparation programs, rarely looks at content in relation to knowledge about community. With state licensing agencies increasingly focusing on alternative routes to teacher preparation, the requirements become more focused on minimum literacy and content requirements (Berliner, 2000). As a result, teacher education programs often lack a comprehensive family involvement practicum. Little is known about alternative ways to prepare prospective teachers to interact with families and students outside the structured and traditional parent-teacher conference or parent-teacher sessions regarding disciplinary actions. Since most teacher educators do not have knowledge about the local urban communities, they are not able to be a resource for their student teachers. If prospective teachers need opportunities to visit and interact with families and community members, it makes sense that teacher educators need to lead the way.

BUILDING BRIDGES

This is an account of a teacher education program struggling to find a way to connect with the surrounding community through a grassroots, neighborhood organization. Our story has a feminist view as a theoretical perspective. The feminist view embraces the value of multiple perspectives, erases the distinction in hierarchy between "researcher" and "researched" (Lather, 1991) and values both "subjectivity and personal experience" (Black, 1989, p. 75). We researchers are participants as well, and in telling authentic stories, there is a comfort with "unfinished stories" (Black, 1989, pp. 4-5). That is, the story continues after the study is completed; this is only one moment in time. It also means that it may be

the telling of the story that makes the most sense to the readers and that they, the consumers of the research, make sense of it for use in their own lives. It becomes applicable in the lives of teacher educators as they read and think about it, perhaps applying pieces of it to themselves and their situations. In addition, “feminist research strives to represent human diversity” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 252). All of these characteristics describe the value system that underlies both the project and the research about the project. The validity is internal validity, which means that it makes sense in its own context. We hope to be part of the conversation. The few tentative steps we have taken may spark interest and possibility for other teacher education programs.

As researchers and teacher educators we have these firm beliefs: The overarching and most important objective for teacher educators is to improve the teaching and learning of students in urban schools; this can be done through improved instruction of teacher candidates. It is the responsibility of Colleges of Education to enhance teacher education programs through community bridging, making and sustaining authentic collegial relationships with parents of students in urban schools and community organizations.

We at the University of Massachusetts—Boston’s (UMB) Graduate College of Education began to look closely at how our teacher education programs were addressing education in urban public schools. We could not help but notice that there was an almost complete lack of knowledge about the specific social context of the surrounding urban communities. We decided to try to integrate community members in our ongoing discussion as informants, as people who had knowledge we lacked. At the same time, we were at the beginning of a Title II (Higher Education Amendments of 1998) Teacher Enhancement grant, which gave us even more opportunities to shape and reshape our programs. The Director of the grant, Najwa Abdul-Tawwab (the second author of this article), was also the president of the board of a local community organization. We wanted a renewed focus on preparing teachers for urban public schools.

RESEARCH QUESTION

A compelling issue for those of us who work in teacher education is to prepare our students for the context of the community in which they will teach (Murrell, 2001). The question for this research project is: How can an urban university’s teacher education program begin to form a relationship with its surrounding communities in order to improve the preparation of teachers?

Our goal was to bridge the gap between the teacher preparation programs and preservice student teachers’ clinical placements, prepracticum, and practicum experiences, where they may eventually teach. This is a docu-

mentary account of how the discussions began and how the context of the teacher education program changed. Included are its successes and failures to value and accommodate the views, as well as the knowledge of members of the community organization.

METHODOLOGY

Because of the myriad purposes of educational research, it is important to select the methodology that best suits not only our feminist perspective but also informs practice and policies (Lagemann & Shulman, 1999). The qualitative method is a naturalistic approach that respects the context of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Specifically, for this inquiry, we are “qualitative researchers studying things in their naturalistic settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 2).

Case Study Method

The specific qualitative methodology we used was case study, with purposeful selection (Stake, 1995) of participants from UMB and the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI). Using Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) case study structure, we have included in this report: the issue, the problem, the context, and the lessons learned. But first, it is necessary to situate the case within the context of its social setting (Stake, 1995), so the account describes the university setting. The case study fits well with our feminist viewpoint because both share the goals “to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification and to conduct research that is transformative” (Creswell, 1998, p. 83). Stake (1995) stresses that a qualitative, holistic case study is highly personal research. He notes that “the quality and utility of the research is not based on its reproducibility but on whether or not the meanings generated, by the researcher or the reader are valued. Thus a personal valuing of the work is expected” (p. 135). Certainly the work was valued by the people involved in the study and in the project. Specifically this is considered a holistic case study, which is a “highly subjective affair and includes the personal value system of the case study team” (Scholz & Tietje, 2002, p. 21). Holistic nature means that there is a description of the case and in-depth understanding is a desirable outcome. Even this written account illustrates a feminist influence as it becomes more personal when it moves away from the formal presentation of the methodology and moves toward our story. Another important feature of this methodology that was also attractive to us for our purposes is that the case itself can be a “significant communication device” (Yin, 2003, p. 144).

Extending this description of case study, it further fits into the feminist perspective because both of us (the researchers) were closely affiliated with the problem so that “being insiders of the experience enables . . . [us] to understand in a way that no other person could” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 260). During this project, we explored ways to talk about teacher preparation with community members, who are typically outside the process. Our account is written with the understanding that we bring our values to the project and to the inquiry. Agreeing with Freire (1985), “All educational practice implies a theoretical stance on the educator’s part” (p. 43), we are making our values explicit. These values include the desire for the regeneration of urban schools; the preparation of teachers who can be successful with urban children; the recognition of varied voices of “expertise” that exist in urban areas; and a “culture of conversation” (Oakes & Lipton, 2003, p. 419) within the university. We open the traditional paradigm of “expertise” to legitimize the voices of those outside the university who are involved in the achievement of children in urban schools. Our goal was to accomplish Stovall and Ayers’ (2005) description of a project in Chicago, “The ‘experts’ [university faculty] engaged community members as equals” (p. 37). This view sees the urban community as a context for faculty to develop relevant objectives based on students’ lives. We also understand that the reality of all institutions is that much action, including our project, is person-dependent, and as the “players” change, so too the project may change and become inactive or even disappear.

Data and Analyses

There are multiple sources of data that reflect the nature of a case study: “an exploration of a ‘bounded system,’ [using] in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Bounded in time, our study spanned about two years (or four semesters) at the University of Massachusetts—Boston. The data included minutes from all Department meetings, Title II meetings, seminars and workshops with participants from DSNI and UMB, reflective journals, and informal interviews with faculty and members of DSNI. Because we see this as an issue-oriented case study (Stake, 1995), all of the data were limited to the stated question of how the UMB teacher training program can connect with a local community organization. The strategy for data analysis was suggested by Yin (1984): The original theoretical proposition, which led to the study and shaped the data collection, served as the guiding strategy to focus on some of the data and ignore other irrelevant data. This proposition helps to organize the entire case study and is especially effective when used with inquiries that have a “how” question.

Our Story

Before we begin our story, we will give a brief description of the values and goals of the University, the Curriculum and Instruction Department, and the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. The University of Massachusetts—Boston identifies as a “model of excellence for urban universities” (UMB, 2004, Mission Statement, ¶1). Its core values include meeting the needs of both traditional and non-traditional students and its intent is to “dedicate itself especially to understanding and improving the environment and well being of the citizens of this region” (UMB, 2004, Vision Statement §, ¶2). From the Chancellor’s Office to Student Affairs, there is a stated public commitment that the surrounding community, meaning the neighborhoods around the university and Boston as a whole, are important in both research and academic programs.

The Curriculum and Instruction Department houses most teacher education, including initial and professional licensure programs. At the time of the study, there were about 100 undergraduate students and 500 graduate students in all licensure programs. There were about 22 full-time faculty in the Department and 3 full-time staff. The College is National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) approved and many, although not all, faculty are involved directly in the teacher education programs through teaching, research, and/or service.

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) is a nonprofit community-based organization committed to revitalizing “environmental, economic and human” (DSNI, 2005, Mission Statement, ¶1) resources in the Roxbury/North Dorchester neighborhood in Boston. It began in 1984 with residents who wanted to revive their community “nearly devastated by arson, disinvestment” and who wanted “to protect it from outside speculators” (¶1). It has a diverse population whose major accomplishments have been to “create a shared vision of the neighborhood and bring it to reality” by working with “individuals and organizations in the private, government and nonprofit sectors” (¶6).

After the Director of DSNI was hired to lead the Title II project, we began to look more closely at how we might use DSNI as a resource for the teacher education program. Because Ms. Abdul-Tawwab also had been a teacher in the Boston Public Schools, we were able to strengthen ties with many of the surrounding public schools for clinical placements and professional development sites, which the grant enabled us to fund. We then began to look at how to involve more members of the Department in the Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement grant. One specific goal of the grant, and one that fell within our interests and expertise was to “[e]xpand the school-and-community-based nature of teacher education to provide greater

practical experience" (Massachusetts Coalition for Teacher Quality and Student Achievement, 2004, p. 1).

After having just successfully gone through an NCATE review, the UMB teacher education programs were ready to go to a higher standard of practice than the required "minimum" expectations of national and state requirements. In order to move the grant forward and in order to go deeper into the issues of urban diversity, we decided to look at an area where little or nothing has been written—the direct connection between teacher education and community organizations.

The two of us, Mari Koerner and Najwa Abdul-Tawwab, discussed many options of how to institutionalize the notions of community. Because we had little guidance, our discussion began to focus on monthly Department meetings, the one time all the faculty and staff are together. We liked the idea of enlarging Department meetings, at least one or two of them, to include members of the community and parents of students in our Title II partnership schools. We intentionally did not use the Advisory Board model. This, historically, has not been seen as a source for information about the larger community, but rather an almost proforma structure to meet the needs of accreditation. We also discussed the membership of Advisory Boards and how this relates to community involvement. Often the membership of Advisory Boards is slanted to only include people who can be guaranteed to show up at meetings or who are publicly known for their expertise. Because both of us have served on these Boards, we knew that there is limited discussion and often the purposes are diffused because the participants may have little in common. We were looking for a more comprehensive engagement model for Advisory Boards that calls upon community members and parents to be valued peers in the education of urban teachers (Stovall & Ayers, 2005). This was based on our deeply held belief, supported by research showing positive outcomes of community/school partnerships for PreK-12 education (Comer, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), that linking a university teacher education program with urban parents and community would eventually enhance PreK-12 education.

We believed that "insufficient knowledge about the circumstances, neighborhoods, and supports of their students hampers teachers' effectiveness with many students, most particularly, with students who come from backgrounds different than the teacher's" (Honig et al., 2002, p. 1017). For us, this meant that we needed to heighten faculty's awareness of the importance of community and family in the lives of children. Because of lack of familiarity with urban neighborhoods, it became clear that many faculty members could benefit from more knowledge about the communities in which their students had clinical experiences and in which these students might work. We thought that if we could provide opportunities for faculty to learn firsthand about the con-

text in which urban children live, play, and work, they would be able to more effectively include this knowledge about community in courses and develop a disposition to emphasize its importance. Delpit (1988) notes that it is through our beliefs that we see the world, and a teacher education program has many opportunities to stretch, examine and shape each individual's perception that exist with and result from these beliefs (Schubert, 1991). Hopefully, this can create a sensitization of preservice teachers to the positive impact of the urban neighborhood.

Our story continued as our discussions led to action steps. All of our activities (some of them funded by the grant) were led by the Director of Title II (Abdul-Tawwab) and the Department Chair (Koerner). Parenthetically, the Dean was supportive but not actively involved in the process. We spent a lot of time talking to faculty, staff, community members, and each other to decide on the steps we could take to engage and teach faculty. Specifically, we decided to highlight the community in the curriculum and content of preservice teacher education courses and in the required clinical experience by using funds from the Title II grant to provide materials and the stated goals of the project to push the dialogue along.

We began this practice by scheduling a meeting with Department faculty and staff with a panel of school principals, teachers, faculty, and community organizers, who made a presentation about the community (both current and historical perspectives) and its importance in the education of children. The presentation was engaging and informative because it was given by a community organizer who brought a real, clear, and urgent focus about the importance of schools and teachers to his neighborhood (an expertise and framework that was lacking within our own Department). A recommendation that came out of this meeting was that community members should be invited to attend future scheduled Department meetings when relevant. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction revised their constitution to say that at least one meeting per semester should include community partners and parents as part of the discussion portion that deals with pedagogical practices or licensure. The constitution was revised so as to institutionalize the inclusion of community people in department meetings.

To ensure that everyone understood the role of DSNI as an example of a community organization linked with families of PreK-12 students, we planned a Department meeting at the community center itself. When we invited staff and faculty to attend the meeting, we decided to make it a special event by having a lunch provided by a local caterer. We emphasized that it was very important that each person come who had promised to be a part of the event because poor attendance might be regarded as indifference on the part of the university people. Colleagues from another university in the Title II consortium

were invited as well. There were some questions about directions and facilities for parking and some slight discomfort with issues of safety but, in the end, there was 100% attendance.

We set an agenda that highlighted the personnel and accomplishments of the organization. The meeting included a tour of the neighborhood (the houses and the school), which had been dramatically improved because of the work of DSNI (Medoff & Slar, 1994). In addition, a copy of the book recounting the history of the community organization, *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood* (Medoff & Slar, 1994) was given to each person attending the meeting. As a consequence of the meeting, goodwill was generated between the organization and the Department, and it was recommended that a mission statement, which we had been writing to represent the overall values of the Department, be revised to include the goal of inclusion of community.

Along with a movie, the walking tour, and presentations, the staff and members of DSNI had specific suggestions for the teacher education program. One of them was to encourage faculty to become actively involved in community and model ways in which inservice teachers see their role in the community development process. This was a unique experience for Curriculum and Instruction faculty: professional development, done intentionally and done through a regular Department meeting.

Because this was such an unusual event, many people talked to us, both informally after the meeting and through e-mail. There was a positive feeling about the connection with each other and with the community people, and there also was a strong feeling of respect for the work of the community people. It was suggested by several participants that the Department expand meeting places to include community locations. Several faculty also made the suggestion that they collaborate with community members on papers and presentations at local and national conferences. This paper came about as a result of the community-based meeting as well.

Title II funds provided opportunities for professional development. Najwa Abdul-Tawwab asked for volunteers to participate in an ongoing book discussion group to meet monthly. Ten faculty and staff members volunteered to be part of the group and Title II funding provided books. The books, *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood* (Medoff & Sklar, 1994) along with Peter Murrell's (2001) book, *The Community Teacher*, provided common ground for the discussions. By allowing an extended time for deep conversation, this allowed faculty and teachers a safe place in which to talk about and critique practice by looking at research on community involvement, with an actual case study of a neighborhood that reformed itself.

Another simple suggestion that arose from the meeting was to keep reading materials about community works available to students and faculty. We collected

them from both DSNI and the Coalition of Asian Pacific American Youth (CAPAY), an Asian American student organization that is sponsored by a professor in the Department—and left them in the Department reception area as well as in the student advising office.

These ideas focused on how to enhance some of the procedures and practices in the Department to encourage community participation. There were additional ideas that came from faculty and staff in subsequent Department meetings for how to enhance the design of the teacher education curriculum. Some faculty met as a study group to talk about how our new ideas could inform teaching and curriculum. These recommendations, although made for our teacher education programs, can apply to any program. They include:

- Having preservice teachers do lesson plans and make curriculum materials that use the neighborhood as the source and focus of content for student learning. Be sure family and community are used almost like a text; that is, included in every area of the curriculum.
- Taking a critical stance, continuing within a feminist perspective, and providing work in courses where students examine school policies and practices that impact lives of children in urban schools. For example, collect the parents' stories about how their children are not served well on days when their teachers are absent. Many of the preservice students work as substitute teachers, so this is an issue that is particularly relevant to a graduate teacher education program.
- Being creative in course offerings. An example of this creativity is part of our story. A special topics course about Islam and what it means to teachers and schools was proposed. Access to the local community provided the opportunity to recruit a leader of a local mosque who was respected in the community and who would not have been in the traditional academic "expert" circles.
- Preparing practicum supervisors to look at how student teachers use the community and families as resources. They need to ask questions like: Do students invite parents into the classroom? What is the language that preservice students use to describe the children's families? Do the student teachers know about the district's policies that deal with the place of family and community in the curriculum? In the school? In the classroom?

A central positive result of working together was the opening of a new subject for discussion among faculty about teaching practices and issues central to urban education. Part of this collegial conversation led to dispelling the myth that community and parents have little interest in or knowledge of how teachers are trained for urban classrooms. There was also the recognition that the consistent revision and reformation of syllabi (course content) was needed to improve the preparation of teachers for urban classrooms.

There is no question that these issues can have a direct impact on the area that has the closest relationship to the community: clinical or practicum placements. It is

here that the future teachers come to know about classroom and community experiences and integrate that knowledge into future learning experiences. This is the culminating experience in teacher education programs (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). Many of the faculty who supervise student teachers continued these discussions with part-time people who attend a monthly discussion group for supervisors.

Another suggested step was to create an alternative field experience for prepracticum teacher education students. This would help to dispel students' self-reported notions that parents of color and those who may live in poverty do not care about their children. For example, an internship at DSNI or Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) would help the teacher education students to see urban parents as more than abstract concepts by working with and having conversations with families. This would provide opportunities for a deep understanding of the overlapping spheres of influence that contribute to a child's achievement (Epstein, 1995)—the spheres of family, school, and community. This is not possible in a traditional field experience, which tends to be only in schools. It would provide space for collegial conversations among faculty, students, and community members—a conversation about preconceived ideas, assumptions, and prejudices.

OTHER OUTCOMES

Two clear outcomes that arose from this project were: to create a substitute training program with the Boston Public Schools (BPS); and to establish an oral history project with CAPAY.

We were contacted by Najwa Abdul-Tawwab's colleague from the community group, ACORN, to find out how we could join forces in getting the public school system to look at the substitute teacher workforce. After going to a community meeting, we were asked by the Superintendent to meet with the head of BPS Human Resources. Following a series of meetings, the university, through the grant, planned and funded a substitute teacher training workshop. Then with representatives from ACORN, many of whom were parents, we petitioned the district office to start the training. The schools welcomed the ideas and were working on their own plan. All three constituencies worked together to change the policies for substitute recruitment and training and also requested additional funding to do a pilot program. ACORN became part of the invited guest list for future teacher education Department meetings.

Because of the success of the trip to DSNI, many faculty members asked if we could have another community group talk to the Department members in the next semester. We decided to ask the faculty advisor of CAPAY to bring some of the members of his organization, which

is housed in the College, to a meeting. The group who attended consisted of the Director of CAPAY and several high school student members of the organization who talked about their experiences with racism. There were faculty discussion groups following their presentations. Because their stories were so personal and powerful, we decided to ask them to write five case studies describing their experiences in high school that would be available for use by faculty in their college classrooms.

Lessons Learned

We resonate with Stovall and Ayers (2005) in how they described their project, "These lessons are neither manifesto, nor 10 step program, neither blueprint, nor map. Instead, they serve as points of departure and dialogue" (p. 37). Because this study looks at the case holistically, our stories represent a change in the culture of the university and alternative sources in addition to traditional knowledge. In universities, expertise often resides in the professoriate and although there is acknowledgment that teachers in the field possess a practical knowledge, it is rare that respect extends to families and communities—especially those who reside in urban areas. There is much research that points to the importance of connecting teachers with the families of their students (Epstein et al., 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), but there is virtually no research about the importance of families and community in the education of teachers. Knowledge about this important aspect or circle of influence in a child's life and its relationship to the effectiveness of teacher preparation is ignored in the formal inquiries done by university faculty.

Many of our discussions and panel presentations shed light on why this happens. We found there are numerous barriers that prevent collaboration of teacher education programs, community organizations, and parents of students in public schools. We received feedback from both DSNI and ACORN members that the university often appears to be a well defended fortress with little access to anyone from the outside. They felt this was especially true because of the difference in status between community people and faculty's levels of education.

It is difficult to make changes in the culture of a university, and it is even more difficult to institutionalize changes. A big problem and, ultimately the piece that can lead to failure, is that new policies and practices often depend on one or two people and when those individuals are gone, the changes go with them. Making changes permanent, independent of who is in charge and that extend beyond the life of the grant is a constant struggle. Another issue that makes change difficult is that colleges are places where courses are the top priority and schedules are arranged around those classes. The main responsibility of faculty is to teach those classes. Community

organizations meet during regular business hours or in the evening at the same time as classes are scheduled. Just changing meeting times to accommodate community people as well as public school teachers would help to build bridges.

We talked about the values that underlie all of the work we view as important and that drives our work. Again, we think that the overarching objective is to improve the teaching and learning of students in urban schools. We think this can be done through improved instruction of teacher candidates. We further believe it is the responsibility of Colleges of Education to enhance teacher education programs through community bridging—making and sustaining authentic collegial relationships with parents of students in urban schools and community organizations. A summary of our goals in this project, which we tried to implement and that we think are portable to other institutions include:

1. Make institutional and systemic changes in order to build the connection for community input into teacher education instruction and curriculum.
2. Provide a forum for discussion of the expectations and issues surrounding the preparation of teachers for urban children.
3. Make faculty aware of community resources for their inclusion in their courses.
4. Use community organizations to help recruit future teachers.
5. Open up discussions so that faculty can have greater knowledge of community and greater understanding of the home and school life of urban students.
6. Validate and value community members and parents in the training of teachers.
7. Make community members and partnership schools more aware of and part of the underlying values of college of education conceptual framework.

Significance

A feminist perspective includes issues of diversity and power relationships. This case has pointed to problems with barriers that have been set up to recognize academic knowledge over and above practical experiences and common sense. Research shows that it is necessary to include outside experts, families, and community members in the education of their children (Epstein, 1995). We hope that our account highlights the necessity of building on families' cultural and linguistic capital. Further, this case has raised issues of equity, its meaning, and the role educators play in the goal of achieving an understanding of social justice, stated in the College's Conceptual Framework ("Conceptual Framework," 2002). How we infuse it into the curriculum for our students is vital.

Because awareness of, and intentional experiences with, issues of diversity tend to be outside the experiences of many students as they enter their clinical ex-

periences, it is good practice to have them placed in settings where their preconceptions and biases are challenged. It is often difficult to provide positive experiences for students to view activists working toward social justice and see its validity in classroom practices. The non-traditional field experience of placement in a community center would enable students to see what they had previously only experienced through readings and lectures. The partnership with DSNI and ACORN would give prospective teachers opportunities to learn first-hand how an organization works with families and how a community center can help parents actively participate in the education of their children. It would also provide future teachers opportunities to interact with families and find out what it means for them to be involved in their children's education.

When universities and communities are linked, it expands the possibility of the resources typically available to teacher education programs. An urban focus broadens the perspective of the educational goals and content. It also can provide advantages for the faculty who teach the classes in the college program. Teacher educators can establish a professional network that provides opportunities to connect with a different set of "experts" as an aide to their teaching and research. These relationships can provide opportunities to do action research. For example, many of the parents involved in the community organization can provide information about how schools align themselves with home life. As one example, studies about the urban neighborhood and their views of the required achievement tests are needed. An additional benefit to faculty who work in universities is the opportunity to be a vital part of community through volunteer work. This is especially true for faculty who have an interest in social justice. They may perhaps work with the PreK-12 students who will be in the classrooms of their university students.

CONCLUSION

"Those teachers must be willing to travel new highways and byways of teaching and learning to ensure that all of the children they teach experience academic, cultural, and social sciences" (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 9). The new highways for teacher education and colleges of education have to be found in work outside of the university classrooms. The enterprise of preparing people to become teachers for urban classrooms is a complicated business. It takes more than good intentions; it takes expert knowledge from many different sources; it takes valuing children and their lives. Through our work, we received glimpses of different paradigms for doing this work.

In explaining the best outcomes of a feminist approach to research, it is important to note that "for many

feminists, research is obligated to contribute to social change through consciousness-raising or specific policy recommendations” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 251). Therefore, the goal of this inquiry is to be part of a conversation at UMB and also to stimulate a conversation beyond our teacher education program. Because “feminist research strives to create social change” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 240), we think it is important that through a critical perspective, various parts of teacher education programs need to be investigated. We hope to expand the conversation about how to think about these new voices in education and then take steps in making them a part of children’s learning and the preparation of their teachers.

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