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## Using a Place-Based Approach in Preparing Community Teachers for High-Need Schools

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One important goal of the grant-funded Collaborative Schools for Innovation and Success (CSIS) partnership was to improve the preparation of new teachers so that they could more effectively teach diverse learners, especially those in high-need schools with significant numbers of English learners (EL) and students impacted by poverty. As part of this effort, the legislators wanted the school-university partners to implement innovative instructional approaches and establish models for family engagement and community support. Western Washington University and Washington School in the Mount Vernon School District led one of three state-funded partnerships. This article presents a description of selected team actions focused on teacher preparation and professional development, in a context that fostered partnership with families. Collaborative efforts with other educational and social service agencies in the community to provide support to families are also described. Because the project was a complex, five-year effort, there were many other team initiatives beyond the scope of this article.

### **Partnership Goals for Teacher Education**

Our partnership efforts to better prepare new teachers for high-need schools had three action goals:

- Prepare *community teachers* (Murrell, 2001; Murrell, Strauss, Carlson, & Dominguez, 2015) who are able to partner with families and draw upon community resources to promote student well-being and academic success;
- Prepare new teachers in settings where educators across the professional continuum can learn core practices effective for meeting the needs of diverse learners, especially those in high-need schools;
- Develop a supported pathway to teaching for bilingual/bicultural students from the community in order to diversify the teaching force and provide teachers who have a deep understanding of the social, political, cultural and historical context.

This case will describe actions and outcomes related to these three specific goals. Data presented in the case are derived from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, intern and teacher surveys, teacher candidates' journal reflections, and information on new teacher employment available in state databases.

### **Preparing Community Teachers**

Foundational to our approach to better prepare new teachers was a commitment to working in partnership with school districts to ground teacher education in a community and school context; that is, to prepare *community teachers* who would be attuned to the assets, identities, culture and needs of families and students in a particular place. In this case, the context was Mount Vernon

Washington, a small town in an agricultural river valley with significant numbers of Latinx families. Yet wherever these new teachers eventually chose to teach, we wanted them to become community teachers in that particular locale. What do we mean by a *community teacher*? Murrell has defined a community teacher as “one who possesses contextualized knowledge of the culture, community and identity of the children and families he or she serves and draws upon this knowledge to create the core teaching practices necessary for effectiveness in diverse settings” (Murrell, 2001, p. 52).

In addition to contextualized knowledge of the social, historical, and political environment of a community that good teachers need to bring to their practice, the concept also implies a commitment to working in partnership with families and other community members to holistically address student needs. As Murrell, et al. (2015) have noted: “The *community teacher* sees himself or herself as integral to the circle of support for each child, along with the family, community residents, social workers, health care providers and social, cultural and recreational leaders” (p. 158.) In addition, teacher time invested in building community relationships is focused on learning and honoring local wisdom and expertise. This stance requires fostering an “ethic of humility and an intentional posture of student/learner” required of any successful university – community partnership (Zygmunt, Clark, Clausen, Mucherah, & Tancock, 2016, p.103).

Ongoing supportive interactions and deepening understandings of children in their community enable the teacher to develop learning environments that tap into family funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992), connect to students’ interests, and develop their critical capacities. These learning environments, because they are situated in a community context and involve doing place-based inquiry in subject-matter disciplines, develop students’ identities as active learners:

The accomplished practice of a community teacher encourages students’ participation and engagement in learning activities as well—‘doing’ biology, or history, or whatever the subject matter is. The success of engagement and participation is closely tied with the community teacher’s capacity to elicit from students a sense of identity, a meaningful sense of self in the context of the activity and among peers engaged in the activity (Murrell, 2001, p. 89)

This case will include a description of how university coursework intentionally focused on both the *doing* of social studies and a place-based approach.

In the past, the job of teacher education has often been thought of as providing new teachers with a generic repertoire of effective strategies for transmitting information and managing behavior that would be applicable in any

school or district. As our understanding of the situated nature of teaching and learning has developed (e.g., Ball & Cohen, 1999; Borko, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991) we recognized that teacher learning ought to be grounded in particular contexts and activity settings where teachers—in-service, preservice and teacher educators—can engage with families and communities to develop situated understandings and supportive relationships. Our project sought to do this by forming professional communities of practice where members would mutually work to enhance teaching and learning in the school and model core practices for new community teachers.

### **Preparing Teachers for High-Need Schools**

A primary motivation for legislators in providing funding for this type of partnership was concern about the achievement and opportunity gap among students from particular demographic groups in the state's public schools. The students demonstrating lower achievement on the state's standardized tests were predominantly English learners and students from families who qualified for federal free- and reduced-lunch programs. Generally, because school populations are drawn from neighborhoods where families have similar socio-economic status, large numbers of high-need students have often been clustered together in particular schools. The term *high-need school* generally refers to schools where at least 60 percent of the students are eligible for a free- or reduced-price school lunch (Legal Information Institute, 2018).

Because there is extensive literature indicating that P-12 schools exert a powerful socializing influence on preservice teachers during their field placements (e.g., Zeichner & Gore, 1990), we recognized that if our goal was to adequately prepare new teachers able to teach English learners and students impacted by poverty, we needed to situate high-quality preservice teacher preparation in high-need schools. Ronfeldt (2015) has noted the impact of student teaching: "The literature generally suggests that schools cause student teachers to reproduce the kinds of teaching they encounter in these settings" (p. 306).

In a related study, Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom (2015) used extensive survey and administrative data on 9,000 teachers, students, and schools in a large urban district to research whether placement schools might predict later teacher performance. What they found is that the placement can result in higher student achievement if the school where the preservice teachers did their student teaching *matches* the school where they eventually teach as certified teachers:

Specifically, teachers were more effective at raising student achievement when they learned to teach in field placements that matched their current schools in terms of student enrollment, school level and, to a lesser degree, proportion of low-income students (p. 318).

A recent study by Goldhaber, Krieg, & Theobald (2017) used extensive state-level data to do research similar to Ronfeldt. These researchers found clear evidence of correlations between student teaching placements and subsequent student achievement:

Our findings suggest that what makes a ‘good’ student teaching school appears to vary depending on the type of school a teacher candidate will eventually teach in. Specifically, teachers appear to be more effective when the student demographics of their school are similar to the student demographics of the school in which they did their student teaching (p. 352).

Goldhaber et al., use their findings to argue that if we wish to prepare preservice teachers who will be effective in high-need schools, they ought to do their internships in those settings. Yet it would not be wise to simply drop student teachers into any and all high-need schools. We also need to pay attention to the quality of the teaching and climate in schools where preservice teachers are placed for field experiences. This means that we in teacher education need to work in partnership with schools to establish settings where high-quality practices for high-need students are modeled. Ronfeldt (2015) points out:

Remarkably few studies have investigated the effects of field placement schools on later, in-service teacher performance. An exception is the literature on PDSs [professional-development schools]. A recent review of this literature indicates that deliberate partnerships between preparation programs and P-12 schools tend to have positive impacts on instruction during and following student teaching (Grossman, Ronfeldt, & Cohen, 2011).

Our project formed just this sort of deliberate partnership, and we offer this case as a contribution to the literature.

### **Enhancing Teaching and Learning in a Community of Practice**

Our project team worked to enhance teacher preparation in the context of a professional community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where preservice and in-service teachers and teacher educators could all learn together, and where *all* were recognized to have expertise, which is a key value in successful communities of practice (Murrell, 2001). This situated approach to teacher preparation and professional development recognizes that learning involves both individual construction as well as enculturation in social practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As teachers become more knowledgeable in and about teaching, they more fully participate in the community of practice within which they are embedded (Adler, 2000).

For preservice teachers in the Elementary Education Early Childhood Education Program (ECE), this participation occurred relatively early in their program, as they engaged in a field experience at the school while they were taking a university course called Child, Family and Community Relationships. In a subsequent section of this article, we provide evidence of preservice teacher learning over time as they participated as members of the school team who were building deeper relationships with families.

The three quarters of internship/student teaching for candidates in the Elementary K-6 certification program (ELED) allowed for a gradual process of teacher learning and enculturation to unfold in a school setting. A large number of targeted grant-sponsored professional development initiatives were offered for all of the educators—preservice and inservice teachers and teacher educators—in the community of practice. Complementing the situated nature of teacher learning was a place-based approach for intern placements and teacher education coursework to develop all the elements associated with being a *community teacher*, as defined previously.

### **A Place-based Approach to Internship Placements**

During the pilot year of the grant (2012-13), the Elementary Education K-6 Program (ELED) placed a group of seven interns at Washington Elementary School for their three-quarter internship. In keeping with project goals, and especially the goal of finding ways to close the achievement/opportunity gap, the intent of this placement was to collaboratively develop methods for better preparing new teachers for schools with high-EL and high-poverty demographics. The first cluster of interns who spent their three quarters at Washington graduated in December 2013, and reported high levels of satisfaction with the preparation they received.

In the spring of 2014, an entire ELED cohort of 22 candidates was placed at Washington School and two other demographically similar schools in the area. Placement of the entire cohort in the community allowed the ELED K-6 program to move internship coursework from the university campus to a conference room

in the district office. At the same time, the two internship courses were integrated more closely with each other and with interns' school placements. In the social studies methods course, a place-based curriculum was developed that modeled socio-cultural inquiry as both a pedagogical approach and a means for deepening the interns' understanding of the social, cultural, political and economic contexts of their students' lives. This approach, while focused on one particular community, was presented as a model for the kind of inquiry a teacher would need to pursue when hired in a school in any community unfamiliar to them.

This place-based approach was extended, and during the spring of 2015, 2016, and 2017, additional cohorts of interns were placed in local schools, most in the same district as Washington School. In total, over the project's five years, nearly 100 interns did their internships in the schools of this river valley, and we expect the place-based cohort system to continue. It should be noted that Washington School is located in a relatively small district with only six elementary schools (one dual-language), and five of them have repeatedly had sizeable clusters of interns, which shows significant commitment and a belief among district administrators that their teachers and students benefit from the interns' presence. All of these schools where interns are placed are high-need schools with high numbers of EL and low-income populations.

When first informed that they will be placed in these two districts, interns often express concerns about the distance and other issues, but, as they approached the end of their student teaching, they expressed gratitude and satisfaction for the place-based approach, the mentoring they received, and the extent to which they have been prepared to teach diverse learners:

- *It was really important to have our courses in Mount Vernon. We became part of the community.*
- *It was really beneficial to be placed in Mount Vernon rather than a less diverse district. We got a chance to practice our skills working with English Language Learners in a diverse community. I am really thankful to have had the experience here.*
- *Working with a lot of different kinds of families has helped me become a more rounded teacher.*
- *I was surprised to hear that I was placed in Mount Vernon as an intern. I did not know what to expect as I had only been in schools near campus for practica experiences. However, I have had a truly phenomenal and eye-opening experience. I am proud to say that I am a MVSD [Mount Vernon School District] intern and I wouldn't want it any other way.*

### **A Place-based Approach to Curriculum in Teacher Education Coursework**

As cited previously, Murrell (2001) believes that a community teacher ought to engage students in the *doing* of subject matter, arguing that this sort of active learning approach is essential for engaging students and developing their sense of identity as learners. The social studies methods course taught during the first quarter of the ELED internship emphasizes this type of pedagogy, an approach founded on inquiry into the students' own community. Smith (2002) has explained how this type of place-based education strengthens children's connections to others in their community, "allowing them to experience the value they hold for others and allowing communities to benefit from the commitment and contributions of their members" (p. 594).

The first quarter of internship and the social studies methods course begin with a day-long field trip for the interns to investigate the geography, ecology, history, economics, and sociology of the agricultural valley where they will teach. Led by the faculty member teaching the course, the intern cohort begins by visiting a coastal marine reserve where an educational presentation is followed by field work to explore the diking system that has had a powerful effect on the region's ecology and economy. The interns then visit the county historical museum, where the faculty instructor models how they might use such resources as a teacher, such as investigating the various primary sources (e.g., documents, artifact, photos) in the museum's collection.

The day culminates with a visit to a local farm where they learn how the farmer has decided to raise particular crops and animals so as to provide year-round employment for his workers, many of whom might otherwise have been forced to be migrant laborers. This leads to a discussion about the economics of such an approach and the implications of the crop choices made by other farmers in the area, whose workers have children in the interns' classrooms. At this farm, the preservice teachers also have the opportunity to talk with workers to find out more about their jobs and lives.

This field trip inaugurates a quarter-long social studies curriculum that models inquiry and an experiential, place-based approach in their own classrooms. It also immersed interns in the community. As one intern noted, "The field trip was when I really got to see Mount Vernon and learn about the community as a whole."

### **Learning How to Build Authentic Relationships with Families**

In the *From Toolkits to Relationships* article in this volume, Chu and Korsmo (2018) explain in detail how our project increased family participation. Other data shedding light on the changes that occurred in the school as teachers began to examine their assumptions and build more authentic relationships with families can be found in a series of Early Childhood teacher candidate reflections over four years (2013-2016), as they engaged in service learning during family literacy nights, went

on family visits with teachers, and worked in evening child-family activities called Wolf Pack Night (the Washington School mascot is a wolf) . These journal entries also document how preservice teachers learned in a community of practice that included teachers, teacher educators, and parents to learn how they themselves could build partnerships with families.

Narrative analysis (Pushor & Clandinin, 2009) of those candidate field experience reflections by Chu, the instructor, uncovered some common themes across the four years and provide evidence of changes in family engagement as well as preservice teacher learning over time. Some of the interns' responses are below (unedited to retain original text):

**Theme: examining my assumptions—considering expert vs. co-learner stance of teacher.**

*When I first heard about the home visit, I thought that we were going to attend a student's home and talk to the parents about how the school system worked. (Preservice Teacher A., 2015).*

*A home visit is to get to know the 'whole child' and understand that the households of our students contain rich cultural and cognitive resources (Preservice Teacher T., 2016).*

**Theme: building authentic relationships—stages of individual teacher, school and system learning.**

*It is a building process, and it takes time. The home visiting teacher and her fellow colleagues do not just build a relationship for the purpose of the information and input that the parents give, but more for a relationship that lasts a long time and makes the parents feel like they are contributing to their child's success in school (Preservice Teacher S., 2016).*

The preservice teachers across the four years commented on the family visit process of calling a parent, knowing that some parents will accept and others will decline, and then setting up the time and location that works best for the parent. That this must happen at night, on weekends, or outside of school was an eye-opener for most.

**Theme: teachers should invite participation, share power, and have a stance of respect.**

*The first step to a home visit is to call the student's parents and ask if they would be interested in giving teachers information about the parent's child along with some feedback on what the parents would*

*like to see in their child's schools. At this point, the parents can accept or decline to participate....[the educator], gives the parents the power to choose what best works for them, therefore catering to the parents needs rather than giving them a set time and/or location where they do not feel comfortable or cannot attend. In other words, sharing the power between the two parties and ensuring that the families feel welcomed because that then creates the foundation of a mutually respectful relationship (Preservice Teacher R., 2016).*

**Theme: teachers are learners striving to unlearn deficit thinking.**

*The second step is what this teacher-leader considers being the most important piece, educating the teachers or the people who will attend the home visit about the kind of families and cultures they are going to be encountering. In the lesson, she talks about the goals and the purpose of the home visits. She calls this the "process of dismantling deficit thinking". In order to do such work, this teacher-leader educates the other teachers with a cultural sensitivity lesson on the district's main cultures; which are Latino, Indigenous peoples, Slavic, and Caucasian families....Rather than just review surface culture such as foods, holidays, and artifacts etc. She goes into depth about the cultures values, language, and roles of children etc. (Preservice Teacher R., 2016).*

**Theme: communication skills require a stance of listening, responsiveness and flexibility.**

*As far as starting the conversation with the parents, the teacher-leader starts the conversation with open-ended questions like 'How was your day today? How is your child doing?' Etc. She says that the conversations take off and before you know it, the parent is the one initiating the conversation and the teachers are genuinely listening. I asked what is the "key" to home visits? The teacher-leader responded saying listening to the parents. (Preservice Teacher L., 2013).*

**Theme: teachers learn from families and need to study patterns across time.**

*After the visit, the educators meet up in the car and have a reflective conversation where they take notes and discuss some things that they heard. This process really creates a great dialogue. The discussion is always asset based; where the visit is always an asset and filled with positive comments and observations. This is also the*

*time where the educators discuss how they will be implementing what they learned about this family into the curriculum for students with familiar backgrounds (Preservice Teacher M., 2014).*

These preservice teachers described their experiences of learning with families as involving a process of developing relationships and sharing power. They experienced, and were told in the parent interviews, about how the school inquiry teams work as co-learners with families. The words of the teacher candidates are evidence of the shift away from what had been deficit-based family poverty frameworks and the image of the teacher as the expert and the parent as the learner. Commitment to a collaborative and iterative process (Hong, 2012) based on sharing power, building relationships and mutual school-family benefits seems critical to sustaining meaningful family engagement.

### **Making Connections to Social Services and Promoting Student Resilience**

Previously we cited Murrell, et.al. (2015) in explaining that a community teacher must see herself as integral to the circle of support for each child, and be able to work with other community residents, social workers, and health care providers to provide the supports each child needs for learning. Our school-university partnership modeled this for preservice teachers in a number of ways, the most significant being the hiring of a social service “navigator” from Communities in Schools (CIS, n.d.) who worked nearly full-time in the school and by making the Compassionate Schools (Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, & Kincaid, 2016) model a focus in the school to promote student resilience. More information about these efforts can be found in Chu & Korsmo (2018).

### **Professional Learning Communities Developing Effective Core Practices**

Lave and Wenger (1999) note that a community of practice involves mutual engagement, joint productive enterprises and a shared repertoire. Those three elements were present in the work done at Washington School to develop effective core practices for the diverse learners in the school. Using a Professional Learning Community (PLC) model (DuFour & Marzano, 2011), grade-level teams of teachers, interns and teacher educators focused on evidence of student learning. Nearly every one of the teachers was sent to a DuFour Institute, and since clusters of interns were placed in grade level teams, they participated with their collaborating teachers in weekly PLC meetings, which included learning strategies for data-informed practice and self-directed professional development. Two teacher educators also regularly participated in the grade two and grade four PLCs.

The professional development offered teachers in the whole-school PLC was focused on core teaching practices that would be engaging and effective for

this community's students. One major effort was to provide training in Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) to preservice and in-service teachers as well as teacher educators. GLAD is a research-based instructional model that includes 35 differentiation strategies designed to help teachers integrate English Language development with grade-level content in a mainstream classroom (Deussen, Autio, Miller, Lockwood & Stewart, 2008).

Generally, professional development in GLAD is offered to practicing teachers and is often sponsored by and paid for by individual school districts. In this case, grant funding allowed for a cluster of interns at the school to participate in a week-long intensive GLAD workshop with their mentor teachers. This situated learning experience took place in a school classroom, with one of the teacher educators from the grant team co-teaching and other faculty participating as learners. A powerful element in GLAD training is the fishbowl approach, whereby a group of teachers, usually 23, sit in the back of a classroom while one of the presenters models GLAD strategies by teaching a content unit with real students. In the back of the room, the second presenter quietly points out details and explains what the demonstrating teacher is doing, thus grounding the learning in contextualized practice. GLAD training has another feature that was key for situated teacher learning: Mornings during the week-long training were for observation of modeled expert performance; afternoons were for teachers, interns and teacher educators to collaboratively develop a GLAD unit that aligned with upcoming classroom curriculum. These units would be co-taught by teacher and intern. More information about the GLAD professional development and research underpinnings for it can be found in Chu & Korsmo (2018).

Elementary K-6 interns received this GLAD professional development just before they began their third quarter of full-time student teaching, and as a result, they reported using GLAD strategies extensively, both in co-teaching with their collaborating teacher (CT) and independently. Thirty different GLAD strategies had been modeled during the professional development. Individuals among the 11 survey respondents (out of a total of 22 possible) reported using all 30, at least occasionally. More than 90% reported using five strategies regularly or occasionally that are of great benefit for English learners: pictorial input charts, cognitive content dictionaries, observation charts, graphic organizers, and the 10/2 lecture [a GLAD strategy for allowing two minutes of student processing time for each 10 minutes of lecture]. Seven other strategies were used by 50-82% of the interns. The usage for these 12 high-frequency GLAD strategies is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Intern GLAD strategy usage during full-time internship\*

GLAD Strategy	Used regularly	Used occasionally	Did not use	TOTAL usage	% using the strategy regularly or occasionally
Pictorial Input Charts	3	8	0	11	100.0%
Cognitive Content Dictionary	3	7	1	10	90.9%
Observation Charts	3	7	1	10	90.9%
Graphic Organizers	6	4	1	10	90.9%
10/2 Lecture	5	5	1	10	90.9%
Picture File Cards	3	6	2	9	81.8%
3 personal standards	8	0	3	8	72.7%
Scouts	7	1	3	8	72.7%
Personal Interactions	5	2	4	7	63.6%
Literacy Resources/Awards	6	0	5	6	54.5%
Big Books	2	4	5	6	54.5%
Expert Groups	0	6	5	6	54.5%

\*  $n = 11$  respondents from a group of 22

In survey comments, interns reported collaborating with their teachers in developing GLAD materials and co-teaching with GLAD strategies. They noted how beneficial it was to have both the CT and the student teacher trained to use GLAD strategies:

*We have both been able to have GLAD strategies on our radar. Sometimes it's easy to forget strategies when you are so focused on teaching the content. We were able to remind each other of great times to use the strategies, which meant there was a lot of them being done in our classroom.*

They also reported that their CTs learned from them:

*My CT had some GLAD strategies she used and some more she wanted to use but didn't know how to connect them together. For example when doing an input chart what comes before? Or after? How many times do we go back to the input chart during the unit? What happens to the chart after the unit is done and the learning*

*takes place?*

Interns also described positive impact of GLAD on student learning:

*Students show a strong understanding of our vocabulary words on the Cognitive Content Dictionary, know and work towards being models of the 3 personal standards, enjoy writing in their interactive journals, memorize chants and want to say them often, read along with big books, and read their t-graph for social skills every day to the point where it is probably memorized now. GLAD keeps students engaged and makes content accessible to every student in our extremely diverse classroom. Having GLAD training was an awesome experience, which has greatly impacted my teaching and the strategies I use.*

Developing effective core practices for the diverse students in one's classroom is crucial in becoming a high-quality community teacher. Interns, teachers, and teacher educators were able to see and develop models of GLAD-infused lessons and units in their PLCs at Washington Elementary and in other district schools. These preservice teachers are well-prepared to continue using those strategies in all of the community schools where they eventually teach.

### **New Teachers Choosing to Teach in High-Need Schools**

Our primary goal has been to prepare new teachers who have a repertoire of core practices effective for diverse learners and the dispositions for becoming an excellent community teacher. Closing the achievement/opportunity gap requires that these teacher candidates be prepared for the student populations in high-need schools. Has our approach resulted in more of the preservice teachers from our program going on to teach in high-need schools? We have evidence that this is indeed occurring among those who have done their internship in the place-based community cohorts described in this case.

Using the 60% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch criterion for high-need, we analyzed data on where ELED graduates from two different groups were hired as teachers to determine if there were any differences in terms of whether or not they chose to teach in high-need schools. Group 1 (n=36) was composed of two cohorts who had done their internships in the Skagit River valley. Nearly all were in the district where Washington Elementary is located, although one small cluster of interns was in a school with similar demographics in an adjoining district. This group included the cohorts who graduated in winter 2015 and 2016. Group 2 (n=43) included two cohorts who had NOT done their

internships in the river valley where our school-university collaboration was located. This group was composed of interns who graduated one quarter after the Group 1 cohorts, in spring 2015 and spring 2016.

The interns in both groups were randomly selected, based upon when the candidates had completed all the coursework prerequisite to internship. In general, the Group 2 cohorts did their internship in schools that were less diverse and had lower poverty measures than those in Group 1.

- Group 1: Two PLACE-BASED cohorts — **61% (22) are currently employed in high-need schools** (n=36; 10 in Mount Vernon School District)
- Group 2: Two *Non*-PLACE-BASED cohorts — **37% (16) are currently employed in high-need schools** (n=43)

This striking difference in where the two groups of graduates are choosing to teach after becoming certified suggests two things about Group 1: These new teachers feel well-prepared to teach students in high-need schools and have the dispositions to choose this demographic of students. Furthermore, principals and others doing the hiring for high-need schools see Group 1 candidates as likely to be effective in teaching their students, and they hire them. The large number of graduates hired in this particular district, shows a high level of confidence in the teacher preparation fostered by the partnership. Later a district conditional hiring program formalized this preference for hiring teacher candidates prepared in district schools.

### **A Conditional Hiring Program for Community Teachers**

Ronfeldt (2015) has noted how school districts have generally provided placements for student teachers while expecting little, if anything, in return. This researcher goes on to say: “Although the commitment to teacher education demonstrated by many leaders and mentors seems both exceptional and laudable, it is unlikely this arrangement is sustainable unless schools and districts gain more assurances that it benefits them too” (p.319). The conditional hiring program instituted by Mount Vernon School District during this project shows one way that place-based approaches to teacher preparation might benefit schools and districts.

In 2016, the district initiated a program to hire five of the interns from the place-based cohort who graduated in March, putting them on conditional contracts that provided immediate employment and professional induction opportunities. Administrators were making a strategic decision that these candidates had developed a deep knowledge of their community context and effective core

practices for students in their high-need schools. This conditional hiring process was beneficial in that the district was able to reap the rewards of their substantial investment in preparing these new teachers. Because district administrators had far-reaching knowledge of the candidates' skills and abilities, they were able to hire what could be called the "cream of the crop." Placing these accomplished new teachers under contract before they might be hired by another district is highly advantageous during a time of teacher shortage. Another advantage of the conditional hiring program was that the district had five permanent substitute teachers available during the final quarter of the year. The rich professional development induction opportunities afforded the five interns who were hired early are now viewed as part of the district's beginning teacher support system. This conditional hiring program will be a critical stepping-stone for teacher candidates of color from the local community who are currently, or will be in the future, on the pathway to teaching.

### **Diversifying the Teaching Force**

While we have made progress in developing a culture of family engagement and support, and enhanced teachers' skills for teaching children who are learning English, the majority of these teachers and teacher candidates are not from the same cultural and language backgrounds as their students; they are primarily White middle-class females. Recall that the third main project goal was to develop a supported pathway to teaching for bilingual/bicultural students from the community in order to diversify the teaching force and provide teachers who have a deep, lived understanding of the social, political, cultural and historical context. Research shows the need for teachers of similar background to their students (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

We have taken a long-term, grassroots approach to diversifying the teaching force in this agricultural valley. By partnering with other local educational institutions, we are helping to create a supported pathway to teaching based on a cascading mentorship approach (Timmons-Flores, 2013). In cultures that value strong family and social connections, this relationship-based approach is critical to supporting first generation students as they progress into higher education.

Beginning steps toward the cascading mentorship pathway begin at the elementary level, as students visit the university campus, where they are exposed to the exciting learning opportunities that exist there, and to develop a level of comfort and anticipation that they could attend college in the future. During this project, more than 600 Washington students visited the university and many of them have made several repeat visits.

Another step along the pathway is the *Club de Lectura* heritage language program offered in the evenings at the school. In this program, older students mentor younger students in a way that enhances bilingual language development and English literacy (Niehaus, Rudasill, & Aelson, 2012). The program connects elementary students with mentors from the high school education class designed to recruit local bilingual/bicultural students into teacher education, community college, and the university. These partnerships and overlapping mentoring opportunities together shape a multi-level cascading mentorship approach (Timmons-Flores, 2013) designed to support Hispanic and indigenous Mexican students through high school into higher education and, ultimately, into teacher education (Scontrino-Powell, 2014). In 2014, the university approved a conditional acceptance agreement that offers students from the local community college, Skagit Valley College, an opportunity to apply early and receive intensive advising as they pursue their career goals.

### **Conclusion**

We have cited studies by Ronfeldt, et al (2015) and Goldhaber, et al (2017) that found correlations between student teaching placements and later student achievement when the preservice teachers went on to teach in schools with demographics similar to their student teaching placement. In this case a series of interwoven initiatives were focused on preparing community teachers (Murrell et al., 2015) in communities of practice within high-need schools. This case presents a model for how teacher education programs might engage in collaborative partnerships with schools and districts to create such place-based settings for professional learning. In those settings, preservice and inservice teachers and teacher educators were enculturated in practices for partnering with families and drawing upon community educational and social service resources to provide holistic support. Situated professional learning experiences gave teachers models of the kinds of core practices effective for educating diverse learners.

Finally, a supported pathway to teaching was established for bilingual/bicultural students from the community to diversify the teaching force and prepare more teachers who have a lived understanding of the students and their families. All of these intensive efforts by our school-university partnership were designed to create a synergy that would achieve the project's three main goals. This case suggests models for meeting the needs of students in high-need schools and better preparing teachers, as schools and universities work collaboratively with community partners to close the opportunity gap and achieve educational equity.

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