Stretch, Bend, and Flex:

The Experiences of First-Year Teachers from the Urban Teacher Training Collaborative

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Introduction

For the past 21 years, the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* has examined issues related to education from a variety of perspectives. Its most recent surveys, in 2001 and 2002, revealed that feelings of alienation from school are prevalent among students, teachers, and parents at the secondary level. When schools fail to engender a sense of belonging for any of these groups, the process of education breaks down. People do not feel respected, and students come to believe that their teachers fail to know them as individuals with unique talents, dreams, challenges, and expectations.

With this background and funding from MetLife Foundation, Jobs for the Future has explored the challenges new teachers face and their responses to them, as well as how the challenges are intertwined with relationships among students, teachers, and parents. JFF documented the experiences of 10 first-year teachers who graduated from the Urban Teacher Training Collaborative's Master of Arts in Teaching program at Tufts University in 2002.

Established in 1999, the Urban Teacher Training Collaborative (UTTC) was developed by Tufts University in conjunction with two small pilot high schools in the Boston Public Schools, the Boston Arts Academy and Fenway High School. UTTC is a school-university, school-based program that reflects the commitment of these partners to developing effective, collegial, and reform-minded teachers for urban schools as well as their understanding of the needs of urban students and teachers.

The mission of UTTC is to help meet the need for high-quality urban teachers through an innovative model for teacher training analogous to the "residency" model used to train medical professionals. Instead of completing a ten-week student teaching assignment after a semester of university classes, UTTC student teachers—referred to as interns—work at their assigned schools full-time under the guidance of mentor teachers and university professors from the first day of school through mid-May. Interns assist their mentors in the classroom immediately and participate in the professional responsibilities teachers have in school, including staff meetings and special programs. The interns take three of their graduate courses at Fenway High School, and they attend seven seminars at the school in the fall (see sidebar), co-taught by a Tufts University professor and Fenway High School humanities teacher.

Thirteen interns were enrolled in the UTTC program in the 2001-2002 school year, of whom 10 agreed to participate in the MetLife/JFF project. A quick glance at these ten interns reveals that:

- Seven are persons of color.
- Eight attended public schools, and two a mix of public and private schools.
- Two were educated in urban schools, three in suburban schools, and five in a mix of environments (urban, suburban, and rural).
- Six received a traditional education in high school, while four had less-traditional experiences.

In spring 2002, the interns sought teaching positions in schools with cultures that, in their words, "value real learning and analysis—where there is a positive rapport among faculty and students," "a place where people want me to grow, where people are open to discussing their own fears," "a smaller school where you are active not just a nameless face," and "a school where they could work with a multicultural population." By mid-summer, they had secured employment. Six of the UTTC interns obtained positions in one of the pilot schools in Boston (the Boston Arts Academy, Fenway High School, or Mission Hill School), two were in non-pilot urban schools, and two were in suburban schools—one in a state other than Massachusetts.

Fall Seminars

Preparing Urban Teachers: Uncovering Communities

With funding from MetLife Foundation, the partners also developed a community curriculum that increases future teachers' knowledge and understanding of the home communities, cultures, and life experiences of the urban young people in their classrooms.

Mid-September	Encountering the History—The history of Boston prior to court-ordered busing in the1970s.
Late-September	Boston Tour: A City Envisioned and Evolving—All-day, guided bus tour of their students' neighborhoods in the city.
Mid-October	Walking Tours of Two Boston Neighborhoods—Half-day tours on Saturday led by high school students who have done research on their own communities and designed the tour.
Mid-October	Exploring a Specific Neighborhood: Meeting Wise People—Teams of interns interview wise people in their students' neighborhoods to increase their understanding of issues, programs, and services for youth.
November	Bringing It All Back Home—Interns capture key images of their own neighborhoods and discover the similarities and the disjunction between their experience of place and their students' environment.
December	Home from Students' Perspectives—High school youth discuss their perceptions of their neighborhoods and interns ask questions about students' experiences in their neighborhoods.

Visit JFF's Web site, www.jff.org, to download the curriculum and view other products from this partnership.

From May 2002 through June 2003, JFF followed the experiences of these first-year teachers through three interviews, two retreats, and electronic journal entries. *Stretch, Bend, and Flex* reflects—in their words—the challenges they faced, the strategies they employed, and their insights into the aspects of the UTTC program that were critical in providing them with the confidence and skills to enter their own classrooms, respect their students, and ward off alienation.

The findings are reported in five sections:

- The gravity of the role they have undertaken and what sustained them;
- The challenges they faced in building relationships with students, parents, and teachers; motivating and engaging students in learning; teaching and learning; organizing, planning, and grading; and managing classrooms;
- Their observations on how the UTTC program prepared them for their first year in the classroom and school;
- Their recommendations for strengthening their preparation;
- Their reflections on the success of their first year and their future plans.

We are indebted to the first-year teachers whose words are captured in this document: Camille Burnett, J.D. Fergus, Chadwick Johnson, Kevin Jones, Nakia Keizer, Katharine Kilbourn, Joe Levin, Maggie Norian, Katie Pina, and Rachwayl Sahadeo. They gave willingly of their time, their thoughts, and themselves over the course of the 18 months. We hope that they will continue to impact the lives of urban youth for years to come.

PART I.

The Gravity of the Teachers' Role and What Sustained Them

During their first year of teaching, these former UTTC interns confronted several challenges—not least the huge responsibility they have as teachers in the lives of the youth in their schools. Moving from being interns to becoming first-year teachers, they noted, "All of the responsibilities are ours. . . . We determine a lot of futures through the work we do in classrooms." They felt the stress of ensuring that their students did well academically. They spent a great deal of time establishing good relationships with their students so that their students could move on to careers and college. Most important, they enjoyed the privilege of getting to know their students and "being in their lives"—a feeling they went into their first year with and that remained with them at the end of the year.

Fall 2002 – One Friday, about 4:15 p.m., I was working with some kids who needed help. It struck me that I'm the only person there for them, for what they are experiencing in this class. If I'm not there, they're not there. But if I am, I can encourage students. It's a huge responsibility, but I'm also seeing it as an opportunity.

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Spring 2003 – It felt emotionally intense to be caring for 88 minds and hoping that they would find something they could latch onto in English. It was mentally intense as I felt like I had to constantly be thinking and it was socially hard to always try to be tactful, kind, and upbeat. So, it wasn't just tiring and hard. I think it pushed me to my very limits and not in a negative way. It made me think about what challenge I wanted to reach and how I could.

They assumed this mantle of responsibility and leadership in different ways: determining the big questions that would guide their students' academic exploration and working with other colleagues to plan lessons, start new programs, or solve problems. They learned from their students, their relationships with adults, and the bureaucracy in their schools.

Throughout this first year of teaching, these dedicated novices met challenges that could seem overwhelming. At these times, they returned time and time again to the essential ideals that had inspired them to become teachers. Three overarching themes emerged from the interviews and retreats: their love of students and teaching, the support they received from colleagues, and their commitment to continue exploring and learning from their students, one another, and their day-to-day experiences. Their interest in and commitment to their students kept them going.

Yesterday, I had two classes in a row that were the most absolutely fun and amusing classes in recent memory. This is surprising to me because it was the last two periods on a Thursday and I was teaching the students about electrical resistance—a confusing and potentially boring topic. At the same time, the students were giddy to work on a project they'd been doing for the second half of class, and so there was potential for them to be restless. The stars aligned, however, and it was fantastic. I, for some reason, was spontaneous and energetic, and the kids and I were all laughing and learning together as I plowed through 12 chairs to demonstrate electrical resistance. This, and the plentiful moments when students were working individually and driving their own learning, is what I hope for every day in teaching.

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In my classroom, I have a poetry board next to my desk, which doubles as a homework board. Before and after class, my students congregate around the board and create poems. I love the natural interactions that I have with them during this downtime, and love watching them interact with each other. It is also a nice opportunity to spend time with kids who I wouldn't normally expect to be hanging out, writing poetry. In addition, it reminds me of how much I enjoy teaching poetry.

The seriousness with which the UTTC graduates accepted the responsibility of being teachers was evidenced in their continual reflection on experiences in their classrooms and schools and in their willingness to continue to be open to learning. They were constantly trying to make their teaching better, and their students were their driving force. They talked to their UTTC colleagues, their mentors, their deans, and teachers on their team or in their department about how to teach a concept in a variety of ways, how to work with colleagues, or how to better design lessons that linked to students' lives. Some pursued another degree, took Spanish courses so they could communicate better with parents, assumed a leadership role in their school, acquired grants to support new programs, or revamped curriculum to better suit the read-

ing levels of their students.

One first-year teacher, describing both his internship year and his first-year of teaching, said:

I would express my year as "stretch, bend, and flex." That is how it's been this year. It's meant to really stretch the limits of where you think you can go (step out of that comfort zone). Then, you sometimes have to bend a little to accommodate the needs of students or to find out what you really like. Finally, when you have that, you can flex it as you really own that skill or weakness and can stretch it again.

PART II.

Meeting Challenges

Throughout the year, these teachers faced common and individual challenges and alone or with help from friends managed to surmount or ameliorate many of them. Each of these challenges and some of the strategies they used to address them are described below in their own words.

Building Relationships

Building relationships was critically important to these teachers, w hether with students, parents, or teachers. Their relationships with students, in particular, formed the basis for the students' engagement in learning. From September on, the teachers experimented with a variety of strategies. At the end of the year, they assessed the success of their teaching on the quality of those relationships.

Fall 2002 – I've realized that being approachable was hugely valuable. Light-hearted chatting before class and working to build trust were important steps in figuring out individual styles and skills.

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Spring 2003 – I know a lot of my students really well. If I had gotten through this year and had not, I think it would be more difficult to say that I was successful.

However, the teachers' success and level of comfort in these relationships varied with their partner in the venture. Establishing relationships with students was the easiest. When asked in the spring of 2002 to compare their pedagogy with their own schooling, more than half of the teachers said the major difference would be their emphasis on developing meaningful relationships with students. As teachers, they wanted to be "more student-centered," to be "genuinely concerned about the whole student," or to "mix content and skills in a way that works for kids."

Prior to entering their classrooms, the interns felt prepared to build engaging relationships with students of varied backgrounds. For some, that preparation came from their family or prior school experiences, while for others it came from exposure to diverse classrooms through their internship.

I grew up with a family that is the United Nations. I'm a byproduct of an interracial marriage. I didn't see differences growing up.

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My internship school is diverse. I've never been in an environment that is mostly non-white. This has been a new experience, especially in terms of my own biracial identity. It's caused me to rethink assumptions.

With some experience and deeper reflection, two of the first-year teachers had a more tentative response in the fall of 2002. They had discovered that with *some* students it was more difficult to accomplish this task than they had anticipated.

It takes a lot of time to successfully build relationships with students who have been as wounded as these kids. I need to build trust. If I do something right, I can. If I do something wrong, I can lose a mile.

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I developed relationships more quickly this year because I'm the only teacher in the classroom rather than the "intern guy." With students who are inappropriate, that's been a slower, more strategic road. It's a lot harder to develop meaningful relationships with all students.

For most teachers, relationships and academics were intertwined. They used academics to build relationships or believed that their relationships gave students an incentive to learn, or at least an opportunity to pursue learning. If they did stress one over the other—academics or relationships—the emphasis depended on the needs of their students.

I really try to build relationships between myself and the kids and among the kids. I think that helps to push academics in the classroom. . . . I try to find out the academic challenge for each of my students, and then through that I put myself in a position for dialogue. For example, what else is going on outside of your academics that makes it difficult for you to do the work or finish your assignment?

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I want to build relationships and increase their academic skills, but academics are a little bit higher because of the low skill level of most of the kids. I'm afraid that they won't be able to compete with the rest of the world.

The teachers reported that living in their students' neighborhood provided them with a better understanding of that community and its issues as well as an authentic and close bond with their students. That connection enabled them to see students and their families in their own environment—at the grocery store, in church, or at athletic events—to know where their students spend their time, and to empathize with students when tragic events occurred. Yet, they also recognized that just living in the same neighborhood does not ensure long-term relationships between a student and a teacher.

Living in the same community, you have a shared experience with students–culturally, socially. . . . It's a huge advantage, although it's not enough to sustain a relationship. It only allows you to ease your way into your students' lives. After that, you have to bring the goods to the table.

Three of the teachers, who didn't live in the same neighborhood as their students, felt that their lack of knowledge about their students' lives and neighborhoods is a drawback: "It's a liability to come from a background that is so different. I have enough to learn. I don't know which parents to call and which ones will make it more difficult for their children." One of the suburban teachers said, "If I lived here, I'd have more of a feel for the community. I drive through and see these enormous houses. So, I make assumptions based on that and on what the kids and teachers say about the community."

Inviting students into their lives was another strategy for engendering relationships. In an effort to be more approachable to their students, they shared anecdotes from their lives, past and present, offered their opinions, and encouraged students to do the same. Some teachers displayed pictures of their families on their desks or mementos in their classrooms to facilitate conversations about family and interests outside of school.

My small wooden apple with a changeable calendar, which was given to me by my goddaughter, is one of the few things that sit on my desk. If the kids in my advisory beat me to class, they change the date on the apple. It signifies that they feel comfortable at my desk; that my space is their space and vice versa. The apple reminds me about the freedom of sharing and opening up what is mine to my students, how valuable my relationships are with my advisees, and of how much I like them.

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I think it's important to be clear and to use language that's accessible. I think that honesty is important, both in giving praise and criticism. Show your opinion on a variety of things. It's important to show that you're somebody besides just a robot.

The teachers used the rich diversity of social, cultural, racial, socioeconomic, and familial backgrounds among the students in their classrooms to develop deeper relationships with their students and to enrich and contextualize their lessons. For example, when studying a country from which a student had immigrated to Boston, a teacher asked that student to become the "teacher." The student offered first-person accounts of living in the country the class was studying, taught the class words in his native language, and brought videos and other information into class to share.

Teachers in more homogeneous communities felt their mission was to open up the eyes of their students—to give them a new perspective on the world. They made their classrooms a safe place to explore diversity in race, culture, religion, and thought.

My students come from families where they have been sheltered and have a very narrow view of the world. When I teach, I have been very open and frank about what I personally believe and try to give my students another perspective that they don't often hear. I try hard to support opposing views in my classroom, with the condition that my students can back up their ideas.

Relationships with parents proved challenging. In the fall, eight of the teachers indicated that their schools expected them to engage with parents through phone calls, e-mails, conferences, and open houses. The teachers reported that they had conversed with 33 to 90 percent of their students' parents. Some had talked primarily to the parents or guardians of their neediest students, others to the parents of students in advisories or homerooms as well

as their classes. Two, who teach juniors and seniors, talked to their students first: "They need to be responsible for their behavior and their work. It's a way of reinforcing that they are in charge of their own education."

In the first semester, cultural issues, age differences, and the approach to take with parents concerned some teachers:

Many of my students and their parents will speak Spanish. As a non-Spanish speaker, I worry about communication and day-to-day interactions. At first I didn't know how to deal with unresponsiveness. It was a lack of experience on my part, a lack of understanding around cultural issues.

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Teachers are immediately on the defensive with parents. I want enough confidence to not be on the defensive. I want to tactfully tell them of issues and set the tone for sharing good and not-so-good information with them.

By the spring, only a few teachers felt at ease communicating with parents. If they did, they attributed it to the fact that "a lot of my parents are really concerned about their children, so we agree on a lot of what we want for the student" or to the ease with which it could be accomplished—for example: "I update parents with phone calls and e-mails."

Those who found relationships more difficult or had put these relationships to the side, most often noted competing demands for their time, their inexperience at relating to parents, or the fact that it could be counterproductive to their work in the classroom.

I'm not very good at interacting with parents. I do return their phone calls and talk to them when they come to school. I find it a lot easier to deal with parents who see the education of their children as a joint responsibility.

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It was more difficult than I had anticipated. . . . It was mostly an issue of my lack of time and also that I have not done it before. I am not used to calling people without knowing them, and then talking to them. It feels unnatural.

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I haven't gotten very far with building relationships with parents. I'm spending so much time on curriculum and giving feedback to kids that I don't have the time to cultivate parents. Then, for some kids, it has been counterproductive to involve parents. I call a parent, and then the student acts up for an entire week. I got to where I decided that I could do this myself.

The most unexpected challenge that many teachers faced was working with some of the adults in their schools. In the spring of 2002, before their first year as independent teachers, eight of the interns had hoped they would be supported by other teachers in their building. Most of them did garner support as first-year teachers, but some found the absence of support to be debilitating and disappointing.

In the fall, I taught "Humanities II: Immigration Lives." It was my first year teaching this course, although I had heard about it through my internship last year. I had absolutely no idea or clue about how to teach the course. A curriculum had already been put together, but I didn't have the materials. Throughout the semester, the other two humanities teachers collaborated, but I wasn't included most of the time. . . . We want our kids to take a journey in their learning, to go and explore different areas, and become scholars, but they can only do that if we are effective teachers. My kids were in limbo—if I had the support of my colleagues, they could be pushed over the threshold to gaining knowledge and perspective because they would have access to better materials. My kids suffered because of the disconnect. In the end, students should come first in every equation, and we need to remember that the goal is to better our students through education and development.

***

I didn't think I would dislike being around the adults so much. There are a handful of teachers that I enjoy, but there are two handfuls of teachers that I really don't enjoy (gossipy and grumpy).

Despite these difficulties, the teachers could find support when they needed it. The UTTC program, with its emphasis on developing a positive peer culture, modeled how to build collegial relationships and seek advice from peers. In addition, many of the schools/districts in which they taught had support mechanisms to assist them—some more than one.

Teachers received this support from many different sources. In the fall, it came from teachers in their department or on their team, as well as from administrators, mentors, former UTTC colleagues, community members, and part-time teachers. In the spring, the list remained the same, but the order of frequency was different. In the spring, their primary sources of support came from their UTTC cohort members and opportunities to continue the reflection they had started in their internship year

through the retreats. These were followed by their mentors, teachers on their team or in their department, administrators, and the entire staff at one school.

The most beneficial assistance they received was:

- *Moral support:* reflecting on their students and the day-to-day things that happened at school, sharing frustrations and giving and getting feedback, talking things over, and getting good advice;
- *Materials, strategies, and skills:* sharing materials, curriculum guides, classroom management strategies, techniques (e.g., how to give directions, how to be a leader), and recommendations on what needs to be graded and what doesn't; and
- *Team/co-teaching:* co-teaching a class with their mentor.

Motivating and Engaging Students in Learning

Fall 2002 – At the end of last year, I felt buoyed by my experience. I'm in my next phase of learning. It's harder where I'm teaching now than where I was before. Some days I don't feel that I'm a good teacher. There's so much skill involved in getting students engaged, beyond the lingo.

***

Spring 2003 – Daily exhaustion and the many responsibilities of teaching have prevented me from doing creative, interesting, fun, and random activities with my students. However, every time I have done something that I have been excited about, my students have been engaged and have learned more through the lesson.

Motivating and engaging students in learning were challenges for some teachers and more problematic at some periods during the year than others. With the school year winding down, several teachers faced the challenge of keeping the students and themselves focused and motivated. The students were "ready to move on" or a "little more anxious," and therefore, a little harder to keep under control. Through the year, the teachers explored several strategies to overcome this inertia.

Making learning experiences relevant for students:

I try to connect the lesson to their lives. For example, in studying acres, land size, and population growth, I had them determine the ratio of people per acre in Boston versus Athens, Georgia versus New York City versus China. We talked about how that ratio affects a person's psychological perspective (being squashed up in Boston versus one-eighth of an acre per house in Athens).

Using a variety of instructional strategies:

I mix up activities to keep everyone engaged. This way I'm teaching to different learning styles and keeping kids engaged because things are not monotonous.

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Lectures are sometimes not as successful as projects. Kids enjoy lectures, but as a teacher you have to be very excited, really upbeat, moving all around the room, calling on people, and getting into a debate to keep their attention.

Offering students power and sense of urgency:

I've been able to deal with this issue by giving students a chance to write before you ask them to speak. Contributing something in the classroom comes from being comfortable and belonging.

Conferencing students:

I had one student who did not do any work all first quarter, although you could tell she was bright. I finally sat down with her at the end of the quarter and had a conversation about her performance. It turned out that she struggled with organizational skills. We developed a plan, she followed through, and the next quarter got an "A." It taught me that a student can really progress if you put in effort and give them attention on an individual level.

Trying new things in class:

I get excited about the implementation and the potential outcomes of my ideas, new activities, and new perspectives on a topic. This keeps me and my students engaged.

Teaching and Learning

In the spring of 2002, the UTTC interns said their pedagogy would differ from their own schooling in two important ways: student needs would drive instruction and their instructional approaches would be interactive, using projects, portfolios, and exhibitions to keep students more engaged in learning. By the fall, as the interns became first-year teachers, these themes remained central to the discussion of their practice.

Varying activities, ongoing assessment, using portfolios, and planning group work are strategies I've used on a weekly basis.

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When we were studying sound waves, I divided the class into groups for problem solving, and then had the groups teach

their problems to the class the next day. They also had a quiz on the material each student taught. So, the stakes were raised in terms of accountability. Quizzes, group work, and presentations worked well together. Also, students taught at the level they understood it, giving me another chance to assess their learning in different ways.

One teacher reported difficulty implementing group work. At least four or five kids in each of her classes said they wouldn't work with other students. Another noted that "group work has been a struggle. I try to do it a lot, but it's hard to monitor all of them. There's a lot of goofing off, so there's wasted time. It's a good strategy, but I struggle to implement it."

By the spring, one of the greatest challenges for these teachers was figuring out how to reach students on different academic levels. As one teacher said, "I get a sense of my classroom understanding fairly quickly, but there is a wide range of ability and understanding within that class. I need to spend more time with students individually to see what they understand and where they need more help."

The most effective solutions to this issue were diversifying their teaching methods, individualizing instruction to fit the needs or preferred learning styles of their students, and offering avenues for providing extra attention to students after school or through their peers.

I diversify my teaching methods, for example, lecture and notes, readings and discussion, independent research, art work, videos, field trips, critiques of political cartoons, slides, propaganda materials, and writing—lots of writing.

***

About halfway through this year, I remembered the spontaneity of my mentor teacher. When one thing wasn't working in his class, he would strategically move to something else. He would ask himself, "What can I do right now to make this a teachable moment?" And then he would do it. I have tried to also be strategic in my spontaneity.

They used a variety of approaches to meet their students' individual needs or preferred learning styles:

I think about how students learn and provide different entry points, for example, lectures, notes plus my explanations and students' explanations, activities, jigsaws. The students will work on the same assignments, but they will have different directions. For example, one group of students will focus on a particular skill, while another group is working on strengthening a different skill.

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Long-term, self-directed, and self-driven projects, which are done either in groups or on their own, allow me to weave content into lectures, while also giving students enough room to explore new topics on their own.

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My fourth-period class likes working as a whole class with guided discussion. They love to talk or enjoy being given visual clues and drawing maps. They are very artistic. My first-period class is mature and smart. They refuse to work together in groups, and they like guided discussions. My ninth graders prefer games, competitions, being active learners. They work well in groups.

For two of the teachers, it was difficult to maintain high expectations for student work and a rigorous work ethic throughout the year.

I have high expectations. I make the students write a lot, but my students say, "Your class is so easy." So, am I a hard teacher or not? With the pressure of so many kids failing, the pressure to give more time to go over stuff many times. . . . I feel, personally, disappointed by how much of my expectations I've had to let go.

Beyond that, the challenges identified by teachers were individual:

It's a challenge to keep up with my preps and two different departments. I have more preps than anyone else, and they cross departments. So, I have events in both departments, such as portfolios.

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I think trying to figure out what is important in terms of what you are teaching, because I'm not too hung up on kids' learning every date and person in history. I'm more interested in their acquisition of critical thinking skills. For example, what are the causes behind it, the pushes and pulls? I see another level of growth when they go beyond memorizing facts and see history's relationship to their lives.

***

Time became harder this year. Once relationships with kids were developed, those relationships demanded more time. The amount of time that I had to spend with each child became harder. I kept thinking, if only I had 20 minutes more, I know what they would be producing.

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My emerging challenge is that I sometimes lack confidence when I am presenting my side of an issue. I have experienced so much resistance that I can begin to question myself and always feel that I am the lone perspective on many issues.

Organizing, Planning, and Grading

Several aspects of teaching were challenging at the beginning of the year: grading, planning, organization, and curriculum development. As the year progressed, the teachers became increasingly comfortable with teaching in the classroom, planning lessons and units, and grading.

In the fall, teachers recognized that students wanted to know their grades but were finding it difficult to set aside time to check assignments.

Too much homework, not enough time to grade it all—madness! How much should I accept, how much should I grade? I was good at entering grades at the beginning of the term. Now, with grades due and the term ending, I'm not so good.

The task of maintaining a schedule for grading became less demanding as the teachers discovered systems to assist them through talking to their mentors, teachers in their department or team, or among themselves. Some found it easier to set aside specific time at home to assess work and make decisions about what to grade, and they also learned to use the school's "Grade Keeper" computer program to keep track of student grades.

As I got practice, I perfected my rubric for portfolios, and then I glanced and graded only for points on the rubric. I set up a system: I glance-grade and put more time into aspects that are more critical to me at that point in time.

Concerns about curriculum waned as more than half of the teachers worked on departmental or grade-level teams to develop curricula for their students. They received support from colleagues, and their experiences with their students enabled them to better gauge how much content is too much or too little. Planning became easier as some prepared lessons with colleagues, their team, or their department, and some set their own priorities for their classrooms and prepared lessons that reflected those priorities.

These struggles (keeping up with planning and grading) have stayed present through the year, but were definitely more present in the fall. I have tried to implement a system of getting these things done. I think that the struggle is more in the incessant nature of these tasks, for even as the year went on, they never disappeared.

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I've provided my juniors and seniors with assignments for two or four weeks at a time (like college). We both know where we are headed, and it has helped when students miss a class or have to make-up assignments.

Managing Classrooms

Initially, classroom management was a surprising challenge for seven of the new teachers. A few began the year trying to be stern enough to obtain the authority needed for control, but they found in retrospect that they had not been strong enough.

I expected discipline issues but not to the extent I'm experiencing with my fourth-period class. It is a large class of 30

Mourning the Loss of a Positive Learning Environment

In the fall, four of the first-year teachers mourned the loss of the positive learning environment they had as UTTC interns. As they became accustomed to larger schools or to a small school still trying to find its rhythm in its second year of existence, they missed the strong sense of community among faculty and students in their internship schools.

"There's very little time to stop and reflect. Few structures are in place, and there's no common planning time. That is in stark contrast with last year, where the teachers were constantly in touch through inter-teacher discussions. We would talk during down time and free periods. It was a part of the culture."

Given their experiences in their new schools, these four teachers identified some aspects of the UTTC program that benefited them during their first year of teaching: immersion in a positive peer culture, focus on connecting with students, different perspectives on teaching, and analysis of the classroom. Immersion in a positive peer culture taught them "how to create collegial relationships, seek feedback, and engage in reflection." For most of them, this drove them to interact more with others in their new settings—to break down the isolation that they could have felt in larger, more impersonal schools. It also made them "adept at recognizing the pitfalls of schools that don't have healthy cultures." The student relationship component—"the expectation that you will connect with each student"—provided a compass for them in their new schools. Although they appreciated the different perspectives on teaching and the skill to analyze their classroom that they gained in their internships, one teacher noted that it is "hard to maintain the same level of analysis without an environment that values it."

students. Five of the 30 are passing and most of them don't turn in work. My discipline up to that point had been self-responsibility. But these kids are not ready for that!

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Classroom management is like adolescence. You want it until you get it and when you get it you don't know what to do with it. I'm struggling for silence, and then I don't know what to do with it.

Most of the teachers regained control by being clear about rules, identifying the consequences, and then following through. One started the year by developing classroom rules with his students and having them do skits on what is "right" and "wrong" behavior. Another was clear from the beginning that her class is a fun place but also one for serious work.

Their concerns ebbed and flowed throughout the year—high in the beginning of the year, tapering off as they adopted different strategies, returning at the end of the first term, slacking off again, and then reappearing at the end of the year. Yet, as the year progressed, they gained comfort with classroom management through a variety of actions.

Two teachers set aside time over the weekend to develop plans. They discovered that planning provides a structure for the following week and wards off some discipline issues. Other first-year teachers planned their curricula with more experienced colleagues on their teams or in their departments and took responsibility for developing lessons, handouts, and quizzes for portions of units or projects. Many developed systems to organize their classrooms. For example, one person prepared folders with handouts for each class during the day as an easy way to gather materials and assignments for absent students.

Day-to-day, I see it as a balance between planning and grading. If I'm planning well, most of the problem behavior disappears. That works until grading raises its ugly head. Around progress report time, planning goes by the wayside. I wing it more and the class goes bonkers.

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I need to be structured. My lessons don't need to have holes in them. I have to keep going, so the kids are not easily pulled off track.

For the times when student behavior would seem to get out of hand, the teachers learned that they did not have to take care of everything that occurred. They needed to determine what to make a big deal of and what to let ride. When the entire class went off-task, "don't escalate, de-escalate: whisper instead of yell. De-escalation and taking it down a notch helps take the stress from you." When the behavior was individual, mini-conferences with students were helpful.

I've used my physical presence, standing by their desks and maintaining eye contact.

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I find it more effective to go to each section of the classroom and do a walk-around rather than stay at the front and yell. Some kids only respond to the yell, some to the whisper, and some to the threat.

Some teachers found it valuable to talk to parents, and many leaned on colleagues for support. In calling parents, some found it easier to discuss issues when the parents considered themselves partners in their children's education. In some cases, though, when students were literally raising themselves, teachers found that a phone call could make matters worse for the student.

It has helped to call a few parents, although in some instances that has only exacerbated the student's behavior.

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I've taken ideas from other people and from research that have actually worked in similar situations (e.g., printing up a page of rules brainstormed at a new teacher meeting; learning to be firm, but not necessarily stern from a teaching and learning group meeting).

Finally, meaningful relationships between students and teachers eased classroom management issues.

The motivation of my students got better as the relationship between us became more developed and as we gained more trust in one another. Very recently, there has been a flourishing of effort and productivity of some of my toughest kids. It just takes time to bridge these gaps and relationships. In order to have motivation around something, there has to be a spark of creativity. Then, the follow-up on this spark requires hard work.

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I made building relationships a priority, keeping an open door and encouraging discussion. If anything, I've been too friendly, but, I'd rather go in that direction. Building the relationships has helped with classroom management issues. I can separate the behavior form the student and they know that, too.

PART III.

Preparing for the First Year

Spring 2002: I don't think of next year as my first year of teaching. It feels like my second year—same school, same kids, and same Tufts colleagues.

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Spring 2003: I feel very well prepared, and yet there is so much more to learn. Teaching is not an exact science.

When they looked back at their preparation program, the teachers isolated three aspects that were extremely beneficial for their learning: the year-long internship, the positive peer culture of their cohort and the pilot schools, and the multi-faceted support system that UTTC provided for them. The year-long experience in school enabled them to get real-life experience while learning about pedagogy and learning styles, and it provided a bridge between theory and practice. They were "living, breathing, and eating teaching."

"Confident" and "comfortable" were words the interns used to describe themselves more and more often as they moved into and through their first year of teaching. The internship enabled them to "experience the full roller coaster, of good days and weeks and bad." It was a precursor for similar activities throughout their first year, for example, feeling overwhelmed by work in mid-February during the internship, then facing that same challenge again in the first year of teaching and knowing what it felt like and how to work through it. "That immersed opportunity has made me be resilient, to come back and start over again."

Being co-teachers for an entire year of the internship prepared them for what they faced in their own classrooms. It aided them in setting up their classroom spaces, establishing discipline, and setting tone and expectations.

It sounds basic, but dealing with a lot of different personalities at once gave me both experience and confidence to go into the classroom and be myself. I had a revelation about discipline at the end of last year: i.e., I can make demands and students won't think I hate them or fall apart. Kids are much more resilient.

The year-long experience provided them with an opportunity to see the growth in their students as well as themselves. It helped them to better understand:

- How to be student-centered and what that looks like in several classrooms and a school;
- How to reflect on their own teaching and to solve problems in their classrooms;
- How to think about a curriculum, how to teach it, and how to integrate other elements into it to make it more engaging for students;
- How to organize their work and time within a classroom;
- How to plan and see an academic lesson in total;
- How to move kids out of their comfort zone;
- How to organize group work with students;
- How to use projects, portfolios, and exhibitions; and
- How things work in a school.

Yet, as the teachers expressed in the spring of 2003, their first year of teaching also reminded them of how much they still have to learn. Learning to teach is a "lifelong process or journey."

The cohort approach allowed them to go through the program with people from various backgrounds, who all enjoyed teaching, sharing ideas, and helping one another. The UTTC/pilot school staff fostered a close-knit environment in which the interns' questions, opinions, and suggestions were accepted and discussed.

We work together well, like pieces of a puzzle. Despite our different content areas, we had similar experiences and questions, for example, "How do I deal with failure?" or "How can I reach students with this lesson?" It was more than commiseration; it was deep problem solving.

Another appreciated both the collegiality and the diversity of the UTTC group:

For me, a part of the program's emphasis on diversity was being in an intimate group of colleagues who were from different backgrounds—racial, family, geographic. Having experiences at the school and then having an amazing group of people to share those experiences with was life-changing for me.

Discussions during seminars, in the faculty room, or over dinner with their peers made the interns feel like they were "not alone or inept." This also made the internship an incredible year-long immersion in education.

Those who taught in pilot schools maintained a new close-knit group with which to travel through their first

year of teaching. Those who were not employed in pilot schools found it more difficult to find the depth of support the cohort offered. They missed the quality of the conversation with fellow interns and the time for reflection and group problem solving.

The multi-faceted support system that UTTC provided or facilitated was invaluable. The system of "very talented and intellectually strong people, who are or have been high school teachers"— the professors at Tufts, the intern coordinator at Fenway, and teachers in the pilot schools, as well as their own cohort group—gave them lots of adults and peers with whom to work out problems. During their internship, mentors and veteran teachers exposed them to different teaching styles and types of support. Even sometimes contradictory feedback and strategies were much more helpful and real than only seeing and hearing about one way.

PART IV.

Strengthening Their Preparation

Despite their enthusiastic endorsement of the UTTC program, the new teachers had a few recommendations for strengthening it. The most frequently mentioned options were exposure to different school models, introduction to classroom management strategies for dealing with diverse populations, and the continuation of collegial reflection after graduation.

Their request for an introduction to different models was driven by a desire to know more about other schools and classrooms, and the practice of teachers in them. This exposure could be accomplished through case studies or visits to other schools. They wanted to look at "education as a whole"—not just small, urban schools but also large, comprehensive schools in urban areas, suburban schools.

We weren't all coming from urban environments like this one. It would have been helpful to have more tours of Boston's neighborhoods and to visit more schools in the city and the suburbs. School visits allow you to see different students and teaching methods and give you a more well-rounded idea of what it is like to teach in different settings.

Two teachers would have placed more emphasis on concrete strategies that could be used in the classroom.

It would have been helpful to look at issues of teaching and learning through the lens of skill diversity, not just racial diversity. I have heard the phrase "differentiated instruction" countless times, but I have never seen a lesson plan that really shows what this looks like in the classroom. We covered the theoretical side of skill diversity in depth, but the strategy and implementation side needs more emphasis.

The UTTC graduates also proposed the addition of a case study class that would teach them to analyze the different backgrounds and strengths of students and recognize how that influences the classroom setting. For example, a case study approach could help future teachers learn more about discipline and how it aligns with different cultures.

People grow up with different expectations around discipline and respond very differently to the same type of discipline. For example, Asian kids are taught to defer to teachers a lot more than kids from other cultures. I think that increasing our awareness and learning more about this issue would be a great tool for making us better teachers.

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In terms of cultural difference, I know how to deal with students from my own background. I know what requests to make and how they respond to them. However, African-American students, as a rule, respond to a more direct and in-your-face approach and that is not my personality. It is a weird thing that I am learning: with some of my students, I need to not be myself to be an effective teacher.

The school-based seminars, interactions with mentors, the Tufts classes, and peer gatherings provided places to discuss the challenges the UTTC interns faced, as well as opportunities to share strategies and techniques, solve problems together, and learn how to develop collegial relationships by creating them day-to-day. So it was not surprising to see their reaction to the extension of these discussions through the retreats this year.

After the first year has been completed, it is just as important to continue the relationships we have built and continue to learn from each other. This continuity is almost as important as anything.

These reunions were especially valued by one of the new teachers who didn't have the benefit of the collegial relations that some UTTC graduates gained by working in a pilot school setting.

I think the addition of this year's reflection has been really important for me, because I don't get this portion at school—reflecting on why I'm really doing this, what's important to me, what I seek in the colleagues who I work with or want to work with.

PART V.

Reflecting on Success and the Future

Continual reflection is at the heart of the Urban Teacher Training Collaborative, and it has become integral to its graduates' professional lives. Some of the first-year teachers kept journals; others talked to colleagues about their challenges and successes on a daily basis; and some reflected on their own on their year.

I can't judge the success of my teaching. I know I am definitely doing a lot of good things, but I think the success will come when I see my kids off to college. I want them to be competitive in the world outside of school.

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I made it. That's one thing. When I look back on this year, my success will depend on a mix of things (relationships, content, and longer-term evaluation).

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I don't know how I'm going to judge my successes. It's not going to be what the teachers next year say about me or my students. It's not from tests or quizzes. It may come from the students choosing a piece of writing that they did during the year that they feel really proud of.

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I've been judging myself all year long. I'll take some time at the end of the year to have a meeting with myself. I'll look through everything I've done: what worked, what didn't work, what I should change. Then, I'll revisit what I've written in August.

When asked how they would judge their first year as a teacher, then, some cited room for improvement, while others felt the measure of their success lies further ahead in time.

Whatever the measure, they linked success to the impact they had on their students, both academically and socially:

We got the Math Connections kids to complete electronic portfolios, which live on the school's hard drive. The students' finished products were amazing. They could see their growth over the course of the year.

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We had gone through the trials and tribulations of learning Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It was the first thing I taught this year and I hadn't taught Shakespeare before. We had an exhibition in which the students—even those who had not spoken in class—recited 15 to 20 lines on their own dramatically, with passion, emotion, and movement. It was beautiful. I had accomplished something that I didn't think I could, and the students had accomplished something that they didn't think they could do.

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I felt like I was working really hard but failing almost every day. I asked my students to do an end-of-the-term evaluation on my courses as an opportunity for them to give me some feedback. One of my students, who had failed every task that was assigned until third term, handed me a page-long evaluation. When she turned it in, she asked me to edit it so that she could write a final draft. She told me that she had taken history every year in school but never remembered what she was learning and had not been engaged by the content. This year, however, she loved history. She listed all of the things she had learned in class, and said the class had helped her to develop an interest in seeing new places and extending her view of the world.

The UTTC program has prepared people to be teachers who are committed to establishing significant relationships with young people in urban communities and are accepting the roles of leaders and change agents in their urban schools. They believe in the power of education to transform lives and improve communities. They understand the complex nature of teaching and learning and are willing to continue to learn more themselves about how best to meet the needs of students, families, and colleagues as teachers in urban schools.

Future Plans

In the fall of 2003, eight of the ten teachers returned to their current positions, one moved back to the Boston area, where she will be teaching in a suburban high school, and the other returned to her country to teach in a community college. When asked if they would be teaching in five years, five answered emphatically "Yes," four had caveats, and one questioned was unsure about remaining in the field of education.

Yes, for at least two more years and probably five. I'm getting a degree in educational leadership, but I'm not rushing to get out of the classroom. If an opportunity arises for an assistant principal in a good school, then I'll take it for the experience. I'll stay in the classroom until I feel the time is right.

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I will either be teaching or pursuing my doctorate in five years.

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Even if I am not a teacher in a classroom, we have all learned this year that you don't have to have a class to be a teacher and that we always have the opportunity to affect a young person's life.

About the Authors

Anne Newton is a program director at Jobs for the Future where she manages the 2004 MetLife Community College Excellence Awards and the MetLife Foundation Supporting New Teachers' Initiative, which is documenting the experiences of first-year teachers who were participants in the Urban Teacher Training Collaborative. Her career in education has spanned 35 years. She has been a classroom teacher and reading specialist at the elementary and secondary levels, a staff developer, a technical assistance provider to districts and state departments of education with a focus on linking research, policy, and practice, and a director of regional and national networks of educators concerned with the preparation and continual professional development of educators and the restructuring of high schools.

Linda Beardsley is the Director of Teacher Education and School Partnerships at Tufts University and the Director of the Urban Teacher Training Collaborative, a partnership among Fenway High School, the Boston Arts Academy, and Tufts University. Her career in education has been marked by her commitment to identifying how to make public schools a source of pride for their community. Her work has included extensive teaching experience at all levels, from early childhood classrooms through middle school, high school, and university programs, as well as a playing a key role in implementing the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 while working for the state department of education. Her teaching experiences have convinced her that all issues in education can be resolved if the students and families are placed at the center of the discussions.

Eileen Shakespear is the Intern Coordinator of Fenway High School and the Boston Arts Academy in the Boston Public Schools. She has been a middle and high school English and humanities teacher in the Boston Public Schools for 31 years. While getting a Master's degree in English from the University of London, School of Education in 1978, she developed a fresh perspective on education and renewed interest in the art of teaching. Changes in school settings in Boston gave her a range of experiences that helped her clarify what approaches to teaching and learning make city schools thrive and conversely what approaches make city schools stagnate. She has participated in dozens of professional development workshops, has been a Boston Public Schools' Lead Teacher mentoring first-year teachers, and has become increasingly involved in teacher training in the last 10 years—co-teaching at Simmons College and Tufts University and giving professional development workshops.

The Urban Teacher Training Collaborative is an innovative school-university, school-based, Master of Arts in Teaching program developed by Tufts University in conjunction with three small Boston Public Schools (the Boston Arts Academy, Fenway High School, and Mission Hill School). Established in 1999, it is supported by Tufts University, the Barr Foundation, and the Boston Public Schools. The program, which is an example of the Professional Development School model, reflects the partners' understanding of the needs of urban students and teachers. The UTTC is committed to developing effective, collegial, and reform-minded teachers for city schools. UTTC student teachers—referred to as interns—work at their assigned schools full-time under the guidance of mentor teachers and university professors, starting on the first day of school and ending in May.

MetLife Foundation

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