

# Moving from Traditional Teacher Education to a Field-Based Urban Teacher Education Program: One Program's Story of Reform

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## Abstract

*In recent years, teacher education has been charged with reforming programs to better align curriculum, clinical practice, and accountability. The sense of urgency for reform has been heightened by competition from alternative routes to teaching that jump straight to practice, often criticized for foregoing essential knowledge and theory. This paper details one institution's journey of reforming its early childhood and elementary programs toward practice-based teacher education. Reform efforts have been guided by a clear theoretical framework and philosophical stance and include careful alignment of curriculum and clinical practice, increased partnerships with local schools, and a focus on accountability and program integrity. The focus is on answers to practical questions regarding the application of theory in a field-based teacher education model and is intended to support other programs in their own journey of reform.*

For the past two decades, teacher education has faced the challenge of reform from public leaders and scholars. In 1997, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future released a report of exemplary teacher education programs. In this report, Darling-Hammond (1997) identified distinct qualities of programs whose graduates were successful in both teaching diverse learners effectively and demonstrating pedagogical skills that enabled them "to teach the challenging material envisioned by new subject matter standards aimed at higher levels of performance and greater understanding" (p. 30). Programs highlighted in the report had clear visions of good teaching; extended clinical experiences with "strong relationships, common knowledge, and shared beliefs among school- and university-based faculty"; and were grounded in pedagogical content knowledge "taught in the context of practice" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 30). The report called for teacher education to implement reform with the goal of increasing the quality of teachers and teaching in the United States. In 2009, Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan stated, "We should be studying and copying the practices of effective teacher preparation programs—and encouraging the lowest-performers to shape up or shut down" (Duncan, 2009, p. 1). More recently, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE; 2010) released a Blue Ribbon Panel Report calling for the transformation of teacher education through clinical practice.

Both reports called for significant changes in the way teacher education approaches its work. Recommendations common to these reports include (a) fieldwork central to the curriculum with careful alignment to coursework, (b) extended and carefully designed clinical components, (c) opportunities to work with diverse learners, and (d) fieldwork closely supervised and supported by clinical educators and mentors (Darling-Hammond, 1997; NCATE, 2010). NCATE's report further emphasized the critical

need for universities to partner equally with districts and schools, to enlist more rigorous selection processes for teacher education candidates, and to provide opportunities for candidates to work in hard-to-staff schools. These recommendations were echoed by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE; 2010) in a report citing studies linking programs with rigorous clinical practice to student achievement, teacher retention, and a sense of preparedness. The AACTE report urged teacher education programs to provide opportunity for candidates to “practice and reflect on teaching while enrolled in their preparation programs” (AACTE, 2010, p. 6).

Grossman (2010) supports the recommendations for clinical preparation, stating that “providing high-quality practice opportunities for prospective teachers is fundamental to the enterprise of teacher education” (p. 7). Hollins (2011) further supports the recommendations for clinical practice by proposing a model for practice-based teaching in which “learning to teach integrates academic content knowledge and experience for teaching practice in an authentic context guided by a theoretical perspective and a philosophical stance” (p. 404). This article details one institution’s efforts to realize the recommendations from the literature in reforming its early childhood and elementary programs toward practice-based teacher education. It is our hope that details of the promising practices and our journey of reform will help inform other teacher education programs as they embark on reform.

### **Context of Project CAUSE**

Our university is located in a Midwestern city “known for failing school systems, racially segregated communities, and socioeconomic divides between the inner city and outlying communities” (Waddell, 2011, p. 24). While our university has a focus on urban community engagement and the School of Education holds a mission of being “urban-serving”; the university historically has not had a positive relationship with that community. In fact, the community criticized the university for its lack of responsiveness to the community’s needs, especially its schools (Waddell & Ukpokodu, 2012). In 2005, the university collaborated with three of the largest urban districts within the city and instituted an urban teacher preparation program specifically designed to prepare teachers for the urban partner districts (Waddell, 2015; Waddell, Edwards, & Underwood, 2009; Waddell & Ukpokodu, 2012). The program focused primarily on elementary education and experienced great success (Waddell & Ukpokodu, 2012). In 2009, we were awarded a Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to further reform the program to meet its original goals and expand these reforms to all undergraduate teacher education programs within the School of Education. Among other components, the TQP grant called on teacher education institutions to partner with high-need schools and districts to reform teacher education programs with an emphasis on clinical experience, induction, in-service teacher support and training, and teacher recruitment and literacy training (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Goals of our TQP grant, Project CAUSE (Change Agents for Urban School Excellence), include (a) increase the quality of the applicant pool to teacher education, (b) increase the numbers of prospective teachers prepared to teach in urban classrooms, (c) increase the number of highly qualified teachers hired by partner districts, (d) improve the performance of prospective teachers and new teachers in the partner districts, (e) increase the quality of education provided by partner schools as measured by K–12 student achievement, and (f) increase retention of teachers in urban schools.

At the time of receipt of the grant, our early childhood and elementary programs were isolated. While aligned with university mission, values, and unit standards, each program had its separate

identity; however, there were superficial similarities across programs. Each program had been tinkering with reform for several years, and the TQP grant provided the impetus to begin aligning the two programs toward a unified high-quality and practice-based model. In early stages of the current reform, as coordinators of the two programs, we began engaging in dialogue regarding Project CAUSE components; these would be components that would unite the early childhood and elementary programs toward the goal of becoming one exemplary teacher education program.

### Project Innovations

Project CAUSE has clear goals for reforming teacher preparation and increasing PK–12 student achievement. Innovations within the reform include the move to field-based courses, a focus on social constructivist pedagogy, and practice-based experiences. Foundational to Project CAUSE was the move to field-based courses. As a result of the reform, all of the teaching methods courses in the elementary program and 63% of the methods courses in the early childhood program occur within partner school sites and or community agencies. During the first year of the 2-year professional program, early childhood and elementary candidates also spend the equivalent of one day per week involved with a carefully designed, closely supervised field experience in urban partner schools. The final year is spent in a year-long internship in which university faculty offer support in a job-embedded manner at the school site rather than in a typical format where courses are taught on campus, away from the school site. Figures 1.0 and 1.1 show sample schedules for the candidates within the first year of the program.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8 - 9	<b>Infant Toddler Practicum</b> Child Development Center	<b>Pre-Kindergarten Practicum</b> Yellow School 9:00-12:00			
9 - 10					
10 - 11					
11 - 12					
12 - 1				<b>Reading Methods</b> Bell Elementary School	
1 - 2	<b>Infant and Toddler</b> Early Childhood Agency	<b>Integrating Curriculum</b> Apple School 1:00 - 4:15			
2 - 3					
3 - 4			<b>Program Management and Advocacy</b> Yellow Elementary School		
4 - 5					
5 - 6					
6 - 7					
7 - 8					

**Change Agents for Urban School Excellence**

Figure 1.0 Sample Student Schedule, Early Childhood Program

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8 - 9	<b>Literacy Methods</b> Section 1 ABC Elementary School		<b>Literacy Methods</b> Section 1 ABC Elementary School	<b>Internship Day</b>	
9 - 10					Section 2 123 Elementary School
10 - 11	Section 2 123 Elementary School	<b>Learning Theory</b> Section 1 Apple School 10:30-12:45	Section 2 123 Elementary School		
11 - 12					
12 - 1					
1 - 2	<b>Math Methods</b> Bell Elementary School	<b>Curriculum for Diverse Learners</b> Section 2 Apple School 1:00 - 3:45	<b>Science Methods</b> Yellow Elementary School		
2 - 3					
3 - 4					
4 - 5					
5 - 6					
6 - 7					
7 - 8					

**Change Agents for Urban School Excellence**

Figure 1.1 Sample Student Schedule, Elementary Program

Along with changing the format for the course delivery, faculty have spent the last two years examining practices and creating more authentic learning experiences for candidates learning to teach. In the following two sections, we will explore essential program knowledge (what to teach) and the pedagogical practices of the program (how to teach it). We have also infused additional innovations throughout these sections, such as the cohort model, focus on candidate dispositions, and the use of assessments as authentic learning events. Figure 2.0 outlines the structural components of the program as discussed throughout this manuscript.

Curricular Components	Assessments	Logistics	Professional Development for Faculty
<b>Theoretical Framework – Social Constructivist Framework for Social Justice</b>			
Understanding Self Understanding Others Working with Families & Communities Cultural Responsive Teaching Equity and Social Justice	Candidate Characteristics GPA, CBASE, Demographics Haberman Star Teacher Interview Social Justice / Equity Prompt Teacher beliefs / values Q-Sort	Admission and Exit Criteria Selection of Faculty Selection of Cooperating Teachers Teaching Candidates How to Reflect	Shared Readings and Discussions (Delpit, Gay, Haberman, Howard, Ladson-Billings, Milner) Haberman Star Teacher Training
<b>Program Knowledge, Skills and Understanding</b>			
Social Constructivism Child Development Integrated Curriculum Teacher Practices Professional Dispositions Social Justice	CLASS Dimensions Key Assessments / Major Assignments Year- Long Internship Competency Benchmarks Teacher Work Sample Fitness to Teach Rubric	2-year curriculum Communication with School Districts Field-Based Methods Courses Key Assessments/Major Assignments Fitness to Teach Process	CLASS Training Fitness to Teach Process Training
<b>Instructional Transactions</b>			
Richardson (2003) Constructivist Pedagogy Grossman (2010) Clinical Practices Hollins (2011) Epistemic Practices	CLASS Dimensions Clinical Evaluations Key Assessments / Major Assignments Year- Long Internship Teacher Work Sample Fitness to Teach Rubric	Cohort Model Seminar and Discussion Time Identifying Classrooms (for clinical and/or epistemic practices) Teacher Work Sample/Performance Based Assessments Videotape Analysis	Shared Readings and Discussions (Gay & Kirkland, Grossman, Hollins, Richardson, Zeichner)
<b>Other Considerations</b>			
Curriculum Changes and Mandates within School District Partners	Changes to Certification Assessments, Requirements Graduate Data (success, student achievement, retention)	Transportation Issues Cohort Size Time for Collaboration Changes in Leadership Memorandums of Understanding Job Placement	

Figure 2.0 UMKC IUE/Elementary Program, Project CAUSE Structured Components

### Essential Programmatic Knowledge, Skills, and Understandings

The elementary and early childhood teacher education programs focus on the essential knowledge, skills, and understandings, which are informed by six areas as outlined by Hollins (2011): (a) knowledge of learners; (b) knowledge of learning; (c) knowledge of subject matter; (d) knowledge of pedagogy; (e) knowledge of accountability and assessment; and (f) the ability to participate in a professional community. In describing these areas, there are six features weaving through the programs' essential knowledge, skills, and understandings: (a) social constructivist lens; (b) developmental nature of learning; (c) integration of subject matter; (d) Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS); (e) Fitness to Teach (professional disposition) policy; and (f) focus on social justice.

### Knowledge of Learners

Human development knowledge is indispensable for candidates to understand the children in their classes and for teacher educators to understand candidates in the program. Hollins (2011) states:

... knowledge of human growth and development and individual and group differences that, when combined with specific knowledge of particular learners – such as their background experiences, what they know and how they make sense of what they know and what they value, how and why – inform the design of learning experiences and the specific ways in which learning is facilitated. (p. 397)

When candidates understand human development, they can make educated interpretations of children's levels of development for planning curriculum and appropriate pedagogical practices and supportive interactions in the classroom. Through understanding children's prior knowledge, background experiences, and culture and community, teacher candidates are able to construct meaningful learning. Throughout the program, there is a focus on understanding and responding to children's culture, ethnicity, identity, family, and community. During class, teacher candidates discuss issues of social justice, oppression, and institutional barriers in relation to schools, teachers, and society. Therefore, candidates in Project CAUSE focus on all aspects of development and co-construct learning opportunities for children within practicum and practice teaching experiences. Program experiences are designed to teach candidates the values of strengths-based teaching and working with students, families, and communities.

Faculty members also understand the developmental nature of candidate learning. They sequence and scaffold experiences so candidates can practice new skills in a graduated fashion. For example, early childhood candidates learn how to develop a learning experience for their students. In beginning courses, faculty members introduce a partial shell and review the basic elements of planning. In subsequent classes, teacher candidates and faculty develop the learning experience format to include all component parts until the candidate has designed and practiced a full plan. Once the candidate understands the planning process and the decisions he or she must make, the candidate can write learning experiences in a more abbreviated fashion. We plan the learning experiences for our candidates in a developmental fashion, based on their background, which allows us to model developmentally appropriate practice.

Another developmental aspect of the program is the examination of candidate beliefs, which we assess through a beliefs Q-Sort. The beliefs Q-Sort is an independent activity that allows us to assess the candidates' belief systems when they enter the program and again when they exit the program. Faculty member also completed the Q-Sort assessment. Therefore, at program entrance and exit, we can measure congruence of candidate beliefs to the social constructivist program philosophy of the teaching faculty. Candidate and faculty beliefs are made explicit in courses and discussed in open dialogues so candidates can hear various perspectives and construct understandings about teaching and learning. Individual courses and experiences woven throughout the program focus on the candidates' understanding of self and how the candidates' background and experiences impact their beliefs and actions within the classroom. As they progress through the program, faculty question candidate beliefs and teach them to reflect deeply (Gay & Kirkland, 2003) as they develop and fully understand their own philosophy of teaching.

Faculty structure program courses and assignments so that candidates develop ownership through autonomy, voice, and responsibility (Rainer & Matthews, 2002). As previously discussed, the program provides candidates opportunities to engage in field experiences, classrooms, and the first professional semester. Autonomy then increases as the experiences progress in each subsequent semester; each experience is an opportunity to further develop candidate beliefs.

### **Knowledge of Learning**

The social constructivist theoretical perspective on learning (Richardson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) has guided our programs. As discussed, the programs "immerse candidates in social constructivist experiences, in which they learn through the social construction of knowledge via authentic

experiences in schools and within a community of fellow learners" (Waddell, 2013, p. 3). By adhering to a theoretical perspective, both individual programs offer coherence, consistency, and continuity in the application of pedagogy and content. Richardson's (2003) five elements of constructivist pedagogy also guides the program:

- Attention to the individual and respect for students' background and developing understandings of and beliefs about elements of the domain (or student-centered);
- Facilitation of group dialogue that explores an element of the domain with the purpose of learning to the creation and shared understanding of a topic;
- Planned and often unplanned introduction of formal domain knowledge into the conversation through direct instruction, reference to text, exploration of a website, or some other means;
- Provision of opportunities for students to determine, challenge, change, or add to existing beliefs and understanding through engagement in tasks structured for this purpose, and
- Development of students' meta-awareness of their own understandings and learning processes. (Richardson, 2003, p. 1626)

The program aligns with social constructivist teacher education programs in which candidates experience learner-centered teacher education and learn how to teach within learner-centered classrooms. Candidates observe classrooms to gather information about children's understandings regarding concepts and skill development. Candidates assess present level of functioning and then use that knowledge to plan curriculum and interactions that will be appropriate for the children in the classroom. Thus, throughout our program, candidates become aware of the relationships and dynamic interactions between and among the learner, classroom environment, and home and school culture.

In Project CAUSE, candidates are involved in small-group experiences (i.e., teaching cases or scenarios) in every class to facilitate group dialogue, share different perspectives, and co-construct knowledge. Faculty members are able to respond to candidates by providing the structures or foundational knowledge in flexible ways through these interactive sessions. Candidates discuss and challenge existing beliefs and understandings through these small- and whole-group opportunities. Reflection is a major task of every assignment and within every course. Candidates can self-evaluate and get feedback from peers as well as instructors as they reflect on their knowledge and practice in course assignments.

Candidates also learn strategies for interacting with children. Faculty designed the curriculum for various formats: centers, small and large group, individual experiences, reciprocal teaching (Wilson & Peterson, 2006), and cooperative learning situations. Learning is interactive, and faculty members encourage inquiry whenever appropriate. The program also highlights and encourages peer interaction so children can begin to discuss, challenge, and co-construct understandings within the classroom. Candidates also help children self-evaluate the learning experiences so they can identify concepts and understandings.

### **Knowledge of Subject Matter**

Project CAUSE features the integration of subject matter and learning. Within both programs, faculty designed the learning plans so there is integration of subject matter and developmental areas, so candidates learn to web experiences to increase the interconnections of conceptual understandings. The

program also makes links between subject matter and children. Through experience, candidates begin to comprehend that teaching is intellectual work and children must learn with understanding (Wilson & Peterson, 2008). An example within the elementary program is emphasis on integrated literacy instruction, knowledge, and skills in which candidates learn to develop integrated units of study incorporating essential components of literacy instruction with social studies and science content, while making connections to students' lives and cultures.

### **Knowledge of Pedagogy**

The early childhood and elementary programs in Project CAUSE have selected a research-based pedagogy to follow by using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008). CLASS provides a common measure and descriptive base for classroom practices (LaParo, Pianta & Stulman, 2004). It also provides a shared standardized framework for defining and observing classrooms (Pianta et al., 2008). The ten dimensions of CLASS have been shown to significantly predict gains in children's outcomes and social interactions in pre-kindergarten (Curby et al., 2009; Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008), kindergarten, and first grade (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Likewise, research in PK-5 classrooms concludes that classrooms with higher CLASS ratings realize greater gains in student achievement and social skill development (Pianta et al., 2008). The Measuring Effective Teaching study by the Gates Foundation has also found high CLASS scores correlated with higher student achievement (Gates, 2012). For these reasons, we selected CLASS as the pedagogical focus of the teacher education programs. The specific ten dimensions and three domains of the tool are immersed within the coursework. We then used the CLASS measure as a feedback and evaluative instrument for observing candidate practice.

Another major feature of these urban-centered programs is an emphasis on social justice. In learning about issues of social justice, candidates learn about inequities in society and discuss possible solutions, and they also learn how to think deeply about their own beliefs, ideas, and thinking. Throughout the program, faculty model reflection and critical thinking in efforts to assist candidates in developing "critical cultural consciousness" (Gay & Kirkland, 2003) and a social activist stance toward teaching and education. The program introduces this philosophical stance in specific foundational courses and then embeds the stance throughout the candidates' experiences. Candidates become involved in metacognitive engagement, which encourages them to consider their "reasons for teaching and the commitment and social responsibility assumed by classroom teachers, as well as to develop a purpose that directs their work as teachers" (Hollins, 2011, p. 401). We also measure candidates' understanding of social justice in society and in schools pre- and post-program via a social equity writing sample. This ensures that candidates have had the opportunity to develop an understanding of social equity and justice within our educational systems. Through the field-based model, candidates build bridges as they use learner differences as resources and come to understand differences as natural and beneficial (Grossman & Richert, 1988; Wilson & Peterson, 2006).

Aligned with the CLASS framework and social justice stance, candidates become immersed in culturally relevant and responsive teaching and experiences (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Trumbull et al., 2003; Zeichner, 2003). We can define *culturally responsive teaching* as an approach to teaching that "teaches to and through [students'] personal and cultural strengths...filtering content and strategies through their cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master" (Gay, 2000, p. 24). Throughout the program, candidates engage in



experiences in which they examine their own culture and identity, learn about their students and the communities in which they live, and learn how to create meaningful connections between students' culture and classroom learning experiences. Through culturally relevant and responsive teaching, candidates learn how to make pedagogical choices that honor and reflect students' cultural values, history, and beliefs; derive curricula from students' interests; connect learning to the lives of students; match curriculum and instruction to students' developmental levels; and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students (Gay, 2000, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Trumbull et al., 2003; Zeichner, 2003). While culturally relevant and responsive teaching is imbedded within the programs, specific courses serve as the foundation for this learning. These foundational courses include introduction to urban teaching, cultural diversity, working with families and communities, and community immersion experiences.

### **Knowledge of Accountability and Assessment**

Our programs also help candidates develop meaningful, authentic assessments to measure children's learning, and they learn how to use standardized test information organized around state and national standards. The interactive approaches to assessment that the program teaches and assess include portfolios, experiences, projects, and a continuum of developmental rubrics on specific concepts. Candidates document outcomes through records that they can revisit (child's work samples, pictures, observations, video tapes), and they use multiple sources to make meaningful decisions.

Authentic assessment of candidates is achieved through active and interactive experiences. Candidates video tape and self-evaluate their own teaching, conduct peer evaluations, plan and present professional development presentations, and are observed and evaluated by cooperating teachers, principals, supervisors, and instructors. Candidates also give class presentations individually and in groups. "Integrity exists in the appropriateness of the pedagogical practices for particular learners and the strength of the theoretical perspective and philosophical stance in which practices are located" (Hollins, 2011, p. 401). As candidates practice the art of teaching, they are evaluated using CLASS, measuring pedagogical practices within the social constructivist stance. Candidates are evaluated by how closely they follow social constructivist ideology.

CLASS, Praxis scores, and other program assessments as well as child-based assessments help with trustworthiness of the program completers since "trustworthiness exists when learners consistently achieve the expected learning outcomes" (Hollins, 2011, p. 401). All candidates must demonstrate their impact on child learning by the end of the program, since quality in teacher preparation is defined in terms of student learning (Cochran-Smith, 2003).

### **Ability to Participate in a Professional Community**

The socialization process of becoming a teacher allows "new teachers to learn the culturally accepted norms of behavior, practices, and thought associated with the community of practice in which they are participants" (Hollins, 2011, p. 402). Candidates in the teacher education programs work collaboratively within cohorts and through the co-teaching model used in all teaching experiences. Faculty work collaboratively with cohorts of candidates so common understandings are established. Building a sense of community within cohort groups can help students transcend from relatively passive course-takers to becoming active agents in learning (Beck & Kosnik, 2001). Throughout the program, candidates work in multiple schools and community agencies, across the three districts. In

each situation, candidates are immersed within the school culture and then, in seminar and class experiences, discuss the differences in cultures and the role of professionalism and collaboration.

Our programs also use a Fitness to Teach policy outlining the professional behaviors, dispositions and interactions expected of candidates as they progress through the program. The rubric faculty and candidates used to evaluate dispositions is developmental in nature, so candidates become aware of expectations first and begin practicing behaviors throughout their experiences. More sophisticated practices are required as candidates' progress through the program moving from developing to acceptable behaviors on individual indicators of professional dispositions.

### **Program Practices**

In supporting the recommendations for clinical preparation, Grossman (2010) identifies challenges to designing high-quality clinical experiences, including the need to bridge divides between professional knowledge and skilled practice and between universities and PK–12 schools. Grossman (2010) suggests that clinical practice be carefully designed and can take the form of experiences in schools, simulations, laboratory settings and/or virtual settings. Grossman et al. (2009) identify three key concepts in teaching candidates how to understand the complex practice of teaching: representations of practice, decomposition of practice and approximations of practice.

Representation of practice can be described as the “different ways that practice is represented in professional education” (Grossman et al., 2009, p. 2058) and can be taught through a variety of venues including direct observation of teaching, videos, written cases, student work, lesson plans and modeling by instructors. Decomposition of practice “involves breaking down practice into its constituent parts for the purposes of teaching and learning” (p. 2058). Decomposition of practice allows instructors and candidates to “identify components integral to practice” (p. 2069). Examples of decomposition of practice include elements of a lesson, planning, managing transitions and questioning strategies. Finally, approximations of practice are designed settings in which teacher candidates practice and receive feedback on pedagogical practices. In these carefully designed settings, candidates “focus on a small set of core practices for teachers, such as leading a classroom discussion...or specific practices for teaching elementary mathematics” (Grossman, 2010, p. 3). Opportunities to engage with approximations of practice can occur through simulations, role-plays and opportunities of practice teaching; allowing candidates opportunities to develop clinical judgment and skills as well as build confidence in their teaching abilities (Grossman, 2010).

Hollins (2011) also contends that teaching and learning to teach are complex processes. In practice-based teacher education, Hollins (2011) identifies three epistemic practices in learning to teach: focused inquiry, directed observation, and guided practice. During focused inquiry, candidates address questions about what has happened/is happening and the impact or outcome in relation to teaching and learning. Focused inquiry can occur in a variety of formats including exploring content, pedagogical practice and PK–12 student learning.

Directed observation often follows directed inquiry and provides opportunity for candidates to “investigate particular aspects of a phenomenon” while shifting their perspective from student to teacher (Hollins, 2011, p. 403). Directed observations can occur through carefully designed classroom observations, instructor modeling, watching video of teaching, and through direct observation of learners. Directed observation and the deconstruction of observations that occur simultaneously

“supports candidates’ developing habits of mind for engaging in professional discourse” (Hollins, 2011, p. 403).

Finally, during guided practice, candidates experiment “with planning and enacting a short sequence of learning experiences for a small group of students under the careful supervision of university faculty or an experienced classroom teacher” (Hollins, 2011, p. 404). Guided practice is starkly different from field experiences in which candidates are paired with a mentor teacher with a list of assignments to complete. In guided practice, faculty carefully plan experiences and candidates are provided the opportunities to enact specific practices under close supervision of an instructor or classroom teacher. During guided practice, candidates experience the complexity of teaching in authentic settings. The *“process of planning, enacting, interpreting, translating, planning, and (re) enacting is essential for engaging in quality teaching and is the essence of guided practice in learning to teach”* (Hollins, 2011, p. 404).

We follow Hollins’s (2011) model of practice-based teacher education, which is aligned with the social constructivist perspective guiding Project CAUSE. In this model, candidates are allowed to explore and question a particular phenomenon about teaching or learning (focused inquiry), observe the teaching or learning about the phenomenon (directed observation), participate in planning and enacting teaching (guided practice), deconstruct experiences and create meaning (focused inquiry) followed by directed observation and/or opportunities to reenact. These three epistemic practices are experienced in conjunction with one another, often following cyclical pattern.

### **Epistemic Practices in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program**

Practice-based teacher education programs include multiple opportunities and experiences for candidates to begin understanding the complexities of teaching and integrate knowledge from the learning and developmental theories into practice. Throughout the early childhood program, candidates are involved with focused inquiry, directed observation and guided practice, both in university and field-based components of the program, helping them interpret and translate experiences while co-constructing learnings for and maintaining respectful and reciprocal relationships with children. When this article was written, approximately 63% of the early childhood methods courses were taught in the schools. However, in an effort to move all methods courses into the field and follow practice-based teacher education, future reforms of the program include more field-based components.

Early Childhood Faculty use focused inquiry and reflection throughout the early childhood curriculum, in the field and on-campus. Each semester, we present guiding questions designed to ask candidates progressively more complex questions that shift from individual children’s learning and what teachers do in classrooms, to how can teachers have an impact on classroom learning and what are personal professional responsibilities. (See key questions for each semester, Figure 3.0.) Faculty use teaching cases, learning scenarios, and documentation within each course, provoking candidates to ask questions and test hypotheses about learning and teaching. Faculty also use selected readings to generate questions and discuss the application of practices. Finally, Faculty employ self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and instructor evaluation of practicum and student teaching experiences, which contributes to candidates asking themselves and others questions and reflecting on practice and outcomes.

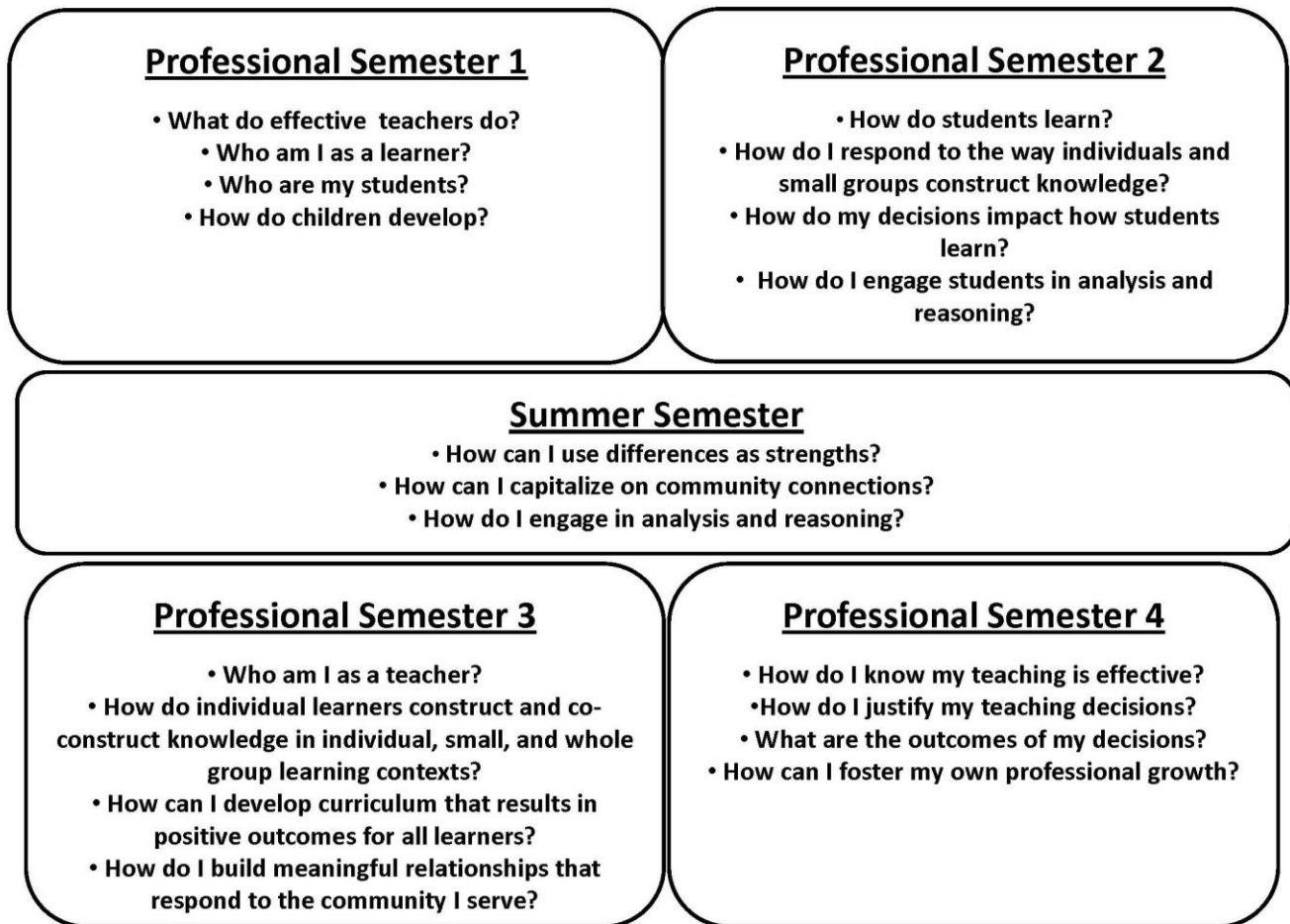


Figure 3.0 What is a change agent?

Directed and/or focused observations are key experiences in the early childhood program from the initial course to the last student teaching experience as candidates shift from the candidate perspective to a teacher point of view. Faculty also utilize videotape analysis so that it becomes routine as candidates study child behavior, learning and outcomes. Candidates learn to observe and process what they see in small groups, pairs, and individually allowing them to compare and contrast what they are seeing, become open to others perspectives and ideas. During the final year of the student teaching experience, supervisors and candidates review candidates' teaching tapes together and engage in professional discourse where the candidate reflects on practices for revision and refinement.

Within the early childhood program, faculty sequence guided practice so candidates gradually start with individual child interactions in tutoring sessions, move to small group experiences, and finally take over entire class responsibility. Additionally, faculty use certain dimensions of CLASS as the focus of particular courses so candidates can concentrate on specific strategies and teaching behaviors. For example, in the Integrating Curriculum course, candidates focus on the Instructional Support Domain of CLASS to practice strategies that will foster higher-level thinking skill development. Instructors use guided practice to support candidates in proposing adjustments, trying unfamiliar strategies, and gaining confidence in their own teaching skills.

### **Epistemic Practices in the Elementary Teacher Education Program**

The field is central to all methods courses in the elementary program. Elementary Program Faculty teach classes in the field in partnership with schools and practicing teachers, which allows an authentic context for inquiry, observation and practice. As stated previously, all of the elementary methods courses are taught in partner schools. In each of these courses, candidates are provided multiple opportunities to focus on essential components of teaching, observe in-service teachers, instructors or their peers engaged in teaching and to participate in guided practice experiences in which they are provided direct feedback. Candidates also participate in guided reflection to construct meaning regarding learning to teach. Two examples of the inquiry-observation-practice cycle are from the literacy and math methods courses.

**Literacy methods.** Within the year-long literacy course, candidates are provided opportunities to learn how to teach reading in individual, small group and whole group contexts. Specifically, learning to teach guided reading illuminates the epistemic practice cycle. Candidates in the literacy methods course engage in discourse regarding the essential components of teaching reading and how to make instructional decisions based on the ongoing assessment of student reading performance (focused inquiry). Candidates then observe master teachers conduct guided reading groups; candidates engage in debriefing sessions wherein teachers make their teaching visible by explaining their decision-making process as well as their assessment notes (directed observation). Candidates are then provided an ongoing opportunity to practice guided reading through a twice/weekly before school program in which they work with a peer and 3 to 5 students. In these guided reading groups, candidates are responsible for shared planning and enactment of reading instruction as well as assessment of the students. The guided reading instruction occurs during class time allowing the university literacy instructor to provide immediate feedback to the candidates regarding their own progress in learning how to teach reading (guided practice). This practice is then followed by group discussion around how to teach reading (focused inquiry), opportunities to observe master teachers and peers engage in teaching guided reading (directed observation) and receiving feedback from instructors (guided practice). Faculty design this cycle of epistemic practices to continue as the candidates transition from student of education to teacher of reading.

**General methods.** In the first of two general methods courses, candidates are also involved with the cycle of epistemic practices. Candidates are involved in classroom discourse regarding culturally responsive instruction in which the instructor poses questions for reflection and group dialogue (focused inquiry). The instructor then models the teaching of a lesson with PK-12 students and candidates observe for particular components of the lesson plan and/or teaching strategies (directed observation). At the close of the lesson the instructor and candidates engage in dialogue regarding the instructional choices made by the instructor and the effectiveness of such choices (focused inquiry). The candidates are then provided opportunities to work in pairs, under the supervision of the instructor, developing lessons to teach to K-12 students during class time or in their field experience (guided practice). The cycle of epistemic practices, though looking slightly different in math than in literacy, continues as a spiral in developing candidates' understanding of and comfort in the teaching.

As illustrated through these examples, faculty have designed all courses within the elementary program to follow Hollins's (2011) practice-based model and faculty have modified the cycle for each course to fit the needs of the teacher candidates at various stages of the program. Faculty intend for the focus on practice-based teacher education in the junior year (first professional year) to both provide

authentic opportunities for learning how to teach and develop a level of comfort and experience with constructivist pedagogy as well as the complexity of teaching. Faculty have designed the senior year (second professional year) with the goal of candidates mastering the complex process of teaching in a self-directed manner where candidates, cooperating teachers and faculty can jointly create opportunities for inquiry-observation and practice, making this cycle a process engrained in the candidate as they transition into a teacher responsible for his/her own professional growth and learning, as well as the learning of others.

### **Program Qualities and Issues**

Hollins (2011) identifies four qualities of practice-based programs. These qualities include (a) collaboration among faculty to support learners, (b) coherence through the interconnectedness of experiences over time, (c) continuity and consistency of faculty and program components, and (d) integrity and trustworthiness of the program as determined by the success and common traits of program completers over time. Faculty use each of these qualities as a guide for the work as well as to help make visible potential issues and challenges; many of which we continue to examine. Dewey (1938) states, "It would not be a sign of health if such an important social interest such as education were not also an arena of struggles, practical and theoretical" (p. 5). Project CAUSE has encountered both of these struggles; specific examples of our struggles include: time for collaboration, disconnect between theory and practice extant in schools, program-specific curriculum decisions, and the complexity of the process as we move towards the goal of trustworthiness and integrity. Since challenges arise from doing the work, the following section highlights the progress we have made within each of Hollins's (2011) four qualities and the ways in which we have responded to the related challenges and issues.

**Collaboration.** Perhaps the most salient feature of the first year of Project CAUSE was the culture of collaboration that developed through the work with program faculty. Faculty met frequently to collaborate over coursework and clinical experiences, share effective strategies, and discuss individual candidates' needs in efforts to support learners and ensure coherence of course and program experiences. A predictable challenge in meeting the goal of collaboration is that of time for collaboration and the process of change. In an industry where working as individual scholars is the norm, the process of reforming programs (rather than courses) involves not only a collaborative approach, but a great deal of time for professional study, focused and honest dialogue, collaborative planning and collaborative assessing. Developing a "culture of collaboration" and maintaining program coherence and consistency are needed to meet the goals of becoming a trustworthy program with predictive results of graduates. However, this culture requires a focus on time for collaboration including carefully planned meetings and opportunities for engagement at both the university and school levels.

**Time for collaboration.** Practices at the university level that have become part of the culture of collaboration include time for programmatic planning, time for curriculum planning, time for refinement, and time for ongoing discussions of problems of practice, solutions and future plans. Our program faculty meet monthly for "business meetings" in which the focus is on program-wide reforms, assessment and instruction, candidate needs and university-school partnership needs. During program business meetings, time is also allotted for professional study, review of research and reflection. At another 2-hour monthly meeting, university faculty engage in collaborative planning across courses

within the program. These meetings are designated spaces for collaboration and have become a necessity in assuring consistency of program courses and experiences. Finally, at the university, another 2-hour monthly meeting is dedicated time for program coordinators and School of Education leadership to engage in dialogue regarding programmatic components, university-school partnerships, problems of practice and expansion of the program. Each of these separate meetings has become essential at ensuring effective evaluation and progress of every stage of reform.

As with the need to create culture of collaboration within the university, there is a great need to increase communication and collaboration between the university and partner schools. Three separate venues ensure consistent communication and opportunities for collaboration among the partners. University faculty meet regularly with cooperating teachers in the partner schools to ensure clarity of communication, discuss needs of teacher candidates, and to provide an avenue for cooperating teachers to contribute to the design and success of the program. Faculty supervisors/instructors then share updates of their meetings with the program coordinator for appropriate discussion/dissemination of information. Another type of meeting that occurs monthly is that of partner school principals. Principals and assistant principals of schools involved in the partnership meet for 3 hours each month to discuss the partnership, receive and share information that may impact/enhance the partnership and engage in professional dialogue regarding effective practice for school leadership. Finally, on a quarterly basis, the Project CAUSE director meets with school district administrators. These meetings serve to ensure consistency of the program, secure expansion, and maintain critical communication between the university and the school districts. The Project Director designs the agenda for these meetings, which may include evaluation, new school identification, district mandates and university curriculum and student teaching and/or candidate job placement.

**Coherence.** The emphasis on collaboration during the first year of the project helped ensure interconnectedness of experiences across courses and semesters. As described previously, each of the two programs, early childhood and elementary, created an intentional and developmental sequence of professional semesters, ensuring that program faculty collaborated and communicated about course experiences and content at every stage of the program. This reduced the likelihood of duplication of efforts and allowed faculty to focus semester objectives and experiences on a pre-determined set of skills and knowledge connecting courses within each semester.

To further ensure program coherence, faculty developed professional semesters connected via essential questions and anchor experiences. The essential questions provide a framework for what is important in learning to teach and assist with the use of common language and depth of focus across courses, while maintaining program-specific content. Anchor experiences are those experiences serving to align clinical experiences and individual courses to the larger focus of each semester. An example of an anchor experience in the elementary program is a case study assignment in the second professional semester. The assignment asks the candidate to focus part of their clinical time on a student with whom they interact in teaching math and reading. The assignment also asks the candidates to interview the student and the student's family in facilitated efforts to learn more about the student and then use the strengths of the student and the student's background to prepare lessons in both math and reading. The assignment aligns content learned in the literacy methods, math methods and learning theory course while utilizing the field component of the Thursday internship. Anchor experiences are listed in the example of the elementary and early childhood program overviews (Figures 4.0 and 4.1).

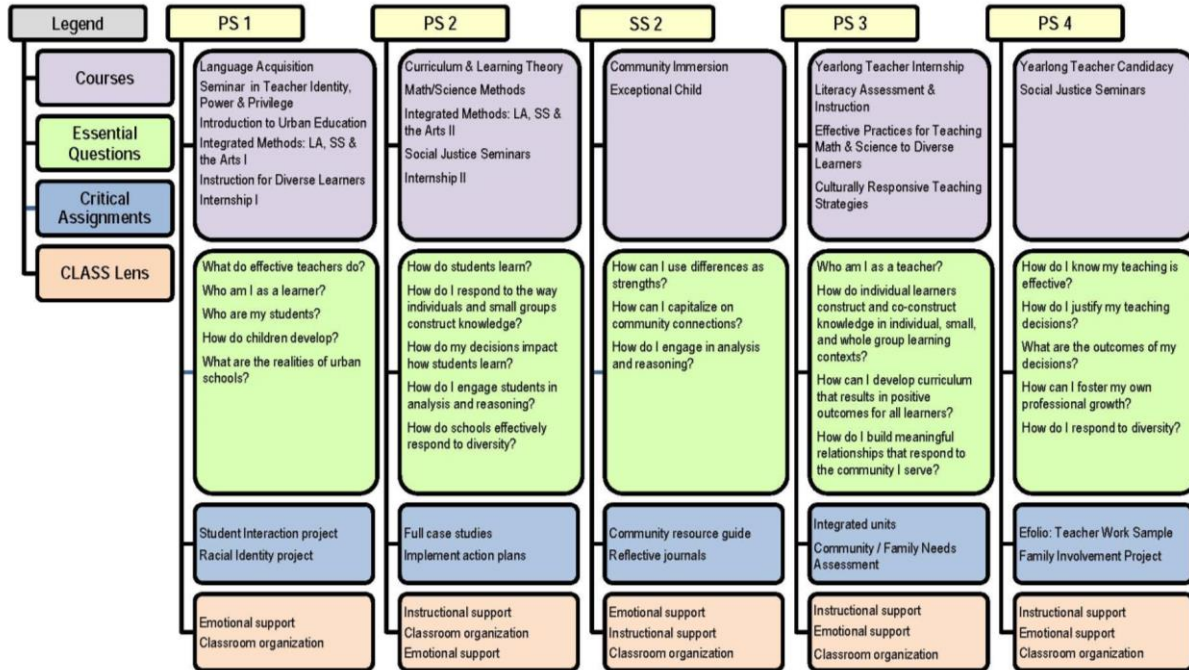


Figure 4.0 Elementary Program Courses, Professional Semesters 1-4.

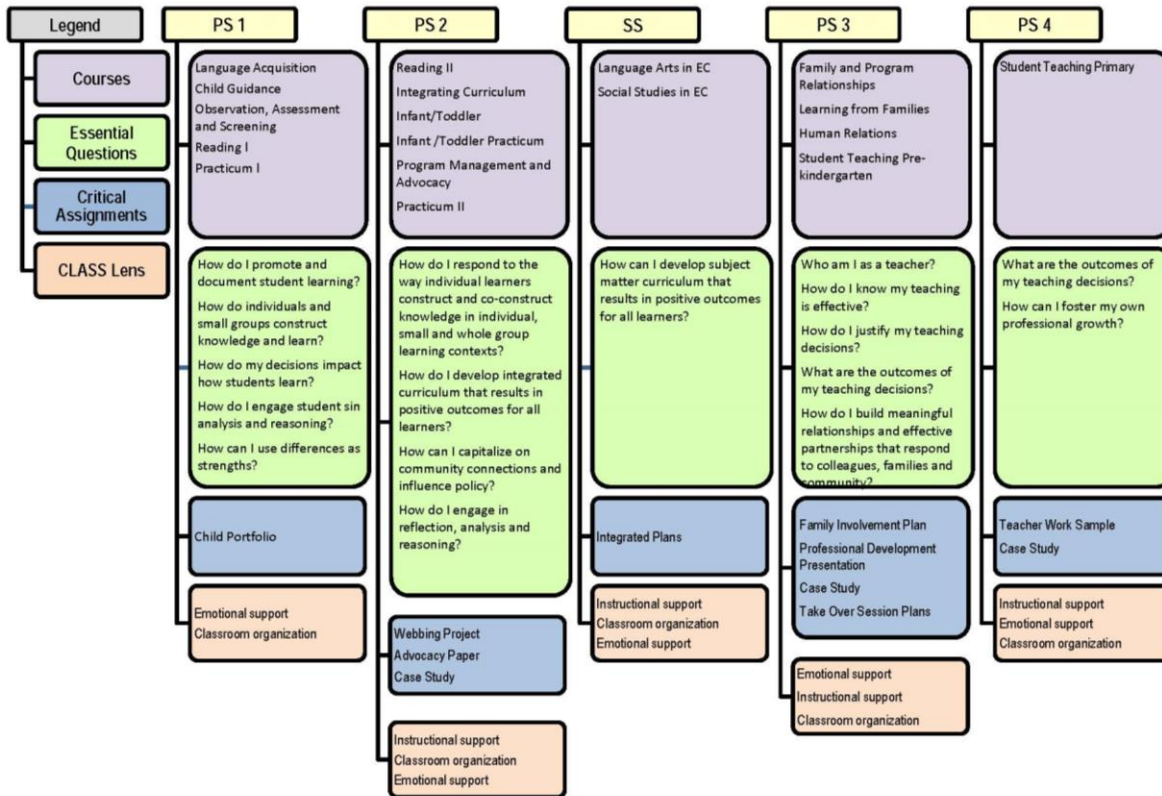


Figure 4.1 Early Childhood Program Courses, Professional Semesters 1-4.



Finally, program key assessments serve as learning events for candidates and provide coherence of experience and content throughout and across programs. These focused and deliberate events connect the candidate to authentic opportunities to teach and connect the early childhood and elementary programs to the larger context of Project CAUSE. Example key assessments include clinical evaluations and performance measured by CLASS, performance measures evidencing candidates' impact on student achievement, and progressive expectations for candidate professional dispositions. Each of these assessments is scored on a developmental rubric and is utilized multiple times throughout the program as both an educational and informative event.

**Disconnect between theory and practice.** As the program became more focused on the intended goals and curricular components, the issue of how to maintain coherence between university constructivist practice and school classroom practice became a harsh reality. Unfortunately, No Child Left Behind focused instruction in classrooms on raising test scores and not on facilitating learning. Therefore, many candidates participated in practicum and field placements where the espoused practice is not being modeled. Yet, candidates need to see the practice demonstrated before they can emulate strategies.

Faculty have attempted to address this issue and build social constructivist teacher capacity in partner schools in a threefold manner. The ongoing connection with graduates, who after three years of practice, can serve as cooperating teachers is one way to begin dismantling the theory to practice barrier. Another strategy is the use of video to create focused observation opportunities. Faculty are also creating videos of exceptional practice in classrooms of graduates and through classroom-based demonstration lessons. These, as well as existing and/or commercially made videos, are used to illustrate specific teaching behaviors. Finally, when candidates do see less than desirable practice in schools, instructors capitalize on the opportunity to engage candidates in focused inquiry about the practice, negotiating and brainstorming how candidates can successfully achieve a desired outcome to maximize, not compromise, student learning. One example of such focused inquiry involves the current practice of subjects taught in isolation rather than taught in an integrated, social constructivist approach. Using an integrative approach to curricular design, discussions on how to use a science or social studies book during the designated reading block will help students achieve well rounded knowledge. In this solution oriented focused inquiry, candidates learn how to take a practice that may appear to be too teacher directed and examine ways it can be recast into a more social constructivist practice.

The process of developing social constructivist educators is complex and, in this pursuit, there is a balance between modeling and inquiry that must be realized. In situations where criticism of current classroom practice might seem warranted and candidates are tempted to criticize in-service teachers, faculty encourage candidates to engage in the problem-solving, social constructivist approach to dialogue about how to increase the effectiveness of practice and positive learner outcomes. The dialogue focuses on the practice and child outcomes, not individual teachers.

**Continuity and consistency.** The theoretical framework and philosophical stance of Project CAUSE aid in ensuring continuity and consistency with which faculty organize, teach and model the practices and ideologies candidates are expected to learn while in the program. Our social constructivist theoretical perspective ensures that candidates are provided experiences in learning to teach and are offered opportunity to question and debrief experiences. These opportunities to construct meaning ultimately help develop habits of mind in learning to teach. We have developed program courses

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unified by our social justice stance, in which candidates ponder the question, “what does it mean to be a social justice educator?”

Additionally, to ensure consistency throughout the program, we have ensured that all courses employ the same epistemic practices for learning to teach. This not only creates a consistent frame for candidate learning but creates opportunity for faculty to dialogue and gain insight to each other’s teaching as well as providing a common language for the work. Epistemic practices specific to Project CAUSE were detailed in previous sections. In moving toward consistency in a field-based program, perhaps the biggest initial challenge was in modification and refinement of the existing program curriculum. As noted previously, a great deal of complexity and time goes into implementing a practice-based model.

The practice-based model includes candidates observing teaching, constructing meaning, enacting practices, co-constructing meaning and re-enacting on a regular basis. This authentic, context-specific learning takes a great deal more time than “covering” material in a more traditional campus-based class. Therefore, faculty spent a large portion of the first year trying to determine “what is essential” to be taught.

**Program-specific curriculum decisions.** Within all courses and across programs, a great amount of time was devoted to examining past practice, re-examining course objectives and certification requirements and analyzing data to determine which course components were most critical and would be the most highly realized in a field-based model. Conversations with practicing master teachers, focus groups with program graduates and current candidates, and fierce dialogue among faculty assisted in allowing faculty to embrace a “less is more” stance toward their own teaching decisions.

Faculty leaders aided the conversations and decisions about course content with the social constructivist framework guiding the program, professional standards and certification requirements, semester and program essential questions, key assessments which had been designed with program goals as the focus, the CLASS framework, the social justice lens and the culturally relevant pedagogy underscoring the program. Questions regarding these key program components became a staple in every faculty meeting and curriculum planning session. Faculty slowly, and sometimes painfully, learned how to focus their course content and experiences on “what was essential” in an effort to bring program focus and cohesion to the experiences of all candidates.

**Integrity and trustworthiness.** In aiming to develop an exemplary teacher education program, we are committed to the integrity and trustworthiness of our practices. We use key assessments as a preliminary tool for ensuring coherence and consistency throughout the program and as a gauge of integrity, as data from assessments are used to inform program changes and enhancements. We designed the key assessments described above to be predictive in nature, allowing a window to the future and the degree to which graduates will engage in quality teaching. Additionally, our research agenda for the project includes longitudinal studies in which graduates are followed to determine the degree to which they enact the habits of practice learned and the impact of their practice on the growth and achievement of students.

**Complexity of the process.** As with any significant change, a challenge in establishing long-term integrity and trustworthiness lies within the complexity of the process of change and specific program components. The process of educating teacher candidates and providing professional development to current teachers in the field is another area of tremendous challenge. Cochran-Smith (2009) asserts that the complexity and multiple dimensionality of change cannot be ignored. The current reform of

moving from a traditional teacher education framework to a field-based model, centers on four interconnected and simultaneously occurring levels of change: a) child outcomes and teacher practice, b) teacher practice and candidate learning, c) candidate learning and teacher educator practice, and d) teacher educator practice and school district mandates. Focusing on attending simultaneously to individuals and the broader community where individuals learn and develop has become a daily challenge for faculty and administrators.

Many strategies are currently utilized to cope with the issue of complexity. "Cultures of evidence" (Cochran-Smith, 2009) are being developed as longitudinally to examine the effectiveness of the teacher education program is being collected. Any changes and transformation occur only after evidence has been examined and a more productive practice has been determined. The field-based model has allowed the teacher educators to develop stronger relationships with candidates and with cooperating teachers, yet more time to process relationship building must be found.

The field-based nature of the program also provides authenticity to the practices discussed. However, often these practices are less ideal than may have been discussed through a simulated experience in a campus-based class. We are continually engaged in discussion of how practice can produce increased child learning occurs, however, the heightened need to honor the partnership with teachers and schools makes such discussions more complex. We provide time for the discussion of ineffective vs. effective practice in seminars and classes, and teacher educators have honed skills in effective facilitation. Candidates learn strategies to engage in productive inquiry-based dialogue while also acquiring new ways of working with children through designing and implementing the new practice themselves.

Discussions among school administrators, teachers, and teacher educators are also essential. This aspect of the reform is the most challenging since schedules are tight and process time is need when ideology differs. Memorandums of agreement with school districts, that detail long-term goals, responsibilities, and relationships, have helped but our communities of practice are still in the infancy stages.

### **Early Indicators of Success**

At the close of our third full year of implementation, we are beginning to see the benefits of our reforms in three distinct areas: (a) unity of program faculty, (b) collaboration with schools, and (c) success of our graduates.

Over the course of the past four years, faculty have been engaged in courageous conversations, have had their own work and beliefs challenged and have spent countless hours developing and re-developing courses and course experiences. However, the ownership and unity of the faculty prove that these experiences have created a collaborative professional learning community within our program faculty. Throughout the past four years, we have gathered reflections from faculty regarding their thoughts about the reform and their work within the reform. These reflections demonstrate evidence that our work is benefitting faculty and students alike. At the close of a faculty meeting during the second year of implementation, a faculty member wrote, "I appreciate being a part of a team where we are focused on getting better at the real conversations...the messy conversations. It is helpful to have clear ideas as a result of these conversations for which action comes next..." Recently, at the close of a program faculty meeting, the reflection from another faculty member demonstrates how the meetings and work interconnect: "The various voices that are allowed to be heard has inspired me and

gives me that extra oomph to make it until the next time we meet. The meetings for me have been my 'filling station' ... the place that I get rejuvenated, reaffirmed, validated."

The collaboration with schools is another area in which we are seeing growth of the partnership and the program. Teachers and principals are recognizing the benefit of having courses held in their buildings and of teacher candidates spending a full-year in their schools during the year-long internship. As discussed, all of the elementary methods courses and 63% of the early childhood methods courses are now housed in schools. While candidates have expressed the benefit of this since the beginning of the program, teachers and principals are now also recognizing the benefit. Currently, we have more schools and principals who want to have courses held in their building than we have courses to offer. Principals with buildings at full capacity have also expressed disappointment that they do not have extra space in which classes can be held. The desire of teachers, principals and districts to be part of the partnership demonstrates that while change takes time, true collaboration and trust between PK-12 schools and universities is possible.

A final indication that school districts and principals are seeing the benefit of the partnership is in the early success of our graduates. The 2013 class of the elementary and urban teacher preparation graduates celebrated a 91% job placement rate; of these hired teachers, 88% were hired by our partner districts. Coaches working with our graduates are also witnessing success. Recently, one coach commented, "Our new teachers this year are off to a GREAT start and it's exciting to see that the work we are doing during their preservice years, albeit challenging, is really paying off. I was able to praise a first year teacher that the current state of his practice is beyond that of a first year teacher. I am so proud of him and am excited to work with him this year."

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In attempts to meet the original goals of Project CAUSE, we have focused on reforms highlighted in the literature including (a) fieldwork central to the curriculum with careful alignment to coursework, (b) extended and carefully designed clinical components, (c) opportunities to work with diverse learners, and (d) fieldwork closely supervised and supported by clinical educators and mentors (Darling-Hammond, 1997; NCATE, 2010). As clear, from the recommendations, each of these calls for reform is connected to the other. We have rediscovered that the journey of reform must be holistic, tinkering with programs is not the answer and we cannot make changes to individual courses isolated from the program as a whole.

Starting with the end in mind, we were able to *re-form* our programs rather than revise components. Our vision for preparing exemplary teachers through a social constructivist framework and towards a social justice stance became the yardstick with which we carefully measured program decisions and actions. We hope that the details of our program and our journey will help inform other programs in their pursuit of reforming programs to meet the current needs of our profession. As Darling-Hammond (2010) asserts, "We need to raise our expectations for the teacher education enterprise as a whole, requiring every program a common vision that informs a tightly integrated program of high-quality clinical work married to a supportive learning-focused curriculum" (p. 43).

We would be remiss, however, if we did not emphasize our lessons regarding the complexity of the work, the difficulty of enacting real change and the need for commitment to our goals. We have adopted a "problem-solving" or reflective perspective, knowing that each opportunity for meaningful change will also present multiple challenges that need to be addressed. We learned from Dewey (1933)

that “[T] the function of reflective thought is, therefore, to transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious” (p.100–101). Through modeling this problem-solving or reflective thought approach, we are not only growing stronger as a program, but we are modeling practices that will enable our candidates to enter the profession equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be change agents for our nation’s children.

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