

Engaging and Working in Solidarity With Local Communities in Preparing the Teachers of Their Children

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Abstract

This article analyzes a programmatic effort in teacher education, “The Community Teaching Strand” (CTS), to engage local community members as mentors of teacher candidates (TCs) in two postgraduate teacher preparation programs in a large research university. Three different conceptions of the nature and purpose of teacher–family–community relations frame the analysis: *involving* families and communities, *engaging* families and communities, and *working in solidarity* with families and communities. Three primary research questions are explored in this article: What do TCs learn through their participation in the CTS? To what extent and how do TCs bring community teaching into their classrooms during the program and as first-year teachers? What programmatic features encouraged and/or constrained TC learning from the community mentors? After describing Mountain City’s “Community Teaching Strand,” the article identifies a set of TC learning and practice outcomes as well as a number of tensions that arose in the programs in the attempt to implement engagement and solidarity approaches to working with families and communities. Finally, the implications of this work for teacher education are discussed.

Keywords

social justice, preservice teacher education, equity

Teachers often see parents’ goals and values as impediments to students’ academic accomplishments. Parents in turn believe that teachers are antagonistic toward them and fail to appreciate the actual conditions that shape their children’s lives. This lack of trust between teachers and parents—often exacerbated by race and class differences—makes it difficult for these groups to maintain a genuine dialogue about shared concerns. The resultant miscommunications tend to reinforce existing prejudices and undermine constructive efforts by teachers and parents to build relational ties around the interests of children. (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 6)

It is very clear from the literature in education (e.g., Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Comer, 2009; Murrell, Strauss, Carlson, & Dominguez, 2015) that teachers need to know about the communities where their students grow and develop, how to develop respectful and trusting connections with students’ families and other adults in their students’ communities, and how to make use of this knowledge and these relationships in ways that support their students’ learning. It is also very clear from the literature in teacher education that while learning to work with families and in communities have been articulated as important goals of teacher education for more than 50 years (e.g., Flowers, Patterson, Stratemeyer, & Lindsey, 1948; Hodgdon & Saunders, 1951), there has been only minimal attention to both the preparation of teachers to

work with families and communities (Graue, 2005), and to community field experiences as a source for teacher candidate (TC) learning (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2017).

This lack of attention to communities and community field experiences in teacher education has been the case in both early entry and college recommending programs as well in many of the new hybrid teacher residency programs (Zeichner, 2014). In the highly visible and widely discussed 2010 report of the Blue Ribbon Panel of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), “Transforming Teacher Education Through Clinical Practice” (NCATE, 2010), no attention is given to the role of clinical experiences in local communities. Despite the lack of emphasis on community-based learning and working with families and communities in teacher preparation programs, there have been a number of isolated and often temporary efforts to address these issues in teacher preparation programs in the United States.

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This article analyzes a programmatic effort in teacher education to engage members of a local community as mentors of TCs in a large research university in the Pacific Northwest, and to examine the impact of this work on the perspectives and practices of the TCs. Although the issue of accessing community-based knowledge in the preparation of teachers applies to all education settings, our focus here is on preparing TCs in a predominately White university to teach in schools serving non-dominant families and communities highly impacted by poverty.

What follows is an argument in three parts. The first part organizes previous teacher–family–community efforts within teacher education into a three-tiered typology: involvement, engagement, and solidarity. We do this to parse the rhetoric in education around “community” (Philip, Way, Garcia, Schuler-Brown, & Navarro, 2013) and distinguish the epistemological groundings, the educational purposes, and the implementation requirements of each approach.

The second part examines Mountain City University’s (MCU’s) “Community Teaching Strand” (CTS),¹ a curriculum co-constructed by teacher educators and members of a multicultural, education-focused, community-based organization (CBO). Using individual and focus group interview data with elementary and secondary TCs, cooperating teachers (CTs), and university coaches, as well as survey data from elementary and secondary TCs, we argue that the CTS is a case of attempting to move a teacher education program toward engagement and solidarity approaches to teacher–family–community relationships built on mutual benefit and trust. Although our data revealed a positive impact on TC learning and their actions within classrooms, extending in the few cases examined into the first year of teaching, Part 3 discusses some of the programmatic tensions that arose from the CTS and the features of the work that supported and obstructed TC learning. We conclude the article by discussing some of the implications of this work for teacher education programs.

Teacher–Family–Community Relations in Teacher Education

The idea that teachers should interact with families and in neighborhoods and communities has a long history in modern American education. The movement to create “schools as social centers” during the Progressive Era recognized “the necessity of getting better teamwork between the school and the home” (Perry, 1916, p. 47). Historical case studies have depicted a range of different rationales for developing this “teamwork” over the course of the 20th century: from paternalistic and racist attempts to sanction and correct parental child-rearing strategies (e.g., Reese, 1986) to truly collaborative attempts to build humane educative spaces, especially by non-dominant groups within the segregated schools and society of the Jim Crow South, North, and West (e.g., Donato, 2007; Walker, 1996). As Epstein and Sanders (2000) contend, since the 1960s, federal educational policies and

programs such as Head Start and Title I have “legislated the involvement of low-income parents” (p. 285) in their children’s education.

Over the past two decades, educational researchers and policy makers have attempted to organize and formalize local teacher–family–community practices into frameworks, standards, and professional development curriculum that promote interaction and partnership as a means of increasing academic achievement, especially in Title I schools (see Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Ferguson, 2009).

Teacher education programs, too, have adopted an understanding that teacher–family–community relationships are important to teaching, albeit in fits and starts and to varying degrees (see Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Broussard, 2000; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996; Zygmunt & Clark, 2016). Building on and extending earlier work that distinguishes community and family involvement from engagement (e.g., Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004), we propose a typology for understanding the myriad approaches to teacher–family–community relationships in both K-12 schools and in teacher education. Our typology consists of three approaches that we name as follows: teacher–family–community *involvement*, teacher–family–community *engagement*, and teacher–family–community *solidarity*.

Rather than seeing these approaches as static and totalizing, we understand that schools, districts, and teacher education programs can move between approaches. However, as we discuss below, significant epistemological, pedagogical, and political differences exist between the three approaches. We argue that these differences are intrinsically linked to conceptions about the causes of educational inequity and how teacher–family–community relationships might address them. These differences can—and *did*, in our program—result in misunderstandings, miscommunications, and tensions related to (a) the goals of teacher–family–community relationships, (b) the people invited to participate, and (c) the terms of participation.

Teacher–Family–Community Involvement

When many educators think of teacher–family–community interaction, they think about activities that we identify as belonging to the *involvement approach*: family curriculum nights, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, family–teacher conferences, student homework assignments that include family–home connections, and, increasingly, events that include community service providers such as local CBOs and social service agencies. These involvement activities create opportunities for school staff to share their knowledge and expertise with families and community providers about school expectations, specific school curriculum, ways to support children’s learning outside of school, effective communication with teachers, and ways that families and CBOs can support teachers and the school as a whole.

Many school districts around the country have adopted Epstein's (2002) Six Types of Involvement framework, which details practices related to parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. The ultimate goal of this approach is to increase academic performance. In Evans's (2013) recent review of the empirically based literature in teacher education, he argued that if the subject of teacher–family–community interaction is addressed in teacher education programs, the involvement approach remains the most common.

This kind of coursework reflects a particular tendency to understand teacher–family–community interaction as a technical matter that can be enhanced through skill development. Yet, at its core, it is an important acknowledgment that families and out-of-school time providers are important to the educational development and outcomes of students. It recognizes that increased teacher–family–community communication is important and attempts to create and maintain school-based policies that encourage communication and collaboration. Schools and teacher education programs that adopt this approach are trying to develop teachers who have the disposition and skills to talk with families and providers, although most of the talk is often done by the teachers and is limited to curriculum or student academic progress.

The literature in teacher education cautions that when family–community activities in field placements are unmediated or lightly mediated, they are often “superficial” (Baumgartner & Buchanan, 2010), and sometimes have negative effects, including the reinforcement or production of stereotypes about race, culture, families, neighborhoods, and communities (McDiarmid, 1992).

Although the involvement approach predominates, Evans's (2013) review also suggests “a slight shift” and “a new emphasis on relationship building [that] is slowly starting to replace more technical approaches” (p. 125). This is what we refer to as the *engagement approach*.

Teacher–Family–Community Engagement

The engagement approach attempts to “flip the script” from the involvement paradigm. Instead of teachers and school staff as the knowledgeable participants, this approach stresses the knowledge that families, CBO staff, and community mentors can impart to teachers. The goal of this approach is to create opportunities where teachers can develop an understanding of students', families', and communities' “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) to help them better serve and see their students. In K-12 schools, the engagement approach can take various forms, including home visits (Schlessman, 2012), neighborhood walks led by families and community leaders (Henderson & Whipple, 2013), and “listening sessions” where teachers and administrators listen to stories from families and students about desired educational environments.

This approach has found its way into teacher education programs through curricular and experiential inclusions in multicultural education and social foundations coursework and in TC placement in non-school community settings (e.g., Boyle-Baise, 2005; Buck & Sylvester, 2005; McDonald, Bowman, & Brayko, 2013). In an early article on this kind of work in teacher education, Haberman and Delgado (1993) coined the term “interprofessionals” to describe the development of TCs “who look beyond what happens in the classroom to what happens in the child's school, family, and community which can make an impact on improved teaching and learning practices” (p. 2).

Subsequent reviews in the teacher education literature (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Sleeter, 2001; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996) echo the potential in such an approach. Coursework and community experiences grounded in the teacher–family–community engagement approach can increase awareness of personal prejudices; increase knowledge of, and attention to, cultural diversity and within-group diversity (McDonald et al., 2011); can encourage teachers to approach communities as learners (Buck & Sylvester, 2005; Mahan, Fortney, & Garcia, 1983); can disconfirm stereotypes (Sleeter, 2001); can foster confidence about making community connections (Boyle-Baise, 2005); and, on some occasions, can be used to improve instruction (Evans, 2013). However, Sleeter (2001) notes that the engagement approach in teacher education takes significantly more time and attention and, therefore, runs the risk of being undermediated, which can reinforce stereotypes and cause candidates to sour on the idea of family and community engagement in their future practice. In addition, our research on community mentors suggests that this approach requires families and community participants to do the majority of the work: work that is often un(der)compensated and mentally spiritually exhausting (Guillen, 2016).

Teacher–Family–Community Solidarity

Underlying the *solidarity* approach is an understanding that educational inequalities (e.g., opportunity and/or achievement gaps) are part and parcel of broad, deep, and racialized structural inequalities in housing, health, employment, and intergenerational transfers of wealth. Over the past two decades, community organizing efforts that foreground educational concerns have received renewed attention in the literature. Some of this work has focused on the participation of families and community activists in high-profile experiments in community- and site-based control within large urban school districts such as Chicago (e.g., Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hong, 2011), New York (e.g., Fabricant, 2010), and Philadelphia (e.g., Fine, 1993). Other work has presented individual empirical cases from across the country that show how families, community activists, teachers, and teachers unions have joined forces to create “bottom up” educational and social reform proposals in the midst of a

market-oriented and “top down” policy environment (e.g., Warren & Mapp, 2011).

However, there exist few scholarly articles on this kind of approach to teacher–family–community interaction within the teacher education literature. Hyland and Meacham’s (2004) work on Community-Knowledge-Centered (CKC) teacher education programs makes the case for basing programs “on the assumption that colleges of education have an ethical responsibility to systematically work towards educational justice and take a lead in this effort” (p. 124). They rightly identify the CKC approach to be “explicitly political” and urge teacher education to “model for students and teachers how to organize collectively to incorporate subjugated knowledge and marginalized community perspectives in their own practice” (p. 124). This work mirrors the more general effort to encourage schools to incorporate the lived experiences, untapped insights, and knowledge of non-dominant parents and families in public schools (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Barajas-Lopez & Ishimaru, *in press*; Tatto et al., 2001).

Although small, the “Grow Your Own” (GYO) teachers’ initiative in Chicago discussed by Hong (2011) is a promising example of teacher preparation programs grounded in the organizing/solidarity approach. Created as a partnership between a community/neighborhood organization in a low-income neighborhood and local universities, this GYO initiative seeks to recruit, prepare, and support the development of bilingual teachers and teachers of color who have deep connections with these communities, families, and schools. There are few other examples of teacher education programs that have developed coursework or experiences that explicitly link “social justice teaching” to broader and deeper community organizing efforts or social movements.

In sum, the literature on approaches to teacher–family–community relationships in both K-12 education and teacher education provides the field with a number of possibilities for including family and community members, voices, and perspectives in their work. We argue that in each of the three approaches are differences in who is considered “appropriate” for inclusion and under what terms. Under an involvement approach, we might imagine a group of mothers attending a class session in teacher education to role-play parent–teacher conferences or an assignment that asks TCs to assess their own partner school’s practices using the Epstein’s involvement framework. These very well could be beneficial practices, but they are invitations to work on teacher–family relationships from a school-centric frame.

Under an engagement approach, we might imagine family or community members coming into teacher education programs to share their knowledge about, and experiences with, teachers and schools and/or TCs going into their partner school’s neighborhood to do asset mapping and interviews with residents. In these cases, families and community mentors are viewed as having valuable knowledge to share, and

TCs are tasked with developing the dispositions and skills to find and “tap into” that knowledge.

Under a solidarity approach, we might imagine sustained engagement, wherein family and community members become mentors to, and co-collaborators with, both teacher educators and TCs for the purposes of transforming the curriculum and learning environment in both teacher education and K-12 schools. In such a case, parts of the teacher education program curriculum open up for negotiation and joint work; teacher educators and family/community mentors together struggle over pedagogical, content, and assessment issues related to their work.

Below, we examine an attempt at one university to move the teacher–family–community curriculum in its teacher education program toward engagement and solidarity approaches.

The Setting

MCU’s elementary teacher education program (ELTEP) and secondary teacher education program (STEP) are cohort-based four-quarter graduate programs that offer a master’s degree in teaching. The university is located in a city with a population of about 650,000. In the spring of 2012, both programs faced a curricular decision. For a number of years prior, both ELTEP and STEP TCs were placed in CBOs as sites for teaching learning. Although research on these efforts suggested that there was some benefit in the CBO placements for elementary TCs, it was understood by TCs, faculty, and mentor teachers to have limited relevance to TCs once they moved into the classroom for student teaching and the project was ended (McDonald et al., 2011). The question in the spring of 2012 became, how could ELTEP and STEP continue to acknowledge the importance of learning about local communities and building relationships with families and community educators while also deepening and extending the relevance of this work?

The CTS began as a proposal by the then teacher education director as a response to this question. Over the first year, the CTS developed into a variety of scaffolded actions TCs could take in their clinical placements to get to know students, families, and neighborhoods. Over the second year, STEP and then ELTEP connected with the Family Community Mentor Network (FCMN)—a multicultural, education-focused, CBO—to co-plan CTS curriculum and coursework with faculty and instructors. This connection with FCMN was an explicit attempt, according to programmatic materials, to give those who have the most at stake in the effects of teacher preparation—and in public education in general—a substantial say in its operation (Guillen, 2016). This was an initial to move toward deeper engagement and solidarity with local community members in the preparation of teachers.

As an umbrella organization, FCMN serves as a vehicle for Mountain City’s youth, families, and community members to share their knowledge, concerns, and proposals with

local community organizations, individual schools, and entire districts. The two leaders of FCMN identify their work as advocating for individuals and groups within particular educational settings as well as helping build a more comprehensive education justice movement. Through their work, they have consistently challenged local schools and districts by asking the question, whose voice matters when it comes to educating our children? (Guillen, 2016). The two FCMN leaders, who were the co-planners of the work described here, describe what they do “as connecting the grassroots to the grass tops” (Guillen, 2016). FCMN’s work with MCU’s teacher education programs was its first sustained effort at “connecting the grassroots” to university-based teacher education.

With FCMN’s leadership, more than 70 community mentors worked with TCs in 2013-2014 in a variety of settings and formats. From the perspective of the faculty and instructors involved in the CTS and the leaders of the FCMN, the goal of their joint work was to develop, through numerous “touches” (as the community mentors often called interactions), opportunities for TCs to see family members and community elders as having deep knowledge about children, communities, and education, and that this knowledge was vital for building equity-oriented classrooms and schools.

The CTS: An Approach to Teacher–Family–Community Relations

The faculty/instructors of the CTS and the leaders of the FCMN grounded their joint work in two concepts. First, Murrell’s (2001) concept of the community teacher pointed toward the importance of identity work in teacher education:

Community teachers draw on richly contextualized knowledge of culture, community, and identity in their professional work with children and families in diverse urban communities. . . . Community teachers have a clear sense of their own cultural, political, and racial identities in relation to the children and families they hope to serve. This sense allows them to play a central role in the successful development and education of their students. (p. 4)

Second, Cochran-Smith’s notion of “learning to teach against the grain” located teacher identity work and the acts of teaching in broader contexts of educational and social change.

Prospective teachers need to know from the start that they are a part of a larger struggle and that they have a responsibility to reform, not just replicate, standard school practices. . . Teaching against the grain stems from, but also generates, critical perspectives on the macro-level relationships of power, labor, and ideology—relationships that *are* perhaps best examined at the university, where sustained and systematic study is possible. But teaching against the grain is also deeply embedded in the culture and history of teaching at individual schools and in the

biographies of particular teachers and their individual or collaborative efforts to alter curricula, raise questions about common practices, and resist inappropriate decisions. (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 280)

These foundational concepts appeared in programmatic materials (e.g., course descriptions, syllabi) and often structured decisions about the readings/materials assigned to TCs, the kinds of interactions between TCs and community mentors, and the forms of assessment within the CTS. In addition, these concepts informed the essential questions for the CTS work, which were presented to TCs at the beginning of the academic year:

1. What is a community teacher and why would I want to be one?
2. How can I develop a clear sense of my own cultural, political, and racial identities in relation to the children and families I hope to serve?
3. How do I build alliances and take part in this work to help me understand, engage, and respond to students and their communities?
4. How can I sustain myself, and the practices that are part of being a community teacher, during this program and in my own practice?

Although the CTS contained a number of curricular and experiential elements, for the purpose of this article, we focus on TC learning and programmatic tensions related to the three most prominent ways that TCs and FCMN community mentors interacted within the CTS: panel presentations and debriefs, geographically based small group conversations, and field-based seminar course content and connections.

Panel Presentations and Debriefs

FCMN preferred panels for particular topics; they felt it was a good way to introduce a topic as a first “touch.” FCMN advanced several topics for panels and then planned the panels with university teacher educators. The panels included “FCMN Family Panel: Hopes and Dreams,” “Mountain City Civil Rights and Education Panel,” “Teaching Against the Grain,” “The School to Prison Pipeline, Prisoners’ Perspectives Panel,” and a screening and discussion of the PBS documentary “American Promise.” Typically hosted off campus, with both secondary and elementary TCs required to attend, panels sought to connect FCMN community mentors to certain scholarly texts assigned in the social foundations course and the field-seminar.

Either immediately following the panel or in the subsequent seminar class session, TCs were given opportunities to discuss the issues raised in the panel and to make sense of what they were learning and observing. These discussions were mediated by one or two of the FCMN leaders, one or

more FCMN community mentors, and CTS faculty/instructors.

Geographically Based Small Group Conversations

Because Mountain City's teacher education program places TCs in schools throughout the city and in several nearby districts, and because CTS faculty/instructors recognize that teacher–family–community relationships differ depending on context, FCMN leaders organized small group discussions around issues of concern to candidates for each of the four school placement regions. They sought to create opportunities for TCs to engage in conversations about their teaching and teacher–family–community relationships with families who lived in that geographic region, but logistically this was not always possible.

One-Credit Field-Seminar Course and Course Connections

In both the elementary and secondary programs, a one-credit field-seminar course was the most consistent space for the CTS–FCMN work. In the elementary program, the field-seminar course met weekly in the summer and fall and operated under a reduced schedule in winter and spring. In the secondary program, the seminar met weekly in the spring and fall quarters, with only a few meetings during the winter quarter. The instructors of the field-seminar and the leaders of the FCMN also tried to make curricular connections with other courses.

For example, in ELTEP, the summer social foundations course had a “place-conscious” orientation, meaning that a number of course texts and course experiences focused on the social, historical, and educational geographies of the Mountain City area (Bowman & Gottesman, 2013). As such, and in connection with the CTS, the local indigenous tribe hosted a session with texts and cultural teachings by tribal members. Also, when the entire ELTEP cohort participated in a 3-week summer program at a local elementary school, families from the neighborhood took TCs on a neighborhood walk, introducing them to residents and people employed in the community and pointing out assets such as the community center, the library, and the community garden.

Also in ELTEP, the “Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching” and the “Classroom Management” courses each included a class session that FCMN helped to organize: “Talking About Race and Difference With Children” and “Race, Discipline and Equity in the Classroom: Community Perspectives.” In addition, the “Differentiated Instruction” course hosted a family panel organized by FCMN that involved multicultural family members talking with TCs about learning disabilities and instructional accommodations. In the “Teaching and Learning” course, four mothers who identify as Latinas and Biracial from a partner elementary school talked with the TCs about their experiences as parents

in schools generally and in parent–teacher conferences specifically. This course also devoted a session and a course assignment to parent–teacher conferences, along with the connections to the CTS Strand readings and class discussions.

In STEP, the field-seminar instructor organized field trips to local sites that are historically, politically, and educationally significant as sites of community, identity, resistance, and (re)building for non-dominant groups in the area. For example, one of these visits in 2013–2014 was to El Centro de la Raza, a CBO that advocates for the Latino community in the region.

Taken together, the CTS–FCMN work significantly expanded—and we will argue deepened—Mountain City programs' curriculum and commitment related to teacher–family–community relationships. Using the three-category typology discussed above, we argue that many TCs viewed these panels and debriefs, small group conversations, and coursework as promoting, at various points, engagement and solidarity approaches to teacher–family–community relationships. This work also caused tensions within the programs, as some TCs and teacher educators questioned the qualifications, purpose, and extent of FCMN's participation in teacher preparation.

Research Methods and Research Questions

Our study focused on the 2013–2014 elementary and secondary teaching cohorts. During this year, there were 65 TCs in ELTEP and 64 in STEP. We employed qualitative methods of interviews, focus groups, observations, document reviews (e.g., program documents, TC inquiry projects), and surveys of the entire cohorts several times during the year. Data included in this article are from individual interviews with 12 case study teachers in May and June 2014, five in ELTEP and seven in STEP, and from seven focus groups conducted throughout 2013–2014 with volunteers from the ELTEP and STEP cohorts that included a mixture of 16 case study and non-case study teachers (<https://education.uw.edu/zeichner-protocols-jte>). Some of these 16 participants were involved in more than one focus group. The case study teachers were selected from among those in both programs who appeared early on to be taking up the ideas surrounding community teaching and represent the range of race/ethnicity and gender existing in the programs.²

We also briefly refer to data from surveys (<https://education.uw.edu/zeichner-surveys-jte>) completed by TCs in the two cohorts during and at the end of their program. These six surveys (four in ELTEP and two in STEP) asked TCs to comment on particular aspects of their experience during the year including the CTS, and to provide specific examples of their connections with families and communities. The response rates for these surveys ranged from 53% to 98%.

Finally, we conducted interviews with four of the ELTEP case study TCs and three of the seven STEP case study TCs

in January 2015 during their first year of teaching to gain a beginning understanding of to what extent, and how, these graduates were utilizing the CTS work in their new schools.

Three primary research questions are explored in this article:

Research Question 1: What do TCs learn through their participation in the CTS?

Research Question 2: To what extent and how do TCs bring community teaching into their classrooms during the program and as first-year teachers?

Research Question 3: What programmatic features encouraged and/or constrained TC learning from the community mentors?

Data Analysis

Our research team consisted of a senior faculty member—who also served as the teacher education program director at the beginning of the CTS work—and three advanced graduate students who served as instructors in various courses of the teacher education programs, including the field-seminar course.

The research team transcribed and coded the individual and focus group interviews and met together on a regular basis during 2013–2014 to discuss the data that were collected. We first analyzed the interviews in relation to each of the three research questions using open coding and then looked for specific patterns within data for each question that led to a second round of analysis focused on the types of claims we could make from this information. We checked our claims and addressed rival explanations by examining other sources such as surveys and course-related “exit tickets” and interviews with university coaches, community mentors, and CTs that provided additional feedback on all TCs. The findings reported below represent the central themes that emerged related to TC learning and the features of the program that supported and obstructed that learning.

Findings Related to TC Learning

Re-Positioning Families: From Barriers to Resources

Across interviews, TCs reported a shift in their understandings about the role of families in the education of children and youth, the responsibility of teachers to communicate with families, and the possibilities of collaboration with families. We identify this learning outcome as “re-positioning families.”

Consistent with Waller’s (1932) assertion, and based on either their own experiences or what they heard from others, several case study and focus group interviewees came into the teacher education program with the belief that parents and teachers were “natural enemies.” This belief shifted as a

direct result of the CTS work, especially the structured interactions with FCMN mentors.

[Families] are such an important and valuable resource . . . They’re totally not barriers. They have a *right* to let me know what their *hopes and dreams* are for their children and what I can do to guide them. My perspective on the role of parents and families has completely shifted due to the CTS work. (Nancy, May 20, 2014)³

Importantly, in this interview conducted near the end of the program, the TC used the very language at the heart of the first FCMN panel of the year: that parents and families have “hopes and dreams” for their children that teachers need to know. This candidate added emphasis to her statement by arguing that such a discussion of “hopes and dreams” was not merely a good idea, but it was a fundamental *right* that families should have in contemporary schools.

The “FCMN Family Panel: Hopes and Dreams” encouraged TCs to consider relationships with families and students as a necessary dimension of equitable instruction.

It was explicitly said that you can’t effectively teach all of the kids in your class if you’re not reaching out to parents, or trying to find out what they do outside of school or the different ways that they learn. Because if you teach one style, what you’ve been raised with, you’re giving preference to a certain group of kids who are going to be able to succeed, who already have what they need to succeed, and you’re just choosing not to see or meet the needs of a large group of your kids. That’s something that I don’t think that we would have been able to understand if we didn’t have a family panel first thing. I came to education with an idea of why I wanted to be a teacher, but then experienced a really powerful paradigm shift to hear what parents want for their kids. (Ranee, May 18, 2014)

We might understand this TC’s “paradigm shift” as the realization that her “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) as a successful student would not necessarily translate into successful teaching. Instead of replicating the “style” of her favorite teachers or imitating the practices that were successful with her as a student, this candidate credits the initial family panel with teaching her that “effective” and equitable teaching is reliant upon relationships with parents as well as interest in children’s lives outside of the classroom.

The initial family panel, the geographically based conversations with FCMN mentors, and the FCMN-organized session titled “Talking About Race and Difference With Children” placed the practice of teacher–family communication in a socio-historical context marked by ethno-racial and social class distrust. That is, FCMN mentors were often explicit in arguing that teachers and families had developed into “natural enemies” because of ethno-racial and class differences. On several occasions throughout the year, FCMN mentors of color discussed their own negative experience with White teachers in hopes that these experiences would

help TCs understand potential distrust as well as encourage them to build trust through conversations about their child. One TC reflected on what she learned:

That was really eye opening in thinking about how to talk to parents about their child's education and how important it is to be really positive and approachable for parents so that even if they didn't have a good school experience you get to change that for their child. (Lisa, May 19, 2014)

Importantly, FCMN mentors and CTS instructors discussed teacher–family communication as something that is most effective when it is frequent and its content varied. In addition to the FCMN family panels and small group discussions, the CTS included several trainings on “positive phone calls home” and “family visits”—a less intimidating form of a “home visit” where a teacher and parent/guardian meet at a mutually agreeable location. Adamant that teacher–family relationship and trust building could not occur if communication begins only after a negative event or only at a parent–teacher conference, TCs were encouraged to repeat the mantra, “My first communication with families should always be positive.” Several TCs noted this approach as one of their key points of learning:

The most important thing that I've taken from the strand is interacting with parents frequently in a positive way and having them be involved in their kids' learning. Just like starting with positive emails or phone calls home and opening that into “Hey would you like to come into the classroom to observe or to help, or to be a part of a lesson, or to teach us something or read a book aloud,” and just continuing that the whole year. I think this has really stood out to me. (Aditi, May 19, 2014)

One candidate summarized what she learned through the CTS about teacher–family communication this way: “It really never crossed my mind that it should be a part of what a good teacher does” (Lisa, May 19, 2014). The re-positioning of the family from a barrier to a resource also impacted how TCs viewed their own role as teachers. For example, some began to express a view of teachers as a part of a larger constellation of effort in their students' lives to help them learn and develop.

I'm now thinking of the role of teacher as something less than an expert. There's so much wisdom coming from other places in my students' lives that I'm really, their secondary or tertiary educator. My role is not to transmit my knowledge and expertise, but to help develop them in tandem with all of the other parts of their lives. I'm not the sole steward of their learning. (Padma, May 18, 2014)

As opposed to much of the popular educational discourse, Mountain City TCs articulated a vision of both families and broader communities as positive influences on student achievement and as holding “wisdom” that should be recognized and understood. For some, this acknowledgment that

teachers are “not the sole steward” of students' learning meant that teaching, parenting, and caring for young people did not have to be an isolating practice. Padma continued,

It gives power to the students and the families in the community, but I also feel empowered as a teacher . . . to have all these other ways to try and navigate and try to find a solution . . . it opens up so many doors and just stops that feeling of helplessness. (Padma, May 18, 2014)

For another TC, seeing families as resources and as potential sources of empowerment required an examination of her own experiences and ways of interpreting the actions of others. As a White TC who admitted to having little cross-cultural knowledge and experience, the small group conversations with FCMN mentors allowed her the opportunity to ask questions and at least begin “walking the road” of community teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

[The CTS] got me really thinking about the way I see other people and how I view myself in relation to them. I think it has been a big takeaway for me in my life, not just in teaching . . . Not making assumptions of people based on the way they act and really taking the time to get to know and understand why they do the things they do has been a big change for me in my life . . . I think the chance to ask the open and honest questions that I've never had the opportunity to ask and get honest answers from people who don't view it in a bad way. That was a big change for me I think as a person . . . It influenced my practice and I'm more open to families. I think getting to understand the reason for things, not just assuming. I would say that it has been more beneficial for me as a person because I was never exposed to institutional racism as a kid. I always had the opportunities and I never realized that there's people who didn't have the same opportunities as me. (Tessa, June 2, 2014)

Translating Knowledge Into Action

Data collected from analysis of TC coursework products, interviews, and surveys, both during the year of the program and in case study teachers' first year of teaching, indicate that some TCs translated their re-positioning of families and their re-positioning of their own vision of teaching into actions in their classroom and/or in their school. Some of the TC actions were driven by assignments and requirements in the program—such as the requirement that they conduct an action-oriented inquiry project on a CTS-related issue or by a particular course.

For example, the end of the program survey of elementary TCs indicated a range of actions taken by TCs during the program because of course assignments or the inquiry project: making family visits, observing students in their after school programs, attending student soccer games after school and on the weekends, surveying parents or students about what they do after school and on the weekends, interviewing parents about their child's strengths, surveying students who had been sent out of classrooms for behavioral reasons, and

involving parents in the curriculum or asking them to come into the class to share something they know with the students.

One elementary TC referenced both the FCMN panels and the CTS training on “positive phone calls home” as she discussed the actions she began to take when she assumed greater instructional responsibilities in her school placement classroom.

The parents in all of the panels have told me that I need to be calling parents and having positive connections with them. I knew that I needed to call and engage with them positively. That was one of the things on the top of my list. It’s hard and I’m still scared of doing it, but I found a way to make it something I could do. That involved calling to introduce myself and invite parents to an event in our class, and complement their kid. That went over really, really, really well. I mean they really liked to hear that. Made even the parents who felt a little standoffish feel a little more comfortable with our class and happy about their kids. That really had an effect on our class. I took a classroom survey before and after our event, which also included calling parents and it changed. I don’t know how statistically significant it is, but the bar went up . . . I think this is really huge. (Olivia, June 3, 2014)

This TC admitted that calling families was hard and scary for her, but she noted both the immediate and long-term impact of the practice. For her, the positive impact could be found both in families’ comfort level with her as a teacher and in their positive view of their child’s participation in school. Another TC discussed communication with families as a strategy to improve student performance in the classroom:

Recently, I had this little girl who hates science, anything that has to do with bugs. I reached out to her mom and said “I can’t get her to do this, what do I do?” Mom responded within half an hour “Do this, this, and this.” I did it and the little girl is looking at worms the next day. How powerful is that to use the voice that knows this kid better than anyone else to help her with her education. (Miriam, May 18, 2014)

Another TC gave us an example of how her positive reaching out to a family of one of her students immediately resulted in a change in the student’s behavior.

One student never turned in homework for the whole year and after I made that positive phone call home, that Monday he turned in his homework and said that his dad was working with him for the weekend. It was really cool. I definitely saw an impact right away. (Rubi, June 4, 2014)

The First Year of Teaching

The conceptual positioning of families as holders of wisdom and knowledge *as well as* the actual experience of talking, consulting, and collaborating with families during their teacher education program influenced the ways in which our

case study candidates began their first year of teaching. Coincidentally, three of the elementary case study participants secured teaching positions at the same school—a high-poverty school serving many recent immigrant families and English Learners. Partially attracted to the school because of the principal’s talk about greater family and community involvement, they quickly realized that they were the only or part of a small minority of teachers who actively worked to connect with their students’ families, and learn about their communities and lives outside of school.

Although these teachers described the pressures that they were facing to have highly controlled classrooms, they engaged in a number of activities they used while in the program, such as making positive phone calls to parents and guardians, making family visits in students’ homes or in other places in the community, bringing students’ cultures into the curriculum, attending to issues of social and emotional learning, and so on. Echoing the finding related to teacher empowerment discussed earlier, these teachers met regularly to support one another and to figure out ways to do the community teacher work they wanted to do without raising concerns among their colleagues. They talked about being pulled in two separate ways (high classroom control vs. community teaching) and about how they regularly justified the community teacher work using the district’s inclusive language, its instructional framework, and state standards. Similar to the Cochran-Smith’s notion of “teaching against the grain,” they identified this strategy as working “under cover” to be community teachers and about how easy it would be for them to just comply.

You’ve really got to finesse it. You’ve got to know our principal, who is all about data and [the] Danielson [framework] and certain things that work for her . . . It’s kind of like we have to infiltrate the system. We have this hidden agenda where we could say we’re collaborating because of reading buddies and we’re going for Distinguished on Danielson. Really we are trying to push for community and we can do that better if we’re working together . . . (Rubi, January 16, 2015)

The sheer number of students who high school teachers work with on a daily basis made the task of communicating with their families seem more daunting to some secondary TCs. Yet, even 5 months into her first year of teaching, one STEP graduate discussed how she continued to prioritize teacher–family communication precisely because of her experience in a FCMN panel:

I often think about the parent panel we had during spring quarter last year and how parents were very passionate about wanting to know what was going on with their students and that it is important that the communication is culturally appropriate and that it starts out positively. To me that means making an effort early on to make a connection with parents, with all parents if possible, but most especially with those parents or guardians of those students who might have a harder time meeting academic

and behavioral expectations . . . So I try to do phone calls twice a week. I schedule it into my Outlook calendar. I don't always get to it, but I try . . . Overall, I find parent communication to be essential to the success of my work as an educator and to students' academic work. (Jackie, February 22, 2015)

Although less frequent, the CTS also impacted graduate's curriculum development in their first year of teaching. A White secondary graduate cited the FCMN panel on the school-to-prison pipeline as an influential moment that caused her to think about how she could incorporate contemporary social and political content into her English Language Arts classroom. After graduation from the program, she accepted a position at Mountain City's "least White high school," which had been designated as "persistently low-performing" by the state in 2011, prompting a group of parents, teachers, community members, and district officials to agitate for significant academic reforms, including the introduction of an International Baccalaureate program. In her first weeks in the school, recognizing the frustration and outrage of many of her African American students in the wake of the August police shooting of Michael Brown and the ongoing conversations about race, (in)justice, and "the New Jim Crow," she planned a new unit with these themes at the center.

The school-to-prison pipeline panel that we did . . . We went to it in the evening, ough . . . but we talked a lot about race relations and it was so interesting to hear so many community members that went over and talked about how our African-American students are underserved and how a lot of them end up going to jail and that is something we need to teach . . . To see these community things that we talked about reflected in my school . . . I did a mini unit, a week-long thing on the Ferguson case . . . Let's analyze what happened, look at the documents, talk about why people are upset, what does all of this mean, kind of the critical analysis aspects of it . . . I asked my kids at the end of the semester what was the most valuable thing that they learned this semester. A ton of them said that unit. They were so glad as a teacher I was willing to talk about these things that they care about and that they talk about and that I was acknowledging that there is a problem of race in our society . . . I feel that if you asked me two years ago if I would ever teach something like that in a language arts class, I'd have been "No, it's not a book. You teach books, right? Yeah." I feel like the CTS classes are particularly to thank. (Moir, February 5, 2015)

Although outside the scope of this article, we recognize the need for additional research on how teacher–family–community relations work within teacher preparation programs influences the kinds of schools that graduates choose to work in, the extent to which they continue to use strategies and content learned in the program, and the ways in which they adapt their community teaching practices to the district or institutional contexts they find themselves in.

In the following section, we link TC learning and actions to some of the programmatic features and tensions that emerged because of the CTS and the joint work with the FCMN. It is this line of analysis that benefited from the

earlier distinction between teacher–family–community *involvement*, *engagement*, and *solidarity*.

Findings Related to Programmatic Features

"All of Those Panels" Provided a Space for "Emotion in the Room"

As noted above, the participation of FCMN mentors in panels, small group conversations, and several courses was an important feature of the CTS to many TCs. Several stated that there is a big difference between reading something or discussing complex and sensitive issues with a professor and hearing it and discussing it with community mentors. For example, one candidate said, "There's a different conversation that you tend to have with a community member than with a faculty member" (Hannah, February 24, 2015). Another TC spoke to the same issue "I think that using outside people made it resonate stronger, absolutely . . . Seeing how strongly parents really feel about it, made it inspiring . . ." (Aditi, May 19, 2014).

Although a minority of survey participants indicated that they had at times felt attacked or criticized when the mentors talked about experiences with racist or uncaring teachers or placed schools within a historic system of racism and oppression; case study and focus group participants reported that they believed that community mentors genuinely wanted to help them become better teachers because they wanted their children to get a good education in public schools.

Besides the words that they're saying, there's the emotion in the room. There's more meaning conveyed there than anything that you can read on paper or hear about from someone telling you they heard it . . . (Sachi, May 18, 2014)

Their real life experience, what they or their kids have experienced is very effective . . . (Nabila, May 18, 2014)

I think unfortunately I always had the feeling that they really didn't care about their kids, that they weren't there and maybe they wouldn't come in because they didn't care about their kids, really care. I think that there's been a really big shift in my thinking, just hearing stories from people who are in those positions. (Tessa, June 2, 2014)

Two elements related to programmatic features stood out in our interviews. First, participants mentioned the "emotion in the room" in FCMN panels and conversations, and placed this in contradistinction to much of their experience in coursework and in their student teaching placement. We argue that connecting TCs with this "emotion"—variously described in interviews as "passion," "care," and "personal stories"—is foundational to the work of teacher–family–community relations. We also argue that creating authentic spaces for TCs (as well as practicing teachers and teacher educators) to listen to parents, extended family members,

and community mentors can help the former realize just what is at stake in education. This is an especially important argument for us, as we witness a number of school districts and teacher preparation programs around the country experiment with forms of teacher–family–community relations that stress “high-leverage practices” through simulation or role playing rather than participation in authentic and “emotional” conversations about the problems and possibilities of education (e.g., Khasnabis, Goldin, & Ronfeldt, 2015).

Second, case study and focus group participants stressed that repeated contact—“all of those panels”—with FCMN mentors helped them realize the importance of teacher–family–community relations to good teaching. Yet, several TCs also leveled a critique of what they perceived to be a disconnect within MCU’s program:

I feel like they (the meetings with community mentors) were not as frequent as they should have been . . . you really had to hit it hard during the year instead of just doing it . . . It wasn’t as often as it should have been. (Tiffany, June, 12, 2014)

I think that it would have been helpful to see the parents right away from day one and not have it disconnected—being there one day on that first day when you were welcoming the new cohort, then disappearing until a panel or something. Having the constant presence of parents from these panels . . . just so the student teachers get the impression that they (the parents) should be in the schools too . . . If you want us to believe that you should have parents welcome in the school, then they should be welcome in the teacher education program as well. (Nabila, March, 19, 2014)

Of course, detached pockets of attention to particular issues are nothing new in teacher preparation. The literature in the field is replete with curricular divides between foundations and methods (e.g., Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009), pitfalls between methods instruction and classroom experience (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 2011), and barriers to integrating culturally relevant and discipline-based teaching and learning (e.g., Hand, 2012; Turner & Drake, 2015). Over the course of our interviews, TCs identified a number of places where the CTS work and experiences could be better integrated with instructional methods coursework and experiences.

Spaces for Curricular Integration: Methods Courses and School Contexts

Consistent with Turner and Drake’s (2015) and Dutro and Cartun’s (2016) findings that teacher preparation programs often fail to integrate TCs’ learning about cultural funds of knowledge and attention to learning practices to teach subjects such as literacy and math, MCU TCs often pointed to missed opportunities for integration of the CTS and field-based methods work. As a result, some TCs felt that they were asked to figure out on their own how to translate what they learned about their students’ communities and from the interactions with their families into teaching strategies.

For the amount of time that we spend in schools, it could have been a lot more focused on [community teaching] methodologies and teaching practices so that we can have them at our disposal and you can apply what you know about this student and their family and their learning styles and where they come from . . . We are forced to connect those and how they weave together on our own. (Nadir, June 2, 2014)

Some TCs felt that they had clinical placements where their CTs served as models and reached out to families in positive ways and tried to make them feel welcome in the school as well as used these interactions to learn more about their students.

I think that my CT is really good about working with families. She really makes an effort to reach out to families so I’ve had a good model . . . In the beginning, it was very hard to get to the level she was with the families because I wasn’t there much in the beginning . . . I think that it has been a good experience for me to see the way she keeps in contact with families. (Tessa, June 2, 2014)

Other TCs stressed either the negative attitudes that they experienced in their placements about strengthening connections to families or the disconnect that they felt between the emphasis on the CTS strand in certain courses and experiences and the lack of knowledge about this alleged program emphasis by CTs.

I always see positive interactions when they are planned and required. Then behind the scenes . . . a very begrudging reluctance to communicate with parents. The message I get is that I should be warned that they will ruin everything if I’m not careful. (Sachi, May 19, 2014)

As we know from decades of research in the field, integration across courses and between programs and placements are perennial issues (e.g., Hammerness, 2006). Importantly, we believe that the integration of the teacher–family–community work is not merely technical or logistical in nature. We argue that the movement toward collaborating with educational organizing groups, families, and community mentors—represented by MCU’s initial collaborations with the FCMN—presents teacher preparation programs with a distinct epistemological and political challenge. At its core is the understanding that a more just, humane, and responsive education is possible. Yet, such an education cannot be achieved *only* through the attainment of “ambitious” or “high leverage” teaching practices or *only* through greater exposure to learning theories or socio-historical ways of seeing classrooms and schools. Such an education is only possible when teachers are also prepared through engagement and in solidarity with the hopes, dreams, and visions of the families and communities with whom they work. This requires both TCs and teacher educators to listen, learn, question, and plan in solidarity with local community members.

Conclusion

Preparing teachers to work in respectful ways with, and learn from, their students' families and to learn about the communities in which their students live are important parts of the mission of teacher education programs. The findings of our research into the role of local community members mentoring TCs indicate that the planned and purposeful mentoring of TCs by local community members in a few courses in their program contributed to helping some TCs begin to see that developing relationships with their students' families and learning about their communities can serve as resources to help teachers succeed in educating their students. Our data also show some evidence of student teachers and first-year teachers acting on their newly developed appreciation for the expertise of families and their knowledge of their students' communities even in situations when their actions were not driven by course assignments, and even when this kind of effort was not common in their schools. The mentoring of TCs by local community members appeared to be a critical factor in the development of these perspectives by these novice teachers.

Fundamentally, the CTS work has been one part of an attempt to further shift the center of gravity in teacher education (Cuban, 1969) toward schools and local communities while maintaining the important contribution that can be made by colleges and universities or other program providers (Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2015). Although this work has been complex and filled with tensions, we think that our findings related to TC learning suggest the potential contribution that community-based teacher educators can make to preparing teachers who are committed to working with and for communities instead of on them.

Despite the difficulties that we experienced in this early stage of our work in achieving the engagement and working in solidarity with community members beyond the small groups of university and community-based teacher educators who planned and taught together, we believe that the effort to figure out how to engage local families and communities in the education of the teachers who will teach their children program wide is an important element of preparing teachers to better serve the needs and aspirations of everyone's children. Continuing to parachute well-intentioned teachers from university and non-university teacher education programs into public schools who know little about their students, their families, and communities, and who are not committed to engaging families and communities in schooling will continue to widen the opportunity and learning gaps that have persisted. The mission of teacher education is not to try and "save" students from their communities, but to work with and for communities to help build on their strengths and develop greater community capacity.

Although developing more "Grow Your Own" programs (e.g., Skinner, Garretton, & Schultz, 2011) that prepare teachers who live in communities to become teachers in their own communities is an important part of what needs to be done, most teachers are going to continue to teach in communities in which they do not live. Given the demographic profile of

teachers and of the students who attend public schools, the big challenge before us is to learn how to better prepare and support teachers who are committed to the families and communities of their students as they go in to teach "other people's children" in communities that are often unfamiliar to their own life experiences. It is ironic that so little of this work goes on in teacher education programs across the United States when so many of them have claimed the mantle of social justice as the basis for their work.

The work at MCU has been difficult for all participants for a variety of reasons and on a variety of levels. TCs, as we note above, sometimes found it difficult to translate the CTS work into their own student teaching contexts and sometimes were forced to confront difficult topics about race, racism, privilege, and schooling that they did not always want to examine.

Although family and community mentors worked well with a number of the university teacher educators, on a number of occasions, they felt disrespected by programmatic representatives or TCs, and some found it difficult to learn that many TCs had yet to be exposed to some of the topics and relationships that they valued. Some teacher educators and programmatic representatives appeared to have difficulty seeing the value of community and family participation in the programs, and at times, they criticized the work of the community mentors by, for example, complaining that mentors "just tell stories" or suggesting that they are not pedagogically skilled enough to teach TCs. This tension between professional autonomy and community participation is common in educational reform efforts that have attempted to bring community members and professional educators together as equal partners (Dyrness, 2011). It is important that continuing to figure out ways to engage and work in solidarity with local communities in preparing the teachers of their children becomes a central part of the work in teacher education programs that claim to want to contribute to greater social justice.

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1. All the names of people and organizations are pseudonyms.
2. More detailed analyses of the experiences of some of the individual elementary teacher education program (ELTEP) case

study teachers are available in other reports of this research (e.g., Napolitan, 2016b).

3. All the interview quotes in this article are from ELTEP unless otherwise noted.

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