Chapter 18

Redesigned Urban Teacher Preparation: A Reflective, Community-Centered, Clinically Intensive Program at a Midwestern Public Research University

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ABSTRACT

A redesigned teacher preparation program at a Midwestern public research university focuses on deconstructing the previous curriculum to enhance the ways in which pre-service teachers get early experiences in communities and schools that serve them. Concurrently, the new curriculum clusters content, pedagogy, and instructional technology so that such clinical/field experiences could be analyzed by means of reflective practice that is highly contextual and dialogic. Challenges, opportunities, and trends during the design and implementation process reveal connections to the most recent research on urban teacher preparation. Future research proposes areas of investigation related to sustainability of research-focused and evidence-driven urban teacher education that involves community partners as an integral part of the program implementation and evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Following the Blue Ribbon Panel set of recommendations related to enhancing clinical teacher preparation based on strategic partnerships intended to lead to improved student learning outcomes (NCATE, 2010), the entire faculty, staff, administrators, and strategic community partners in a College of Education and Human Services at a Midwestern public research university embarked on a journey to redesign a teacher preparation program that had been in place for quite a number of years. The impetus behind this highly-collaborative was based on the realization that improved pedagogical training implied on earlier engagement in the types of work typically undertaken by classroom teachers. Given the urban focus and

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commitment to the larger community served by the particular teacher preparation program, the mix of theory and praxis was intentionally developed as balanced and reflective of the characteristics and needs of the inner-city partners the College had for many years.

In a deliberate attempt to deconstruct the previous teacher preparation program, faculty, staff, and administrators in the College of Education and Human Services involved community-serving stakeholders (school principals, superintendents, clinical supervisors, and in-service teachers) in discussions aimed at mapping our curriculum in a backward fashion (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). To that effect, the analysis of the program in its iteration at the time was continuously grounded in keeping in mind the end-result (our graduates) and how they would be able to demonstrate teaching effectiveness as soon as their first formal employment. The authentic nature of our collaborative effort was enhanced greatly by having community partners work with us on a number of concurrent initiatives, as follows:

1. An overview of the theoretical framework that guided all programs in the College of Education and Human Services, coupled with a comparative analysis to national (generic as well as discipline-specific) standards for the teaching profession.
2. A thorough investigation of the curriculum, with a keen eye out for areas of potential redundancy and gaps in content (both purely disciplinary and pedagogical).
3. An inventory of university-school partnerships that could be further developed as a way to secure clinical sites for our pre-service teachers intended to connect better with the redesigned curriculum.

The development work lasted a number of years, gradually moving from the preliminary deliberations about what we wished a new educator preparation program would be like to actual action steps that facilitated faculty-driven decisions leading up to the launch of the new curriculum in Spring 2016. All along, the joint effort was clearly inspired by relevant conversations at the local, state, and national levels related to context-specific characteristics that would help our graduates adapt quickly and effectively to urban settings (Hammerness & Craig, 2016). Piloting the program over the course of two semesters before its official implementation allowed the faculty to share and compare classroom/field notes related to how the new structure might play out once it became official. Constant communication across departments/units in the College of Education and Human Services ensured foresight related to enrollment, admission criteria, clinical/field placements, scheduling of classes, and the requisite student support services.

This chapter outlines the structures, processes, and their related outcomes that supported the development of an enhanced practice-based teacher preparation program that relies on a core directly tied to early clinical/field experiences (Janssen, Westbroek, & Doyle, 2014) and faculty-mediated student reflections on what it means to be(come) a professional who serves urban communities in a variety of ways centered on effective classroom practices. A community-focused teacher preparation program functions based on three interdependent components that need to be constantly revisited for accuracy and relevance, as follows:

1. **Curricula:** In-depth knowledge of content and its technology-infused student-centered pedagogies undergo rapid change as society becomes increasingly diverse and complex in terms of needs, characteristics, and interests. Context-specific applications of curricula allow pre-service teachers to transfer their knowledge and skills to different teaching settings.