

Unpacking the “Urban” in Urban Teacher Education: Making a Case for Context-Specific Preparation

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Abstract

The literature on preparing teachers for urban schools provides a rationale for helping candidates understand the particular cultures of students. However, research has not sufficiently “unpacked” features of the setting that programs can address; nor has it discussed how programs tailor teaching approaches to their specific contexts. Drawing from program descriptions, syllabi, and interviews, we describe the “context-specific” approach of the University of Chicago Urban Teacher Education Program that prepares teachers for Chicago Public Schools and ways that it helps candidates make meaning of that setting. We present a framework to show how the program defines and then teaches as content essential knowledge about a district and its children—including community and neighborhood histories, district curricula, and policies—that must inform teaching and learning. We include examples of context-specific teacher preparation that illustrate how candidates learn about particularities of Chicago Public Schools and apply this knowledge to develop context-specific understandings and practices.

Keywords

teaching context, urban teacher education, preservice education, teacher preparation

Introduction

Amid the complex debates about the nature and purpose of effective teacher education, a critical question continues to surface: Should preparation programs concentrate on preparing teachers for all settings and all students, or should they prepare candidates for specific types of contexts and the students within them? The first position assumes that knowledge about teaching and instructional approaches span boundaries and are essentially universal, and that “good teaching” transcends setting. The latter suggests that teacher preparation programs ought to more closely consider the varying needs of particular localities and tailor curriculum accordingly.

More than 15 years ago, Martin Haberman contended that the prevailing approach—which he referred to as “generic” teacher education—had wrongly persisted. He observed that university-based teacher education typically focused broadly and “generically” on three areas: learners and learning (child development), subject matter, and teaching children with special needs. He argued that rather than address these topics through a generic or universal treatment, teacher education programs should “emphasize the importance of contextual distinctions in the ways children develop, the ways they learn, and the nature of the content they learn” (Haberman, 1996, p. 749). Because university teacher preparation is usually geared toward preparing candidates for work in multiple settings, it does not tend to focus on any particular context.

Consequently, new teachers generally are not fully prepared for complex settings such as urban schools (Haberman, 1996; Helfeldt, Capraro, Capraro, Foster, & Carter, 2009). However, consensus is emerging that urban school districts are host to a variety of complicated, interrelated issues that have implications for aspiring teachers, including racial and ethnic heterogeneity, concentrations of poverty, and large, dense bureaucracies (Chou & Tozer, 2008; Hollins, 2012; Weiner, 2002, 2006). For this reason, an increasing number of teacher education programs are identifying themselves as preparing teachers specifically for urban schools (Carter Andrews, 2009; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Quartz et al., 2004; Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008). Very rarely, however, is the term *urban* explicitly defined (Chou & Tozer, 2008; Weiner, 2002). Even less frequently explored is the way the term *urban* often serves as code for “the conditions of cultural conflict grounded in racism and economic oppression” (Chou & Tozer, 2008, p. 1).

The call for teachers to work in urban schools, although loosely defined, is heightened by the frequently publicized

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problem of the “revolving door” of teachers in high poverty, urban schools (Ingersoll, 2001; Quartz et al., 2008). For example, in Chicago, the 5-year retention rate for beginning teachers is approximately 30% (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009). Relatedly, lower levels of student achievement—which are disproportionately concentrated in urban schools—have spurred national movements such as Teach for America that focus on urban settings. Certainly, all these factors, coupled with new federal funding for teacher residency programs that partner closely with high-needs districts (Berry et al., 2008; Solomon, 2009) have collectively fueled an even stronger rationale for preparing teachers specifically for urban schools.

Exploring the distinctive ways in which *setting* or *place* affect human society has long been a staple of sociology research (e.g., Park, Burgess, McKenzie, & Wirth, 1925). Research in other social sciences takes setting into account, for example, economics (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Krugman, 1991); politics (Hiskey & Bowler, 2005; Shin, 2001); public health policy (McLafferty, 2003; Zenk et al., 2005); and across many geographic scales (DeBlij, 2009; Fotheringham, Brundson, & Charlton, 2002). Indeed, the extant literature points to the importance of acknowledging setting (or a broader context) when planning to teach, but rarely are features of a specific context “unpacked” during the teacher preparation process. The particular features of a setting—for example, community and/or neighborhood demographics, or a city’s historical underpinnings—are not typically addressed during teacher preparation.

Neighborhoods and communities within geographical regions vary demographically and are quite distinct in terms of their history and sociopolitical climate. For instance, Frankenberg’s (2009) analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core Data (CCD) finds that the racial composition of students across different urban districts varies considerably.¹ Similarly, the history of school reform in Chicago differs dramatically from that of New York (Payne, 2008; Ravitch, 2000), just as the social and political history of Boston (Lukas, 1986) differs from Baltimore’s (Robinson, 2005). Yet, we know little about how programs preparing teachers for Chicago are distinct from programs preparing teachers for New York, or how those in Boston differentiate themselves from programs in Baltimore.

Urban schools tend to serve concentrations of students whose experiences with and orientations toward schooling are often different from and sometimes in conflict with mainstream assumptions and attitudes toward schooling (Chou & Tozer, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). This has led to a substantial body of research developed over the past 20 years that examines pedagogy-related issues to support a more urban-focused, less generic approach to teacher preparation. This research has focused on identifying the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching in urban schools (Haberman, 1995b, 1996; Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002); teaching in multicultural settings (Ladson-Billings, 1995;

McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Sleeter, 2008); the design features and core principles for teacher education programs (Banks et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2000); preparing teachers for urban and/or multicultural classrooms (Banks et al., 2005; Haberman, 1995a; Haberman & Post, 1998; Hollins, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner, 1993); and culturally responsive teaching (Gay 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Lee, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Culturally relevant pedagogy is understood as a set of pedagogical strategies that encourage teachers to understand local students, cultures, and geographies (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). However, urban districts that predominantly serve students of color frequently base their curricula, instruction, and expectations on European American culture (Hollins, 2012). Proponents of multicultural education assert the importance of creating relevancy to bridge the space between their students and a given curriculum. In her provocative analysis of some of the challenges facing urban education, however, Weiner (2002, 2006) notes the importance of differentiating the urban school setting and the academic characteristics of the children in that setting—two critical areas that, in her view, have been erroneously conflated. This suggests that integrating multicultural education—which is intended to focus on the particular cultures and experiences of children—into teacher preparation is necessary but perhaps not sufficient. To equip teachers to work effectively in schools that predominantly serve students of color, candidates need to develop the capacity to analyze the particular setting of any school in which they will eventually teach with an in-depth and nuanced understanding.

Finally, considering the ways that programs prepare teachers for specific contexts may be an especially important development in light of growing calls for teacher education to become more grounded in practice (Ball & Forzani, 2009; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). Zeichner (2012) argues that inherent in the focus on research on core practices of teaching, there is also

a danger of narrowing the role of teachers to that of technicians who are able to implement a particular set of teaching strategies, but who do not develop the broad professional vision (deep knowledge of their students and of the cultural contexts in which their work is situated). (p. 379)

These concerns echo Haberman’s critiques of “generic” teacher preparation—making clear the importance of understanding in much more depth how to reach students in a way that attends carefully to questions about culture and context. Examining how teacher preparation programs not only help aspiring teachers learn in ways that are grounded in practice but also develop a nuanced understanding of students and the specific contexts in which they will work may be a critical means of helping develop individuals who are thoughtful educators rather than technicians.

Toward that end, given today's policies, initiatives, and investment in developing programs to prepare teachers for specific settings—and in light of the vibrant discussions about practice-based teacher education—it is vital to investigate the nature of geographically focused teacher preparation efforts in more detail. We need to understand more about the specific features of a city's context that might be the most relevant to aspiring teachers and then consider what it might look like for a program to prepare teachers to learn to enact core teaching practices in context. Once these issues are better understood, teacher preparation programs can create opportunities to help novices learn to work within a district, a community, and its schools.

To explore what it means to be a context-specific teacher education program, we draw from data from a larger longitudinal study. This larger study was designed to examine how three teacher preparation programs (serving urban public, urban Catholic, and Jewish schools) address the challenge of recruiting the very best teachers, preparing them to teach in particular kinds of schools, placing them in challenging environments, and supporting their teaching and careers in teaching (Feiman-Nemser, Tamir, & Hammerness, in press; Hammerness & Matsko, 2010, 2013). We use the term *context-specific teacher preparation* to describe this form of targeted teacher preparation. Our research on these programs suggests that not only do their graduates report being highly motivated and committed to the particular settings for which they were prepared but also they do in fact remain in teaching longer than their peers and further finds that teachers who were not as well prepared for their contexts are more likely to leave (Feiman-Nemser et al., in press; Tamir, 2009, 2013a, 2013b). This larger study has also found that the teaching practices of the teachers who graduated from these programs are particularly attentive to and reflective of the context and to the students and schools in which they teach: Jewish private schools in the northeast, urban Catholic schools around the country, and public schools in Chicago (Tamir & Hammerness, in press).

As a follow-up to this larger study, we wanted to understand more about the specific features of the context that different programs address in attending to their unique context as well as *how* particular programs address these features in their preparation. To examine these questions more deeply, we carried out a descriptive theory building study of the context-specific elements of one of the three teacher preparation programs: University of Chicago's Urban Teacher Education Program (or, UChicago UTEP) in the Urban Education Institute (UEI), which was specifically developed to prepare teachers for Chicago Public Schools. We selected this particular program because it was the most "context-specific" of the three programs we had studied, and because we felt that it would provide the most useful evidence for how teacher education programs target preparation for particular settings. We focused on two research questions:

Table 1. Choosing to Teach Project Sample Summary (N = 30).

	UTEP	ACE	DeLET	Total
Gender				
Female	8	6	8	22
Male	2	4	2	8
Race				
White	7	10	10	27
Person of color	3	0	0	3
Career				
Stayer	6	0	8	14
Mover	4	8	1	13
Leaver	0	2	1	3
Current school (sector and type)				
Urban public	7	—	—	7
Urban charter	2	—	—	2
Other	1	—	—	1
Catholic (low income)	—	5	—	5
Catholic (upper income)	—	5	—	5
Jewish Day School	—	—	10	10

Research Question 1: What contextual features of the large public school district did the program address?

Research Question 2: How did the program help students learn about those layers of context?

Method

The analysis in this article draws on data collected as part of a research study of three teacher education programs that aim to prepare teachers for specific contexts—we call them "context-specific teacher preparation programs."¹ These three programs—the UChicago UTEP, the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) at the University of Notre Dame, and the Day School Leadership Through Teaching (DeLeT) at Brandeis University—are designed around preparing teachers to teach in particular kinds of schools (public schools in Chicago; urban Catholic; and Jewish day schools) with a particular group of students. These programs also work diligently to help prospective teachers tailor instructional curricula and practices to the specific experiences and interests of the students in that context. To understand the targeted nature of the preparation that these programs offered, the research team collected program documents describing programs' vision and curriculum, reviewed material available on program websites, and collected program syllabi and main assignments from the program.² Researchers also conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 30 randomly selected graduates, drawn equally from the three programs (see Table 1 for a description of participants). The interview occurred when participants were first- or second-year teachers. In the interview, teachers were asked to discuss why they chose their teacher preparation programs, the vision of teaching promoted by their program, the influence of the program on their classroom teaching, the way the

program influenced how they viewed the communities and schools in which they taught, and what they envisioned themselves doing in the future (for a list of questions, see interview protocol with teachers—Appendix A). In addition, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the three program directors to learn about how they conceived of preparing teachers for their specific settings (see interview protocol with program directors—Appendix B), as well as focus groups with several program faculty and the program director (see focus group interview protocol with program faculty—Appendix C). All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Finally, we also observed the classroom practices of at least two graduates from all three programs.

Data analysis involved writing thematic summaries and developing a coding scheme that was generated in accordance to initial hypotheses about context-specific preparation as well as the literature on contexts for teaching that was reviewed in this article. Using the qualitative software ATLAS.ti, we applied the coding scheme to the transcripts and developed a series of analytic grids to highlight themes, patterns, and discrepant data. For instance, a list of codes was developed to capture program graduates' discussions of their vision of classroom teaching; their students; and the schools and communities in which they taught. In addition, a list of codes was compiled from teachers and focus group sessions that captured specific levels of contexts (which initially included "classroom," "school," "school type," "school sector"; but as our coding scheme developed we added "district," "state," and "federal"). When no mention of context was made, we coded "no mention."

We selected the data from the UChicago UTEP for discussion in this article because the analysis of the focus groups and interviews showed greater attention to issues of geography and local context than those from the ACE and DeLeT programs. For instance, in the focus group interviews, faculty in the DeLeT program referred multiple times to the Jewish Day Schools context; and in the ACE program, faculty referred to the Catholic urban school context multiple times. However, the ACE and DeLeT faculty interviews revealed extremely few references to specific geographic regions or particular local contexts. In contrast, in interviews with the UChicago UTEP faculty, they referred not only to the context of large urban schools in general but also, multiple times, to the *specific* Chicago context for which they were preparing teachers; to the Chicago Public Schools; to specific neighborhoods in Chicago; and to the state and federal context in which they did their work. Similarly, in interviews with UChicago UTEP graduates, we discovered that in all ten interviews, graduates referred either to preparation to teach in the city of Chicago or in the Chicago Public Schools. In half of the interviews, participants referred to Chicago and the Chicago Public Schools context multiple times. Furthermore, six participants described their preparation for the contexts of specific neighborhoods or regions in Chicago, and two referred to preparation for the state or federal context. In contrast, in interviews with the other two programs,

graduates described in-depth the type of school (Catholic school or Jewish Day Schools) and community (Jewish or Catholic) for which they had been prepared but only occasionally mentioned their geographic contexts. They rarely referred to the district, state, or city in which they were working and were prepared to teach: In fact, four graduates in the ACE and DeLeT programs did not mention any geographic context at all in relationship to their preparation. None of the interviewees in the DeLeT program and only one in the ACE program referred to preparation for particular neighborhoods or communities.³

As a next step, to better isolate how UChicago UTEP prepared teachers for their specific geographical context, we reviewed all program data using content analysis, searching specifically for all references to the Chicago Public Schools, the city of Chicago, its communities and/or neighborhoods, and the federal and state context. We then analyzed interview transcripts, program materials, and documents focusing specifically on the nature of those discussions of federal and state policy, district, neighborhood, and unique classroom and student contexts. Finally, we analyzed aspiring teachers' opportunities to learn about the various types of context in this particular program, by examining transcripts, statements about the program vision, program structure and design, specific assignments, and course syllabi.

An Overview of the UTEP

UChicago UTEP began in autumn 2003 with two goals: to prepare high caliber teachers to enter the Chicago Public Schools and to develop an innovative model for urban teacher preparation. The program explicitly promotes teaching as "intellectual work" that requires nuanced understanding of the context, subject-matter expertise, extensive clinical and pedagogical training, and knowledge of the self. It is framed as a 5-year experience—2 years of preparation that results in a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) and state licensure in one of three pathways (elementary school teaching or secondary school teaching in either mathematics or the biological sciences) followed by 3 years of post-graduation support. The program remains intentionally small; a maximum of 25 candidates are accepted into each certification pathway each year. UChicago UTEP's cohorts comprise undergraduates at the UChicago, graduates of other colleges and universities nationwide, and career changers. All candidates must express a commitment to teaching in Chicago.

The first academic year of the program, called the Foundations year, integrates four strands of work—tutoring, guided fieldwork, academic and methods coursework, and an introspective "soul" strand. In addition to working with children and adolescents in structured, supervised school settings, the curriculum includes systematic opportunities to reflect on one's evolving teacher identity, learn the history of public schooling in Chicago, and participate in facilitated discussions about privilege, oppression, and equity. This structure provides multiple entry points into the work of

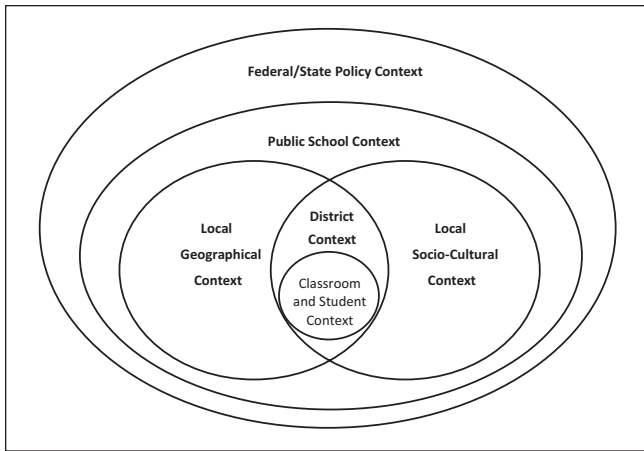


Figure 1. Features of context-specific teacher preparation.

Note. This figure illustrates the layers of context that are explicitly addressed in the Urban Teacher Education Program, and identified as important factors in the development and practice of high-quality classroom instruction.

being a public school teacher in Chicago schools and grounds candidates in knowledge about various aspects of Chicago’s context.

During the next phase of the program, candidates spend a summer assisting in a summer school program while taking methods coursework and then become immersed in a year-long clinical residency. UChicago UTEP’s teaching residents are hosted and mentored by carefully selected classroom teachers who serve as the program’s Clinical Instructors. During the final summer of the program, candidates complete their final course, taught by the program’s induction coaches, to smoothly transition candidates into their own classrooms. A major focus of the program’s post-graduation support is developing alumni to be classroom-based teacher-leaders and future Clinical Instructors for the program (Hammerness and Matsko, 2013).

UChicago UTEP’s Context-Specific Approach to Teacher Preparation

As described in the “Method” section, our analysis of UChicago UTEP was designed to help us to examine how a program can specifically organize itself around a particular geographical context, what aspects of the context it treats, and how it helps new teachers learn about that context. In response to those questions, we share the conceptual framework that emerged out of our literature review and analysis of the data (see Figure 1). The framework represents the features of context that we found UChicago UTEP addressed in the development and enactment of high-quality classroom instruction in Chicago Public Schools. Indeed, through our analysis, we learned that in comparison with the other programs we studied, UChicago UTEP seemed to treat context as *geographical*, incorporating attention to the specific historical, political, social, and even physical features of the specific place. This framework illustrates the multidimensional aspects of

UChicago UTEP’s context-specific focus, which encompasses the racial, economic, and cultural particularities of Chicago, as well as localized knowledge about routines, procedures, and curriculum of Chicago Public Schools. It also sheds light on the ways in which the program attends to other features of the context, which include the larger federal and state policy context in which the city’s district and schools operate—features that were far less salient in our analysis of the other programs. Our analysis suggests that these layers of context were nested, overlapping, and often interrelated in programs’ day-to-day work. For ease of exposition, however, we describe them in the framework as distinct categories.

The outermost sphere of influence depicted in the framework points to the opportunities UChicago UTEP offers its candidates to learn about the “federal/state policy context,” which refers to the broader educational policy landscape within which the Chicago Public Schools operate. Among other themes, this contextual layer surfaces the challenges of achieving equitable education when low expectations for students of color pervade in urban settings (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2003, 2011; Sleeter 2008). It also includes discussion about practices associated with intensive standardized testing and how such testing may threaten teaching for equity (Sleeter, 2008; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011).

The next layer, the “public school” context, refers to candidates’ opportunities to explore how historical features of American public schooling affect present day institutional structures as well as perceptions about the profession (Tyack, 1974). This category also draws on work by teacher educators such as Weiner (1993, 2002, 2006) and Hollins (2012), who specifically highlight broad characteristics of American urban schools that new teachers must understand.

The “local geographical context” layer moves this discussion into features of the setting of Chicago. It captures candidates’ exposure to the history, demographics, and cultural and physical landscape of the city’s ethnic neighborhoods and as a whole. This aspect of context draws on work by scholars who argue for community-based field experiences to help aspiring teachers develop their commitment, understanding, and ability to teach in settings with diverse student populations (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Buck & Skilton-Sylvester, 2005; McDonald et al., 2011; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996).

Progressing inward, the “local socio-cultural context” layer refers to opportunities to learn about the many ways that culture has an impact on learning. This layer reflects the work of a range of scholars who argue that teachers must understand and respect cultural differences among all those in the classroom—not only teacher to student but also student to student—to be effective (e.g., Au, 1980; Gay, 2000; Grant & Secada, 1990; Irvine 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2001, 1994, 1995; Lee, 1995; Milner, 2003, 2011; Sleeter, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999).

The “district context” layer refers to the policies, regulations, and mandates that public school teachers must adhere

to, which, in the case of the UTEP, is the Chicago Public School system. This layer also includes the history of the district—an especially relevant category of context in this era of rapid policy change and school reform.

At the core of the framework is the “classroom and student context.” This aspect of context refers to all the opportunities UChicago UTEP candidates have to develop the capacity to learn about the strengths, needs, resources, culture, and educational background of each student they will teach—underscoring the program’s value on treating each pupil as a unique learner. This category of context draws on the work of scholars who have looked closely at classroom interactions and dynamics and the nature of teaching in diverse settings (Delpit 1986, 1988; Lee, 1995, 2007).

Federal/State Policy Context

UChicago UTEP recruits and attracts candidates who are invested in social justice⁴ and teaching for equity. Through coursework, candidates explore the notion of teaching as political and moral action, such that even students who do not consider themselves especially political seem to develop an awareness of the connections across teaching, adherence to moral principles, and politics. One UChicago UTEP graduate remarked, “We learned about the extent to which kids are subjected to things that just shouldn’t be happening to kids . . . it just seems like our [country’s] motives are completely amiss.” Learning about policy and politics helps students begin to understand the complicated array of challenges associated with achieving equitable education for all students.

The study of landmark court cases, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*; significant federal initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind; and debates around standardized testing, school finances, and the movement toward national standards and assessments, as noted in program syllabi, inform UChicago UTEP’s candidates’ policy perspectives and the ways in which they may heighten challenges inherent in teaching for equity (i.e., Sleeter, 2008; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011). Conversations about politics and education inevitably flow into discussions about the immediate context of the city of Chicago. While our analysis of the other two programs illustrated attention to some of the same issues of equity and access, the degree of attention to these issues as well as the specific treatment of the ways that larger national debates played out in Chicago was unique to the program. For example, candidates learn about the powerful organizations and individuals engaging in advocacy and local education reporting in required course assignments in the Foundations year of the program. In this way, aspiring teachers become informed about issues pertinent to educators in the city’s school district—and learn the value of remaining so. Candidates’ exploration into education policy and politics continues into the second year, when as residents, they see, for instance, the intended and unintended consequences of

shifting accountability structures that are emblematic of the current education environment.

The Public School Context

During their first year in UChicago UTEP, candidates begin defining and exploring prevailing research-based characteristics of urban public schools. These discussions help aspiring teachers understand the origins of what are typically named as macro-level constraints of working within large urban schools districts such as inadequate resources; limited teacher influence in school wide and classroom decision making; teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001); and the disproportionate number of students labeled with special needs. Our analysis of program syllabi revealed that candidates read contrasting portraits of urban schools, in particular, those captured in works by Jonathan Kozol (2005), Charles Payne (2008), and Mike Rose (1995). At the completion of the 9-month Foundations year, candidates enter the Residency year better armed to experience the local urban school landscape. As one UChicago UTEP faculty member put it, “The reality of urban education is that we have to produce teachers who are capable of functioning in this environment of urgency; but we also want them to come away with a larger vision of what is possible.”

Local Geographic Context

The city of Chicago is recognized as one of the most segregated cities in the nation (Rankin, 2009), with recent gentrification exacerbating its pattern of class isolation. Consequently, segregation in housing, schools, and virtually every other aspect of the Midwestern city’s life is the backdrop against which UChicago UTEP graduates will teach. UTEP places most of its residents in schools located in communities that predominantly comprise African American and Latino populations. Shifting demographics have had profound influences on residential and economic patterns (and political agendas) that have affected the city’s public school district, including decisions around school openings and closings. Analysis of program syllabi suggest that UChicago UTEP candidates are required to read scholarly work about these issues as they pertain to Chicago, to develop informed perspectives (e.g., Lipman & Haines, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; W. J. Wilson, 1996). After studying the geographical aspects of the entire city during their first year in the program, during their second year, UChicago UTEP residents complete their residency teaching in two different neighborhoods. As part of this experience, residents examine similarities and variations in each setting and analyze the impact of locality on the school environment. One graduate reflects on this aspect of the program’s emphasis:

Its devoted to sort of weeding out what are the social issues [in the area], why do these schools look the way they do . . . how does the segregation around schools play out, how do city schools differ from suburban schools?

The degree of focus on the geography and history of the city, in which candidates spend considerable time reading research specifically undertaken in Chicago and about Chicago, was again unique to UChicago UTEP.

Local Socio-Cultural Context

UChicago UTEP candidates gain experience with specific south and west side communities of Chicago that have a large population of African American or Latino families; these are communities where they will likely be employed. Such exposure to the richness, traditions, as well as the diversity within the communities prepares candidates to establish respectful and effective relationships with families and students. In reference to learning about students' communities, an UChicago UTEP interviewee noted, "it made me realize how important it is to try to be a part of the community, or try to understand where the kids are coming from, and really building a relationship with the parents and the community." The social-political context candidates study includes teasing out nuanced relationships between culture and learning—a vital tool for them to acquire as they prepare to teach in Chicago (e.g., Au, 1980; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001, 1994, 1995; Lee, 1995; Perry, Claude, & Asa, 2003; Sleeter, 2008; Tatum, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). In our data about UChicago UTEP, there were multiple references to specific communities and neighborhoods; we found little attention in the ACE or DeLeT programs to this layer of context. Candidates also explore the preconceived notions they bring to the program, as well as dominant narratives about "urban" communities—which tend to be fraught with deficit ideology (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). During the first Foundations year, a review of program syllabi indicates assignments and activities that actively help candidates debunk misconceptions associated with low-income communities of color by examining how systems of privilege and oppression manifest at the structural level. The UChicago in which UTEP resides, for example, is surrounded by low-income African American neighborhoods. A program graduate recalled the dissonance she and some of her peers experienced when studying the effects of job loss on that community: "Being at the UChicago makes you aware of the situation around you . . . ideas were (unintentionally) perpetuated that these were dangerous communities . . . communities you should not enter." Forced to reconcile conflicting narratives about the local surroundings, the student concluded that she "just had to reject" prior, more simplistic generalizations about urban communities after participating in the program, and develop more nuanced perspectives. In their second year, UChicago UTEP residents participate in a yearlong seminar that provides a forum to share what they are observing in their classrooms and learning about socio-cultural context. A graduate recalled how the program

presented an image of parents that has a definite basis in reality . . . [M]ost of the parents that I've come across want their children to succeed . . . but they work two jobs [making scheduling a conference with them challenging] . . . so it's sort of preparing me for those realities.

Context of the District

Like many of its counterparts across the country, Chicago Public Schools is a large school system that primarily serves students and families of color whose income falls below the poverty line. Despite many similarities, large urban districts across the country can differ profoundly in terms of curricula, standards, expectations, and ways of operating. For example, the Chicago Public Schools operates under mayoral control and has an unusually strong central office, but hiring first-time teachers is a function held by school principals. A novice entering the district must understand such governance structures, as well as the city's complicated narrative about school reform, which includes closing neighborhood schools while opening new charter schools and engaging in school "turnarounds." By visiting a variety of schools across the city through the program's guided fieldwork strand, UChicago UTEP candidates become familiar with the array of public school options in the city.

Prospective teachers who have grappled with details of localized context will better understand the tensions inherent in how significant decisions are made. As one faculty member noted, "Residents receive 'CPS 101' throughout the program as a way of understanding the ins and outs of navigating the system to find useful resources." If the program's mission is to prepare students to enter the city's public school system, the data suggested that the faculty believe that awareness about structural details such as these will promote candidates' success. In comparison, the other programs did not attend to particular districts or school locales; UChicago UTEP program provided far more opportunities to learn about the district.

Context of Classrooms and Students

The classroom is where UChicago UTEP candidates learn about instructional practice. Required clinical work at a campus of the UChicago Charter School and other partner schools creates a common "text" for candidates to become familiar with some of the program's favored instructional approaches—such as balanced literacy. Knowledge of local curricular expectations and practices puts graduates on a much firmer footing when they enter their classrooms as teachers of record. Because schoolchildren themselves are key to context, UChicago UTEP faculty want candidates to understand relationships between students and teacher, their respective cultures, and the subject matter—all of which converge in the classroom. Candidates are taught to "see" individual pupils by developing astute observation skills and

awareness of the various lenses through which their behavior is interpreted. Our data suggested that UTEP graduates frequently noted the importance of knowing their students individually, as the following quote illustrates:

Teaching children is really about knowing the kids and being able to tailor what you're doing to help meet their needs and to push them to the next level . . . and to look at the [whole] student instead of just looking at them from a deficit point of view, [and] looking at what they can do.

Additive frameworks such as “funds of knowledge” are explicitly taught in UChicago UTEP to help candidates acknowledge and build from the multiple strengths in students’ families and communities (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992, as noted in program syllabi). In the same way, candidates create analytical cases about a teacher and a school. Through these assignments, generalizations about “urban” students, teachers, and schools are dismantled; what is instead emphasized is the relationship between the individual and the forces in the environment and the ways that they act on and react to one another. While the other programs we studied did include assignments such as student observation, the assignments to study a teacher and a school were unique to UChicago UTEP, again underlining this program’s attention to the specific geographical context.

More broadly, opportunities to understand classroom context are embedded in candidates’ learning about culturally relevant pedagogy. Making curriculum relevant and engaging to students by building on their own knowledge, interests, and experiences receive great emphasis in the program. According to one faculty member, “we want teachers to find out what kids are interested in and tailor the curriculum to meet those interests.” At the same time, UTEP candidates understand that cultural relevance is only one deciding factor in instructional material. One graduate elaborates,

[Just because my students say] . . . we want to read about 50 Cent . . . doesn't mean that I'm going to structure my unit around 50 Cent or some other rapper. I'm only willing to use [material that is] useful in their learning . . . and tied to goals.

This observation highlights the complex decision making in which UChicago UTEP candidates must engage, relative to the classroom contexts in which they are working.

From “Universal” to “Context-Specific” Teacher Preparation: Two Key Assignments

Our research illuminates what the staff of the UTEP identified as important contextual aspects of Chicago Public Schools. A focus group interview with faculty revealed that in addition to valuing knowledge about various features of the local urban context, they shared beliefs about what effective teachers must know and be able to do. Indeed, while

faculty advocate that “the core of urban education” for teachers is a conceptual understanding of “who you are in relation to the students and . . . the context in which this instruction takes place,” they also espouse a commitment to an approach to instruction that values constructivism and inquiry. These instructional practices, in and of themselves, are not specific to urban schools or to children in Chicago; nor do staff suggest that particular instructional strategies are more suited to lower income communities of color than others. In fact, many of their program practices actively counter what Haberman (1991) describes as the “pedagogy of poverty.” UChicago UTEP sets the stage for translating universal practices into specific ways of knowing and doing in the local district schools by attending to context—from urban-specific, to city-specific, and eventually to school, classroom and student-specific.

Two key assignments—the school study and the interactive read-aloud—demonstrate how UChicago UTEP enacts context-specific teacher preparation. The first assignment describes how candidates solidify a broad understanding of a neighborhood school. The latter illustrates how an otherwise universal instructional practice is tailored for the district’s context and classrooms.

The school study. The school study is a first-year capstone project. According to the assignment description, students are to “research, in small groups, a district school and explore the complicated ways that its leadership, organization, and ethos affect teachers, students, families, and learning.” Students must actively seek to understand the reciprocal relationship between the school and its local community. The project requires candidates to synthesize what they learn over a full quarter in their academic, fieldwork, and introspective soul strands. The charge to integrate learning across strands trains candidates to consider multiple layers of context (as depicted in our framework illustration) as they analyze teaching and learning in a school.

Groundwork for the project is laid early in the year when candidates are asked to reflect on their own early schooling experiences. They write about the organization of the elementary schools they attended as children, describing them in terms of strengths, weaknesses, core values, demographics, and available resources and extracurricular activities. This initial assignment uncovers the diverse backgrounds of the cohort and provides a basis for comparing the schools that candidates will visit during guided field experiences. Reflecting on seminal school experiences also sets the stage for an ongoing exploration of teacher identity that begins when candidates give voice to their basic assumptions about schooling within the safety of their cohort.

To complement this shared, reflective exchange, candidates are assigned readings that examine how school organization affects teachers and students (per course syllabi). These readings first explore the purposes of and policies associated with public schooling (i.e., Labaree, 2000; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1995) and then move to a specific

focus on the city (i.e., Lipman & Haines, 2007; Payne, 2008; Shipp, 2006). Students learn about the trajectory of Chicago's school reform efforts beginning in the mid-1980s and the structures that emerged, for instance, decentralized hiring and budgeting powers for principals and the neighborhood schools' governance structure. Finally, candidates are introduced to the research conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which developed a conceptual framework for looking at the Chicago Public Schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2009). Candidates use this "5 Essentials" framework to complement their analysis and complete their school study.

The school study assignment intentionally broadens and complicates students' perceptions of classroom, schools, and relationships with their surrounding communities and helps candidates recognize that teaching and learning does not occur in a vacuum. As noted in our framework, a variety of political, socio-cultural, and school-based forces affect a teacher's work and capacity to be effective. From the perspective of UChicago UTEP staff, candidates need to be explicitly taught to recognize the intended (and unintended) effects of these forces early in the preparation process in order to teach equitably. A program graduate describes the kind of data she and her peers collected: "We got to interview teachers at the school, the principal, [and] parents. . . . The study helped me understand all the factors that are involved in [that particular] urban school." For example, interviewed teachers may shed light on issues related to resources, working conditions, or accountability structures, or the latest district initiative. Parents often discuss their communities, share views about feelings of access to the school, and consider the school in relation to the community it serves. Candidates analyze their data in light of the themes they have studied. The final result is a comprehensive portrait of a school and its surrounding community.

The school study allows candidates to begin to see the ways that geographical and socio-cultural contexts, as well as classroom contexts, have content. Situated within a larger conversation about urban schools and educational policy, the school study brings into focus a complicated array of factors that influence the work of teaching. The study also reveals the uniqueness of each school and serves as a powerful (and personal) counter narrative to generalizations that exist about urban schooling.

The interactive read-aloud. Preparing candidates to teach schoolchildren how to read, write, and communicate is inarguably a universal focus of teacher education. However, in Chicago, this core concentration takes on a special urgency, given the number of students who enter school with language experiences that are different from the language demands required in schooling. UChicago UTEP therefore emphasizes the teaching of high-quality, culturally informed instructional practices based on a balanced literacy framework. One goal of the program is to prepare candidates to teach literacy across the curriculum and

provide highly differentiated instruction to the students they will have—a necessity, because a wide range of reading levels and disparities is the norm in most district classrooms. For these reasons, UChicago UTEP particularly emphasizes the interactive read-aloud, an instructional practice that can be used in virtually all content areas (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006). Recent work on core practices suggests that an interactive read-aloud meets the criteria of a "high leverage practice" (Grossman, Hammerness, et al., 2009; McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanagh, 2013). To demonstrate how a core practice such as an interactive read-aloud becomes city/district-specific in the program, we deconstruct the manner in which candidates learn to enact it.

The format of the interactive read-aloud appears on the surface to be relatively straightforward: Teachers read from a conceptually accessible text that ideally is slightly above the class grade/reading level. The teacher periodically stops reading to model authentic responses and to ask questions that encourage the class to engage with and think about the text's meaning.

Candidates begin learning about literacy instruction early in the program when they look inward to their own schooling experiences. A class assignment asks candidates to recall how they learned to read and the role that being read-aloud played in their school and personal lives. This process generally uncovers the privileges that UChicago UTEP students did or did not have in terms of access to print-rich environments, early childhood schooling, and other stimuli that may have sparked or hindered their enthusiasm and interest in reading—a useful point of reference for understanding their biases about the process of learning to read. Candidates are then asked to interview a student they tutor about early reading memories and experiences and internalize the differences the interview uncovers.

Our examination of syllabi revealed that before candidates learn the specific practice of a read-aloud, they read texts that provide them with insights about language features that are relevant to their neighborhood and school contexts related to African American English and/or English as a second language. They are also asked to engage in a variety of asset-based activities that help them look at their students' strengths. One particular experience they have is conducting home-visits, which begin to inform them of the students' not only familial but also neighborhood and community stories. Together, this knowledge and experience—drawing on content from the local geographic, socio-cultural, district, and student contexts in our framework—inform text and instructional strategy selection.

Candidates then begin to learn about the practice by viewing video depicting a high-quality enactment of an interactive read-aloud in classrooms with students from CPS classrooms and begin to articulate its characteristics. Program staff also model the interactive read-aloud, including their decisions around book selection—highlighting relevance, development of teaching points, and follow-up activities.

During visits to classrooms, candidates are required to observe and document teachers reading to children and collect examples of student–teacher dialogue, with particular emphasis on questioning techniques. Attention to the universal practice of read-aloud is thereby coupled with understanding specific classroom conditions.

Classroom observation is followed by formal instruction. Our review of the literacy methods syllabi revealed that candidates learn about the history of reading curriculum shifts in the district, as well as the mechanics of leading an effective interactive read-aloud. Candidates then prepare to conduct an interactive read-aloud in the classroom where they are assigned to work during the year. Once the course instructor approves the lesson plan, candidates develop a detailed script for a lesson. They rehearse with their cohort and incorporate suggestions for improving the lesson with their specific students in mind. Candidates working with second language learners, for example, are taught to emphasize opportunities to engage in discussion and discourse to support oral language development. As a final course assessment, candidates plan and create two follow-up read-aloud lessons that incorporate children’s learning as well as the feedback obtained during the first cycle. Candidates then revisit their read-aloud lesson series during their second year in the program when, as residents in a new district classroom, they develop a 3-week literacy unit tailored to account for the interests, experiences, strengths, and needs of the children in front of them, and assume responsibility for instruction.

Classroom observations of graduates of UChicago UTEP suggest that this high leverage practice of the interactive read-aloud remains a mainstay of their classroom teaching (Tamir & Hammerness, in press). Although only a small number of graduates were observed for this study, we saw each graduate enacting the read-aloud in their classroom in ways that reflected attention to questioning, paraphrasing, and helping students with specific questions around vocabulary or concepts; more than half referred to this learning experience in their interviews. One graduate explained that she had found the interactive read-aloud such a useful strategy that she had adopted some aspects of it to help her work with another subject area:

I was taught [how]to work with kids at their level, so you’re hitting specific skills for each group, and so I feel like that’s a really good way to teach reading and to make sure that what you’re doing is pertinent to other kids, so I decided to try to use that to figure out how to teach math.

This meticulous process of teaching a central literacy instructional practice draws intentional lines between student, context, and practice in a way that informs candidates’ pedagogy more broadly and serves as an important example of how the UTEP blends the imperative to teach content and context. Indeed, it also demonstrates a powerful approach to teaching a core practice—the interactive read-aloud—while

attending to the nuances and unique nature of a particular setting.

Implications and Conclusion

The demands associated with working in urban schools continue to be more challenging than ever before. In response, a growing number of programs—university-based, alternative, and residency—are trying to find models to prepare teachers for urban school settings. For this reason, we need to push for new understandings about how teacher education defines for itself and for aspiring teachers *what* kinds of knowledge must be attended to and *how* such knowledge can be experienced, such that specifics of those urban settings are addressed (Bowman & Gottesman, 2013; McDonald et al., 2013). As the rich conversations around practice-based teacher education suggest, however, important questions persist. These center in particular on how teacher educators can help new teachers learn about teaching practices, while still attending to foundational knowledge not only about teaching and learning but also about culture and place (Bowman & Gottesman, 2013; see also Zeichner, 2012).

We deconstruct the UChicago UTEP to demonstrate how it defines and attends to layers of contextual knowledge that it deems important for teachers to know—in relationship to learning specific practices of teaching. UChicago UTEP’s attention to the *particulars* of its local surroundings begins to illuminate how a teacher education might move beyond a focus on generic notions of urban teacher preparation and begin to engage its aspiring teachers in the content of the specific context. Through this research, we demonstrate how “context” extends well beyond one’s immediate physical surroundings or “setting” and in so doing, we illustrate how a simple understanding of context can be expanded to include the state and federal policy context, the neighborhood, the district, and the urban public school classroom writ large.

This more robust understanding of context serves another purpose: to unpack the “urban” in urban teacher education, and thereby demonstrates how knowledge about specific features of the classroom, school, community, district, and federal contexts all influence teaching and learning at the classroom level. Such a focus, coupled with an emphasis on high-quality instructional practices, creates a “context-specific” design for localized and nuanced teacher preparation—quite different in focus even from programs that prepare teachers for specific types of schools or school sectors. Analysis of program documents, assignments, and syllabi points to multiple entry points for candidates to grapple with various aspects of the Chicago context. Our analysis shows how UChicago UTEP helps its candidates adjust and shape pedagogies that are otherwise deemed generic or universal to the specifics of Chicago’s milieu.

As we examined key aspects comprising the setting of this district’s context addressed by the program, our research led to the development of a framework that articulates the

features of context-specific preparation that matter for new teachers preparing to enter the workforce in this district. The framework we offer, which is anchored in the research of multicultural education, begins to identify the broad array of factors that comprise context and hold important knowledge for new teachers. Opportunities to learn about these aspects of context may help deter candidates from forming simplistic generalizations about districts, cities, or geographic regions, and enable them to move beyond cultural stereotypes and dig into the nuances of local schools and classrooms that at the end of the day will inform their teaching. UChicago UTEP faculty note that their work is continually “in progress” as they work to stay current and responsive to neighborhood and district level shifts—changes to the teacher evaluation system, key curricula, or demographics, as examples. As the context changes, so does the program’s attention to what matters. In this manner, we begin to see that UChicago UTEP’s context-specific approach to teacher preparation offers a pathway toward learning to be an effective teacher in Chicago—a far more nuanced approach for becoming an *urban* schoolteacher.

The framework that characterizes the program’s approach to teacher preparation may be a useful tool for other programs that intend to prepare teachers for particular settings. Although this particular analysis is focused on the program’s targeted preparation for Chicago’s urban context, the framework could readily be applied to other urban cities across the country to help teacher educators and candidates identify the salient features (e.g. Hammerness & Axelrod, 2013). We can envision how the framework might also apply to a rural or suburban school setting in a particular geographic locale, by drawing on the content in that particular context. Furthermore, in the Choosing to Teach study, we have elaborated how context-specific preparation looks when focused on a parochial school system rather than the urban public one depicted in this analysis. However, in the other programs we studied, other important contextual features such as school sector and faith community (Catholic or Jewish) became more salient while the layers such as district and state context (that were critical in this analysis) were less relevant.

At the same time, our findings could raise new questions and possible limitations about the very notion of context-specific preparation. For instance, some scholars might wonder whether targeted and localized preparation has some drawbacks. Given that teachers often do not remain in the same school—particularly in urban districts (Ingersoll, 2001; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002)—would teachers prepared with local specificity be less successful if they move to a different city? Others might say that characteristics of good teaching—careful observation, reflection, and thoughtful instructional decision making, to name a few—will carry over regardless of where they occur. However, we argue that the benefits of a context-specific approach outweigh these or other potential objections. While it is true that teachers may learn how to enact a universal practice such as the interactive

read-aloud without regard to setting, through a context-specific approach, aspiring teachers are also learning what it means to use knowledge about the environment affecting the child to tailor instruction—an important teaching tool for any setting. Our contention is that a context-specific approach to teacher preparation may better enable new teachers to access knowledge about a broad spectrum of context, which in the long term will sharpen and fine tune their teaching. Furthermore, evidence is emerging that teachers prepared for particular contexts have higher retention rates (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Quartz et al., 2004; Quartz et al., 2008; see also Tamir, 2009, 2013a, 2013b). It may be that such preparation enables teachers to more successfully navigate their contexts (and know how to learn about them) supporting them in their work and careers.

The field of teacher education is undergoing a new directional shift that calls on teacher educators to reframe the ways that they teach practice, as well as re-designing programs that continue to advance agendas around equity and social justice (McDonald et al., 2013). Examining how teacher preparation programs can accomplish the goals of teaching in ways that are grounded in practice but also manage to sustain a focus on the context of teaching is critical. An approach that values the content embedded within context may help teachers enact the kind of teaching practices that may matter the most in teaching—understand their students better; develop stronger working relationships with colleagues, parents, and students; learn how to navigate public schools effectively; and ultimately, teach in more powerful and equitable ways.

Appendix A

Program Graduate Interview protocol

Decisions to teach

1. Why is teaching important to you?
2. Tell me about your decision to teach.
 - a. How did you arrive at this choice?
 - b. Have you ever considered other career directions, aside from teaching?
3. Is there something about your personal beliefs or values that influenced your decision to teach in urban public/urban Catholic/Jewish day schools?
4. Is there something about your religious beliefs that influenced your decision to teach?
5.
 - a. Catholic teachers: Did your being Catholic influence you in any way?
 - b. Jewish teachers: Did your being Jewish influence you in anyway?
 - c. Urban public teachers and ALL: Did anything else influence you [draw on answer to Q1]

Possible Probes: childhood, childhood environment, own schooling, family

6. What did you hope to achieve by becoming a teacher?
7. What do you now hope to achieve by becoming a teacher?
8. How long do you think you'll stay in teaching?

Decisions to teach in Catholic, Jewish, and public urban schools

1. Tell me about your decision to teach in a Catholic/Jewish/Urban school.
2. Can you see yourself teaching in another kind of school? Please explain.

Teaching practice

1. What is your image of good teaching?
2. If I were to observe you in your classroom, what would I see you doing that fits your image of good teaching?
3. How does being a teacher fit with how you see yourself as a person?
 - a. Catholic teachers: How does being a teacher fit with your being Catholic?
 - b. Jewish teachers: How does being a teacher fit with your being Jewish?
 - c. Urban teachers: How does being a teacher fit with your commitments to social justice?

Teacher education

1. Did/Does your teacher education program have an image of good teaching in a Jewish day school/Catholic school/Urban school?
 - a. How would you describe that image?
 - b. How did you learn about that image in your program?
2. How does that image fit with your own vision of good teaching?
3. In what specific ways has the program influenced your classroom teaching?
4. In what specific ways has the program influenced your interactions with your students?
5. In what specific ways has the program influenced your interactions with the teachers in your school?
 - a. Who are your important colleagues?
6. In what specific ways has the program influenced your views of your students' parents and the community in which you teach?
7. In what ways has the program influenced your definition of yourself (or how you see yourself) as a teacher?
 - a. Can you be specific?
8. Jewish teachers: In what ways has the program influenced your sense of yourself as Jew? Catholic teachers: In what ways has the program influenced your sense of yourself as a Catholic? Urban teachers: In what ways has the program influenced your sense of

yourself as someone teaching as a means of achieving social justice?

9. Did/Does the program's philosophy or mission fit with your own values and beliefs? In what ways? Are there ways in which it doesn't fit?
 - a. Jewish teachers: Did/Does the program's stance toward Judaism fit your own view of Judaism? In what ways does it fit? Are there ways in which it doesn't?
 - b. Catholic teachers: Did/Does the program's stance toward Catholicism fit your own view of Catholicism? In what ways does it fit? Are there ways in which it doesn't?
 - c. Urban teachers: Did/does the program stance toward social justice fit your own views?

School contexts

1. What is the image of good elementary school teaching promoted by your school?
 - a. How do you know?
2. In what ways does your school enable you to teach that way?
3. Does the school's image of good teaching fit with your image of good teaching?
4. Does the school's philosophy or mission fit with your own values or beliefs? How does the fit or lack of fit affect you?
 - a. Jewish teachers: Does the school's image of Judaism fit with yours? In what ways does the fit or lack of fit affect you as a Jew?
 - b. Catholic teachers: Does the school's image of Catholicism fit with yours? In what ways does the fit or lack of fit affect you as a Catholic?
 - c. Urban teachers: Does the school's image (the school you are currently placed in) of appropriate urban education fit with yours? How does the fit or lack of fit affect you?
5. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me or any questions I can answer for you?

Appendix B

Program Directors and Core Faculty Interview Protocol

Vision of good teaching

1. We're interested in understanding better the kind of teaching you are trying to foster.
 - a. Who on your staff can best articulate this vision of good teaching?
 - b. Is there something in writing that describes this kind of teaching?
 - c. Where in the program do students encounter this vision of good teaching? How do you help students get inside this vision of good teaching?

Where if at all do students see this kind of teaching practiced?

Where do they work the knowledge and skills to teach in this way?

How do you assess their learning?

2. Who else should we talk to about the program's vision of good teaching, where students learn about it and where they learn to enact it?

Context

3. In part, this is a study of "context-specific" teacher education.

So one thing we would like to know is how UChicago UTEP/DeLeT/ACE defines the school context it is preparing students to teach in?

4. Where in the program do students learn about this context?
5. Are there specific courses or seminars where this is focal?

Where do teachers learn . . .

- a. About the students?
- b. About their families? their communities?
- c. About teaching in this kind of school?
- d. About the challenges of teaching in this kind of school?

6. Who is the best person to talk about how the field placements (including internship) work and contribute to this goal?
7. For ACE and UChicago UTEP program directors—Where in the program (or how?) do you work on the challenge of majority teachers teaching poor, minority students?
8. Whom should we talk to about this matter of preparing students to teach in urban public/urban Catholic/Jewish elementary schools? what it means, what students need to learn, what the challenges are, and so on?

Identity

9. We are also interested in how programs help students form their identity as teachers or as teachers in urban schools?
 - a. If we wanted to learn more about this issue of program impact on teachers' identity, who would we talk to? What aspects of the program should we study?

Career aspirations

10. What does the program expect its graduates to do? In other words, what career aspirations do you have for your graduates?
11. Where do students learn about what the program wants them to do or hopes they will do when they finish the program?
12. Where would you like to see your graduates in 5 years? Beyond that?

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

Ideal Teacher

1. What is your image of an "ideal Program graduate"?
2. If you think about a 10 year time span, can you describe two possible career trajectories that would fit your program's image of an ideal graduate's career?

Ideal Teaching

3. How would you describe the kind of teaching your program is trying to help graduates learn?

In other words, would you say your program has a *particular vision* of good teaching?

Probe if we hear different visions: It sounds like we are hearing some different visions of good teaching. Would you say that the program doesn't necessarily have one vision of good teaching but that there are many visions of what good teaching is in the program?

Follow-up probe if we hear the same visions: Are there some minority views or different views here?

4. Is this a vision of good teaching for any context or good teaching in an urban environment?

Context-Specific Preparation

5. I know that UChicago UTEP is preparing teachers for urban public schools. What are some of the most important things you want your students to know about that context?
6. Where are the most important places in the program where students learn about that context and about teaching there?
7. What makes this "urban" teacher preparation?

Leadership/School Change

8. UChicago UTEP is up-front about wanting to change public schools. What role do you see your graduates playing in school change?

9. Does UChicago UTEP use any particular criteria to choose schools for its student internships and graduate placements?
10. Does UChicago UTEP prepare teachers to work in schools as they ought to be or as they are?
11. [if leadership hasn't come up] What kind of leadership roles do you see your graduates playing?

Probe: [refer to career trajectories] Usually we don't think about newer teachers being leaders. How does your program feel about them taking on that role; and how do you feel about the benefits and challenges of that work?

Professionalism

12. In the past several decades there has been a push to professionalize teaching by policy makers and teacher educators who were calling to establish more rigorous standards and expectations that would help define the professional practice of teaching. In what ways is your program responding to these calls?

Probe: Do you use the language of professionalism? What does it mean in this context?

Key Program Ideas.

13. Another challenge most teacher education programs face is limited time. Given this constraint, what are the things you *most* want to make sure your students learn?

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Authors' Note

For more information about our project and related materials, please refer to our website: <http://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/research/choosing/index.html>. Our upcoming book, tentatively titled, *Inspiring Teaching: Context Specific Teacher Preparation for the 21st Century*, will have additional data, models, and research instruments from all three programs noted in this article. An early draft of this article was presented at a symposium titled "New Teacher Induction and The Public Good: Sustaining Professional Commitments in Urban Schools" at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) 2011 Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana.

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The author(s) declared the following potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this

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Notes

1. For more information, including additional research papers related to this research, please see the project website: <http://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/research/choosing/index.html>, as well as the upcoming book, tentatively titled *Inspiring Teaching: Context-Specific Teacher Preparation for the 21st century* (Harvard Education Press).
2. The first author of this article is on faculty in the program examined in this article. Conducting research on a set of programs in which one of us serves as a faculty member can contribute to bias, and represents an acknowledged weakness in research on teacher education. While we cannot address all the possible bias that might emerge from such a relationship, in this study, we have taken several steps to address this concern, including ensuring that faculty members did not collect any data on their own program, or conduct interviews with their own graduates. For this article, the co-author and other members of the Choosing to Teach study were responsible for the data collection reported in this article.
3. In the upcoming book on this project, we elaborate the differences in the ways in which the other two programs treat context, revealing less emphasis on geographical contexts and more attention to the context of the school sector and the various communities (faith-based or other).
4. We note earlier in this manuscript that our larger study suggests that graduates from context-specific programs remain longer in teaching than their peers. It is worth acknowledging that in this program, candidate's incoming commitments to social justice may also amplify this positive outcome—and in the other programs, selection of candidates may also play a role in such outcomes.

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