

Shifting Our Focus: Collaborating with Urban Schools to Support African American Students

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This case study explores the intentional shift in a teacher preparation program at an urban metropolitan university. The need to develop teachers who choose to teach in the region's urban settings, and who have professional competencies and dispositions that allow them to succeed and thrive, have propelled the shift. In this study, our objective is to describe how a traditional, nationally-accredited educator preparation program changes in order to increase support of urban schools in a Florida school district with a high percentage of African American students. Through the process of knowledge transfer, we utilize a qualitative case study design and collected data through focus group interviews of multiple stakeholders including College of Education faculty, K-12 school administrators, in-service teachers, and prospective teachers. The significance of this study lies in the reconceptualization of preparation practices to be replicated by other urban metropolitan universities. This approach aims to encourage university faculty to collaboratively engage with urban schools and school systems as well as prepare teachers to teach in schools that have high African American student enrollment.

Keywords: urban schools, teacher preparation programs, African American students, qualitative

Across the teacher preparation programs in the College of Community Innovation and Education (CCIE) at the University of Central Florida (UCF), the administration and faculty of CCIE are working toward enacting a practice that is grounded in an ethic of respect and support for all learners. Practice that is based in this ethic is not only important to us, but essential. Our university student population is diverse in race, ethnicity, and economic status, as well as gender identification, physical and intellectual abilities, and goals. Even more diverse is the central Florida area that provides our primary service region. That region includes Orange County Public Schools, Florida, which is the 9th largest school district in the nation, with over 206,000 students and 167 home languages among its students. Prospective teachers must be prepared to set high standards and help all students reach those standards. Learning to teach students who come from backgrounds that mirror our own, and who attend schools that reflect our own experience requires intelligence, practice, skill, and extensive feedback as part of a developmental process. When teachers have the opportunity to work with children and

adolescents whose backgrounds are unfamiliar to them because of differences such as language, culture, housing security, familial support, and general health, the teachers also must develop deep knowledge and employ heightened awareness of their own assumptions and guiding beliefs about teaching and learning. Plainly stated, teaching students from diverse backgrounds requires a commitment to the ethic of respect and support for all learners.

In the CCIE teacher educator preparation programs, we depend on relationships across groups of partners in education, and work alongside them as co-learners. We engage simultaneously with each group of partners in efforts to better understand teaching and learning. Our roles are often fluid, as teachers become learners, and learners become teachers. As representatives of the university in the teacher education programs, we recognize that the success of the teacher preparation program depends on the collaboration of participants who form active communities. We need to demonstrate the benefits of assuming the fluid role as teacher-learner alongside our school-based counterparts, since it is in those roles that we grow to better understand processes that improve learning and teaching in the 21st century. Learning occurs in school settings, with university faculty, cooperating teachers, school administrators, prospective teachers, students, and families interacting in the fluid exchanges of sharing information about lives and about subject matter. It is in this context where new understandings emerge, and untested assumptions can be dismantled.

The purpose of this study is to examine how a cross-section of stakeholders contribute to reimagining how a teacher preparation program will prepare new teachers to work in urban schools. The urban schools in this study serve a high percentage of the system's African American students. Accordingly, this study examines the following research questions; 1) What are the perceptions of faculty members, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers regarding teaching in urban schools; and 2) How can faculty members, in-service, and pre-service teachers collaborate to positively transform practices for teacher educator programs that include attention to urban schools and their populations?

Background

Researchers have used various components of advanced data and empirical reports to understand the influence of teacher preparation programs. What is of particular interest in regard to teacher preparation programs is the ability to build relevant professional competencies and real-world work experiences pre-service instructors might need to successfully engage children and families living in urban communities. In order to address the perceived lack of teacher talent in urban schools, researchers point to the need to concentrate on transformative teacher practices, examination of preparation programs, and investigating conditions or school work culture in order to mitigate the worsening of urban school teacher retention (Lee, 2018; Lee, 2017; US Department of Education, 2016). Moreover, nationwide, literature on attracting and training highly equipped, diversified instructors to teach in urban schools with a high concentration of African American students, suggests that potential solutions collide with challenges. School leaders and instructors confirm that high need student populations require incredibly engaged and effective teachers who are prepared to teach and reach students (Causey, Thomas, Armento, 2000; Jennings, 2007; Wilkerson, 2016). Nevertheless, preparation programs suffer from proactively equipping pre-service teachers on subject area knowledge while being reactive in uncomfortable educational elements with students. This problem is a motivating factor in issues surrounding teacher attrition rates (Forzani, 2014; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver, 2016). Despite the acknowledgement that classroom instructors must teach subject matter and incorporate familiar or culturally relevant components into teaching, it is frequently documented that pre-service instructor development fails to go beyond subject knowledge preparation

(Ladson-Billings, 1995). Striking a fine balance between quality teacher education preparation programs that marry theory and practice together to advance learning is paramount (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Nevertheless, in the field of education, particularly in education preparation programs, colleges of education are faced with understanding how to confront the complexities of the modern-day learners within the context of holistic student support, using the college of education as a construct for educational progress (Cuseo, 2018). Some researchers believe that there should be a slow integration into the field of teaching in order to select highly qualified teachers. Still, the need for teachers demands that colleges of education both dramatically scale and expand a highly qualified teacher workforce (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006). As such, a closer examination of the students which instructors are trained to teach is critically important.

African American Students

In this section, we attempt to briefly explore the host of concerns researchers have identified regarding African Americans K-12 learners. Additionally, we will counter the negative narratives with data. As such, we re-frame African American student depictions to combat caricature disparities to enhance a more robust understanding of African American student learners in the public school system. The literature maintains there is an onslaught of non-academic barriers that might impede a student's ability to succeed, such as homelessness, family history, social emotional dispositions, which are all connected to poverty (Bromberg, 2016; Cantor, Smolover, & Stamlerand 2010; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2018), regarding family background, 76% of African American children under the age of eighteen live in a household where no parent has attained at least an associate's degree; 41% live in single parent homes (McFarland et al., 2018). Besides non-academic barriers, researchers also argued that most children who live in urban areas are recipients of educational systems that widen or contribute to social and economic inequalities (Johnson Jr, 2010; Sherman, 1997).

The literature is replete with data that indicate that African American children are most likely to live in poverty in comparison to White, Hispanic, Asian, and Pacific Islander children (NCES, 2018). While education has taken a regressive shift regarding supporting and seeing positive outcomes that leave African American students better off, scholarly evidence indicates quality teaching and targeted programming can reverse the ill effects of poverty and its impact on learners. Seven urban schools in Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) have on average a population comprised of nearly 90% African American children and adolescents (OCPS, Enrollment Summary By School, 2018). Each of these urban settings is a federally-designated Title I school.

In our work, we are balancing examinations of research on the characteristics of African American K-12 learners, studies of the impact of school leadership, and establish goals for exploring the potential that school-community partnerships can have for increasing student success. Our lens is an asset-based approach that draws on a theoretical frame of funds of knowledge. This theory posits that groups have unique experiences that allow them to acquire new knowledge and skills (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Using the notion of funds of knowledge, we can conceptualize urban students in terms of the strengths that they bring to the school and classroom. We can also begin to reconsider salient aspects attached to funds of knowledge that would empower prospective teachers to cultivate empowered teaching approaches. This perspective allows us to begin to reimagine student-centered support, not only for the children and adolescents in K-12 settings, but for prospective teachers in the university teacher preparation programs, as well. Aguilar and Kiyama (2017) suggested funds of

knowledge serves an epistemological anchor which denotes students of color bring knowledge to the table, and that knowledge can support their success.

Essentially, funds of knowledge is a form of culturally relevant pedagogy which values, incorporates, and extends student knowledge through acknowledging importance of interactions in and outside the classroom settings. In the College of Community Innovation and Education at UCF, we are beginning to learn to recognize, value, and include attention to the funds of knowledge that African American learnings in urban areas bring to the classrooms where our pre-service and in-service teachers work. The intentional shift in our gaze has produced a concomitant shift in perspectives. With new commitment to urban schools and the populations there, we are eager to collaborate with OCPS to more fully develop partnerships that advance opportunities for education for children, adolescents, their families, and within our university teacher preparation community. We will utilize the partnership section to discussion common forms of partnerships in education.

Partnerships

Researchers have long assumed that developing, building, bridging, and balancing school and community-based partnerships is a critical component to advancing quality education (Glassman & Couch, 2001; Honig, 2000; Mann, 1976; Masotti, 1967). For instance, eminent scholars on school site leadership and parent engagement reported harmonizing a principal's role and family engagement. Glassman and Couch (2001) described engagement as a function of balancing the interactions of teacher parent communications and employing the usage of district rules as a solutions-based approach. Another leading researcher discussed the concept of partnership within the context of bridging, connecting school base actions with family interactions (Honig, 2000). Ultimately, concerning the early conceptions of partnerships, the basic assumption was communication among various stakeholders is important. However, there were inhibitors to school and community partnerships. A new body of research frames that partnerships between schools and communities as *community alliances*. These alliances foster agency and responds to interconnecting curricular instruction with community realities, while also developing partnerships that organize stakeholders to collectively take impactful action (Barton, Nelsestuen, & Mazzeo, 2014; Crowson & Boyd, 2001; Green, 2018; Noguera, 2015). There is no shortage of research regarding forming, creating, and maintaining partnerships. Yet there is still much to learn about the role of partnership using a college of education as the centrifugal force empowered to inform teacher preparation practices for the staff who populate schools within any specific community.

Methods

This case study relies primarily on qualitative methods, specifically focus groups (think tank sessions), which is particularly useful for studying programming. Focus groups can reveal salient information that other methods cannot display or tap into, such as the survey questionnaires or conventional one-to-one interviews (Kitzinger, 1994). Utilizing this approach, the research team invited participants from the university and the local school district, which included teacher education faculty and graduate students, urban school cooperating teachers, prospective teachers engaged in student teaching internships in the same urban schools, and school administrators of those schools to participate in a series of focus groups (think tank sessions). Specifically, focus groups (think tank sessions) were conducted with the university and local school district staff over a time period of spanning several months in order to inform an intentional shift in the CCIE teacher preparation program. As a result, the university teacher education faculty and students developed familiarity with school district staff, while the district

staff articulated their own priorities for an effective urban teacher education program. However, university researchers were not passive. Using a semi-structured interview protocol kept the group on track with its goals to provide recommendations to the CCIE program, and actively engaged participants to dig deeper into the statements they made.

The focus groups with local school district staff members was invaluable for the study's grounded approach. A grounded approach allowed school district staff used to generate and order their experiences. Focus groups also ensured that priority was given to the school district staff 'hierarchy of importance', their language, concepts, and their frameworks for understanding their work. (Kitzinger, 1994). Ultimately, the purpose of the focus group (think tank) sessions was to explore the realities of teaching and learning in Orlando's urban community. The overarching goal was to use what was happening in the schools to inform changes in the teacher preparation program in the College of Community Innovation and Education at UCF as it intentionally began to shift its focus toward support for high needs schools and student populations.

Positionality

In education, academic researchers contribute to knowledge development in the field, but professors of teacher preparation programs have been accused at times of inadequately preparing students to work in urban environments. At UCF, we had to acknowledge that we have been part of a national problem: since for decades the majority of teacher education students has been made up of middle class, white, female participants, preparation programs have, often by default, directed their instruction toward imaginary or real schools like the ones that those students attended: middle or upper class and predominantly white. To develop an authentic understanding of the urban school context, the researchers arranged collaborative discussions between themselves and a diverse group of students, practitioners, and university faculty who work in urban schools or teacher preparation programs.

How researchers position themselves in relation to their participants and setting is critical because it influences the research process, particularly how data is collected and analyzed. The researchers of this study represent the fields of education and criminal justice. Three of the researchers work in the College of Community Innovation and Education, one as the dean and the other two as postdoctoral scholars. The fourth researcher is a doctoral candidate in a criminal justice program at a university in the northern United States. While the research team is positioned at the university, collectively, the researchers have a knowledge of education in rural and urban settings as either students, secondary teachers, or instructors in teacher preparation programs.

Positionality, specifically the continuum from insider to outsider, is fluid. The researchers were insiders to university faculty working in the teacher preparation program, yet outsiders to the preservice teachers and school administrators. However, given the researchers' past experiences as teachers in urban schools, teacher preparation program instructors and the dean's experience as a former secondary school teacher and university faculty member, they can be classified as outsiders with first-hand knowledge of the context.

Data Collection

Over the course of three intense, sometimes uncomfortable two-hour long meetings, representatives from the university and local school district contributed to a diverse dialogue. Table 1 represents the collective participants in the CCIE teacher preparation program, including the UCF teacher education faculty & graduate students (n= 9), school administrators (n= 4), prospective school teachers (n=2) and school psychologist (n=1). University faculty drew on former and current service, teaching, and research experiences in urban schools and communities

to try to make sense of the descriptions that the think tank participants shared. The prospective teachers attempted to bridge theory and practice as they gave accounts of their journey to connect university coursework to practical experiences. Through dialogue, the participants of the think tank began to identify these topics as they relate to students' academic success in Orlando's urban core.

*CCIE Teacher Preparation Program Participants 2017**

	Female		Male		Total
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
UCF Faculty & Graduate Students	8	89	1	11	9
School Administrators (<i>elementary</i>)	3	100	0	0	3
School Administrators (<i>high school</i>)	1	100	0	0	1
Prospective School Teachers	2	100	0	0	2
School Psychologist	1	100	0	0	1
Grand Total	15	94	1	6	16

*Year 1: 2017;

The Think Tank meetings (*see Table 2*) helped establish a collective understanding of how poverty impacts teaching and learning in Orlando's urban core. Specifically, opportunities were identified for teacher preparation programs to improve preservice and beginning teachers' capacity to develop culturally appropriate responses to students living in trauma and crisis. The final conversation focused on what is working in the field and how to develop a manageable project to "turn the ship" and increase faculty support.

Qualitative Data Collection Schedule

Session Type	Date	Measure	Participants	Location
Think Tank Session 1	February 18, 2017	Focus Group	16	University
Think Tank Session 2	March 17, 2017	Focus Group	16	University
Think Tank Session 3	April 21, 2017	Focus Group	16	University

Data Analysis

The analysis of the CCIE teacher preparation program utilizes a primarily inductive analytical approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1978; Thornberg & Charmaz 2014). All focus group interviews were transcribed and coded. In the first round of coding, an open coding technique was utilized; key themes that repeatedly emerged from the data were identified and given thematic codes, which generated a long list of descriptive codes. For the second round of coding, a selective coding technique was applied to merge existing codes and to create higher level codes that would make the coding process parsimonious. During the data analysis and coding phase several salient themes emerged that captured the voices of those concerned with the education in Orlando's public schools. The themes emerged inductively, allowing the data to become "grounded" (Glaser & Strauss, 1978). In other words, the data were not analyzed to test theory or confirm recent literature as it relates to teacher preparation programs. Instead the researchers allowed the findings to speak for themselves by interacting with multiple stakeholders.

Findings

In this section, we discuss the findings and overarching themes that emerged as a result of hosting the focus group discussions. To reiterate, over the course of three intense, sometimes uncomfortable two-hour long meetings, representatives from the university and local school district contributed to a diverse dialogue. University faculty drew on former and current service, teaching, and research experiences in urban schools and communities to try to make sense of the descriptions that the think tank participants shared. The prospective teachers attempted to bridge theory and practice as they gave accounts of their journey to connect university coursework to practical experiences, while school administrators shared school-based experiences. Through collaboration and shared learning across and within these groups, we hoped to promote conceptualized learning about teaching (Hollins, 2015). Through an analysis of the think tank discussions, four themes emerged: (1) Realities of working in an urban school, (2) Structural barriers to academic success, (3) Zooming in on teacher preparation programs, and (4) Generating faculty support.

Realities of Working in an Urban School

A picture of working in an urban high school was passionately communicated by one principal who painted the ugly scene, with one brush, of violence, teen pregnancy, overcrowding, lack of genuine community support, and parents' expectations. Yet with another brush, the same principal detailed the beauty, innocence, and diligence that she observed in many of the teenage students with whom she worked. The complex and apparently contradictory realities, fueled by difficult discourses, and perceived reputation of some of the urban schools frightened not only some of our teacher preparation students but also, as indicated by the participants, their parents (and some of our faculty, too). The prospective teachers who were completing internships in elementary schools, each of whom had participated for only a few hours in a high needs school prior to their full-time internships in a Title I school, initially were shocked by their students' "neediness," as evidenced by the following statement. "I was surprised to find not only free lunch but also breakfast and dinner served, and backpacks loaded with food sent home on Fridays so children have food over the weekend." They were dismayed by the developmental delays, some of the children were unable to perform simple literacy tasks in the early elementary grades. However, they were most surprised, perhaps, to find that the classrooms in the urban Title I schools were warm and welcoming, and that the children wanted to be there.

The think tank meetings helped establish a collective understanding of the unintended consequences of poverty and its impact on children. Moreover, participants were able to

speculate the realities of poverty and its intersecting nature on teaching and learning particularly among the largest population of students in the Title I urban schools: African Americans. Based on observations about the realities that the principals, K-12 teachers, and pre-service teachers shared, ideas about how to improve pre-service and beginning teachers' capacity to develop culturally appropriate responses to children and adolescents who live in trauma and crisis were discussed. "Preservice teachers need far more than a single course in multicultural education," noted a university faculty member. New intense course activities in mental health first aid training and culturally sensitive teaching are being embedded into the teacher preparation curricula as a result.

Structural Barriers to Academic Success

The participants of the think tank began to consider difficult questions, as they arose through the dialogue, relating to students' academic success in Orlando's urban core:

1. How can stigma associated with high needs schools be removed so that graduates of teacher preparation programs desire to teach in these communities?
2. Students in high-poverty schools have more uncertified and unqualified teachers than those who attend more advantaged schools (Sutcher, Darling-Hamond, Carver-Thomas, 2016). How can high-needs schools recruit, retain, and cultivate the very best beginning and veteran teachers?
3. How should schools respond to increasingly diverse and demanding student populations, with students who have needs for extended support beyond the school day?
4. Can teachers and others make spaces safe enough to discuss difficult topics such as race and gender differences with those who are "different"?
5. How can university/school system partnerships assist in providing a bridge across fragmented school, community, and family borders?

The initial research group did not aim to answer each question. Rather, the identification and broad consideration of such topics moved the group toward its goal of informing change in the teacher preparation programs as the programs shift in orientation to support high needs schools and student populations. Further dialogue within the think tank expanded into conversations more narrowly focused on these issues in CCIE's teacher preparation classes.

Zooming in on Teacher Preparation Practices

The prospective teachers noted many instances in which the theoretical understandings they developed through university-based coursework fell short of preparing them for experiences with children and adolescents in urban schools. They noted, too, that the challenges that they experienced pushed them to seek more information about the students whom they taught, in order to find ways to support the students' learning. The school administrators present agreed that strategies offered in teacher preparation programs, though well intended, are difficult to implement because teachers are constrained by prescribed curriculum and educational mandates. For example, an elementary school principal admitted that, "recently graduated students are not able to implement strategies learned during teacher preparation, such as play." They asked that the programs allow future teachers to spend more time in the classrooms observing and assisting expert teachers, communicating with parents, and interacting with students.

Another focal point developed during a perspective-shifting conversation that challenged the use of the term *classroom management*. In each of our teacher preparation programs, as is common in many, there are courses in "classroom management". However, as one of the pre-

service teachers noted, “managing” students suggests controlling behaviors and information. She shared a moment of consciousness, “while reprimanding a group of students in my classroom [because they were] dancing, I stopped and questioned my own reason for deeming the dance inappropriate. I realized that the dancing was not disrupting instruction or causing a behavior problem. Why stop it, then? Why was it ‘wrong?’” A more appropriate role than management of behavior is for instructors to find ways to support students’ learning and behavioral needs. The terms “student engagement” and “classroom culture-building” were offered as more applicable terms, because they promote the concept that undergirds our ethic of respect for all learners. The group recommended a change in the title of a required course from, “Classroom Management and Instruction” to “Classroom Engagement and Instruction” to better reflect the more positive goal.

Generating Faculty Support

The final conversation focused on what is working in the field and how to develop a manageable project to “turn the ship” and increase faculty support for the focus on supporting schools that serve high needs populations. It was discussed that structured dialogue (Hollins, 2015) be used in professional learning workshops across university and school system faculty. Participants explained structured dialogue was needed in order to intentionally facilitate conversations that are purposeful and meaningful between practitioner and teacher preparers. The principal of an urban charter school shared how her administration positively influenced teacher-student relationships by being intentional about meeting the needs of teachers and focusing teacher conversation on the needs of students and families.

Discussion

Our findings exemplified how shifting the focus of a teacher educator program is critically important. The aims of the shift are to produce quality instructors and to best prepare instructors who might teach in urban schools populated with African American students. In this section, the authors discuss the findings in relation to intentional shifting within and across six specific sub groups. Six subgroups emerged from conversation: 1) perspective teachers, 2) K-12 students, 3) cooperative teachers, 4) school administrators, 5) families, and 6) faculty. We conclude the discussion section within the context of the entire research case study. Moreover, we further discuss our current commitments and goals for each of the six groups with whom we interact in the process of teacher preparation. Finally, we make note of the commitment to building on each in the coming years:

Prospective Teachers

Researchers suggest broadening preparation practices can advance teacher skills (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Shifting our focus entails dedicating ourselves to preparing future teachers for working with students from all backgrounds, drawing on an ethic of support and respect for all learners. Ladson-Billings (1995) reminds us that teacher educators must better prepare future teachers for diverse school settings, and help them learn to set high expectations for all learners; then scaffold instruction in the ways that are necessary for every student to reach those expectations. Further, it is necessary to eliminate deficiency models of teaching (implicit and explicit) in all of our teacher preparation courses and promote among our future teachers an asset-based model (see, for example, Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Students - Early Childhood, K12 Students, and Adult Learners

As Aguilar and Kiyama (2017) reiterated through the theory of funds of knowledge, we can learn to find strengths in each student. Moreover, strength utilized as the beginning point for instruction, with the expectation that faculty presence can enhance the student's learning. Grasping strength, teacher educators and practitioners can observe carefully, teach intelligently, assess fairly, direct and encourage appropriately. As researchers suggested, neither race, poverty, nor urbanization should predict lack of success as a student or limit opportunities as a human. (Logan & Oakley, in Tate, 2012; Nogeura, in Katz & Rose, 2013).

Cooperating Teachers

In the literature, authors discussed articulating the critical role in the success of beginning teachers. Additionally, some researchers indicated collaboration with the others in the school enterprise to develop a system that recognizes and rewards the participation of our school-based counterparts, and ensure that tangible benefits accrue to them for their role in the education of prospective teachers. Researchers have sought to demonstrate that beginning teachers will remain in teaching because their professionalism will be enhanced through their partnership with, and contributions to, ongoing professional development (Darling-Hammond, Ramos-Beban, Altamirano, & Hyler, 2016; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

School Administrators

Participants discussed finding common concerns and issues that can be better addressed when school-based administrators work together with teachers and parents, including how to improve the academic and socioemotional lives of children who are homeless and/or hungry, and how to leverage community resources to support school initiatives. When working together, the community alliances we develop reinforce our understanding that "context matters" (Moll, 2005; Hoglebe, in Tate, 2012). Our teacher education programs must reflect the importance of context with appropriate course work that attends to African American learners' funds of knowledge and the assets that are present in urban settings.

Families

We will continue to meet with community groups to seek wisdom and information from family and other community members. These stakeholders can help us better understand the contexts of the urban communities where we hope to provide support and assistance. It is not our space, it is theirs. As such, we need to spend time, until we have spent enough real time there to be welcomed as community members, in the community. We need to listen hard, before we move forward with our own assumptions about what families know regarding their sons and daughters, adolescents, and what they want to see them achieve (Noguera, 2008).

University Faculty

We in teacher education cannot shift our practices without help from all of those with whom prospective teachers engage in coursework and field experiences. We will require participation from our feeder institutions and their advising offices, along with the faculty with whom a large number of our students take the first two years of their courses. It is in early coursework that the thread of culturally relevant pedagogy can begin to be woven into the teacher preparation curriculum and set of experiences. We will also need to be more direct and thoughtful in our discussions about our more specific purpose when engaging with colleagues in the STEM areas, arts, and humanities, and be able to explain that by preparing teachers for schools and students in poor neighborhoods, we are not excluding students who are among the

most promising in the world. Poverty is not synonymous with inability. The conditions of poverty sometimes mitigate against educational opportunity. It is the job of all members of this collective to counter those conditions and help students living in high needs circumstances, including poverty, succeed (Harper, 2014).

Implications

An examination of how a college sought to intentionally shift its teacher preparation program at an urban metropolitan university revealed that colleges must negotiate such shifts with a cadre of supporters. Learning occurs in school settings, with university faculty, cooperating teachers, school administrators, prospective teachers, students, and families interacting in the fluid exchanges of sharing information. It is imperative that school-based staff & administrators, families from the community, and university faculty fully partner for improved urban teacher preparation and teacher support. There, new understandings emerge, and untested assumptions can be dismantled.

The model that we are building for a transformed teacher education program, one that gives direct and intentional attention to the funds of knowledge that African American children and adolescents bring to the classroom, and one that presents a culturally relevant pedagogy for prospective and practicing teachers whose work is in urban schools, is a collaborative model. It requires all university and school system partners to assume fluid roles as teacher-learners alongside each other. It is in those roles that real growth happens in order to better understand the processes that improve learning and teaching in urban schools in the 21st century.

Research-oriented universities like UCF often minimize the service component of the traditional triad of faculty obligations: instruction, scholarship, and service. However, for faculty members whose work focuses on urban education and related areas, myriad opportunities exist to embed scholarship within teaching and service. As teacher preparation programs shift the locus of their instruction, research, and service to school sites, and continually examine the impact of context on new and experienced teachers' practices and perspectives as well as on learners' growth, culturally relevant pedagogy begins to drive program decisions. Traditional programs draw on a tool box approach: prospective teachers learn a set of practices that they can apply, regardless of the strengths and knowledge that students bring to the classroom, or the context in which the school is situated. All the teacher needs to know is the tools in the tool box. Our model is different: there is no one tool box, but the teachers who progress through the program learn to attend to students' strengths and their funds of knowledge as they prepare lessons; our goal is that they will recognize that they will continually make adjustments in order to respond to the complexities and vibrant realities of today's urban schools.

Conclusion

Ultimately, we at UCF want our goal to evolve: we plan to shift the model of our educational program from one that supports high needs student populations and the preparation of teachers for those students, to one that uses the work of community partners as catalysts for student and teacher success. By working with the community – and as part of the community – we are reimagining how to best prepare teachers to effectively work in all educational settings. We are satisfied that the CCIE teacher preparation focus so clearly mirrors the goal of the university at large, to “lift lives and livelihoods” (UCF *Collective Impact*, spring 2016) in its attention to the alleviation of poverty as the primary barrier to academic success. The University of Central Florida is committed to reducing the impact of poverty on academic access and attainment for its 66,000 students, many of whom graduate from our OCPS school partners. We look forward to the fall, 2019, when full-scale curricular and field experience changes that allow

each future teacher the opportunity to spend purposeful time working in a Title One urban school will be implemented. Ultimately, our impact will be measured in the way and number of lives changed by education. The overarching goal in the teacher preparation programs is that in all of our work, an ethic of support and respect for all learners...those in the schools where we work and those within our own groups of collaborative partners...will be demonstrated and valued, and that through our work, all teachers and students will have equitable opportunities for success in education.

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