

Outsider Partners? Working With and Within a Teacher Preparation Partnership in an Indigenous  
Rural Community

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Working With and Within a Teacher Preparation  
Partnership in an Indigenous Rural Community

As two university-based teacher educators, serving as facilitators of work with and within a rural Native American public school district, we engaged in a year-long self-study of our practices to better understand the tensions and intricacies we faced as *outsider* teacher educators in a partnership context. We describe the nature of our work, the context in which we work, and ways in which we negotiated in order to authentically collaborate as partners seeking to help develop highly qualified teachers and to help provide professional development for current classroom-based educators.

Teacher educators have focused much attention on partnerships between universities and K-12 schools (Darling-Hammond, 1994, 2006; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988; Teitel, 2003). It is believed that closer connections between university teacher education programs and K-12 schools can improve the quality of teaching and influence student achievement. These are typical, comfortable, and renewing contexts for us. This self-study “has prompted careful consideration of the ways in which our own values and commitments are lived in our work as teacher educators” (Crowe & Dinkelman, 2010, p. 1).

We began this study as tenured faculty within a teacher education department at a research university in the southwestern United States. Our state is home to 22 Native American tribes and 19 Pueblos. We strongly value the unique setting in which we work and the ways in which we position ourselves as advocates for diversity. Engaging Teachers and Community (ETAC) is a partnership between a rural Native American Public School District (PSD), and is sponsored by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. As lead investigators for this project we were

*outsiders*, not tribal members. The primary goals of ETAC involve providing opportunities and support for individuals seeking to earn teacher credentials and professional development for members of the rural Pueblo Indigenous community to:

- a) Provide a social and cultural orientation for current and future teachers,
- b) Reestablish a sense of empowerment among principals and teachers,
- c) Facilitate collegial and collaborative work across the district,
- d) Recruit current Indigenous students to become teachers, and to
- e) Provide educational opportunities through scholarship dollars for teachers and future teachers to obtain graduate and undergraduate degrees.

These goals were co-developed by the PSD leadership and the two of us as lead investigators in tandem with the project's advisory board. The ETAC advisory board is comprised of six Native American faculty members who are not tribal members, two PSD representatives who are tribal members, and the two of us. We worked hard to approach the goal-setting phase of our collaboration with open minds, ready to partner however we could to help the PSD meet their overarching goal of having more Indigenous community members become licensed teachers and teach their PSD students. We knew that as university-based teacher education faculty, we could provide support for improving education in the PSD as the PSD sought to increase the number Indigenous teachers from within the Pueblo community.

Because of the approaching deadline to file the grant application to support this work, our timeline was short. At our first meeting with PSD leaders, we listened. We listened to their desires and needs for their Pueblo Indigenous community and school district, and we listened to their frustrations from previous attempts to partner with other universities in the area. It was during this initial conversation that we came to understand that even though our role was to

facilitate teacher preparation pathways, the PSD leadership were the experts regarding their needs for teacher preparation. The heart of the goals of the ETAC Program are the goals the PSD wanted to accomplish for their community, and we were the vehicle that could help carry their goals to reality.

The PSD is located within the rural Pueblo Indigenous community that encompasses approximately 450,000 acres of land across counties in two states, where the Indigenous tribe has lived for thousands of years. The current population of the Pueblo is approximately 12,097, and 32% of its residents live below the poverty line. In the PSD, encompassing over 600 square miles, the largest racial/ethnic group in the area is American Indian (94.1%), followed by Hispanic (3.8%), and White (2.0%). The District is comprised of 1,336 students and 100 teachers (Public School Review, 2014). The PSD is approximately 160 miles, a three hour drive on highway and two-lane roads, from the main campus of our university.

### **Perspectives on Insider/Outsider**

When we embarked on our self-study, we began wondering if our experiences might be similar to those of others who have been, or have perceived themselves as, outsiders when working alongside rural Indigenous communities. We searched the extant literature in teacher education as well as extending our review to the fields of anthropology and sociology.

The positioning of *outsider* has been described by Gregory and Ruby (2011) as difficult, and one in which the outsider can unwittingly make gaffes. They also highlight the importance of the *insider* as “mediator of language, knowledge and cultural insights into the practices of the community” (p. 168). The concept of insider/outsider is often attributed to Pike’s (1954) contribution to the field of linguistics in theorizing distinctions between *emic* and *etic*; how someone from the outside learns to adapt, communicate, and live within a different culture.

Perhaps an oversimplification, but many researchers use the term *etic* to mean *outsider* and *emic* to mean *insider* accounts (Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990). The concept of *etic* and *emic* was further developed by Harris (1964) within the field of anthropology and posited as a theory to help explain human behavior. Different cultures interpret similar behaviors differently. Hall (1977) indicated that increasing understanding of another culture improves intercultural understanding.

The literature addressing insider/outsider with and within Indigenous communities exhibits several commonalities with opportunities and challenges. Outsiders indicate feelings of being unprepared to meet the needs of the community due to lack of cultural competence (Williams, 2013), endeavoring to better understand the political stance of the Indigenous community, seeking to do no harm nor to be complicit in perpetuating outsider dominant culture (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000), and personal and professional growth as a result of being an outsider (Gregory & Ruby, 2011; Klug & Hall, 2002). Osborne (1989) noted that the insider/outsider relationship is complex and its factors are not easily teased out. A clarion theme in the literature are recommendations for developing trusting relationships (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Gregory & Ruby, 2011; Klug & Hall, 2002; Williams, 2013; Writer & Chaves, 2002).

### **Rurality, Schools, and Teacher Preparation**

In order to develop these trusting relationships, we knew part of our learning curve would include better understanding the issues of rural education. Currently, in the United States, over 20% of all public school students are enrolled in rural schools, totaling over 9.6 million students. From 1999-2009 the enrollment in rural districts increased by over 1.7 million students, or 22%; while during the same time period, non-rural enrollment increased only 1.7% or 673,000 students. Of those rural school students, two in five live below the poverty line, a rate that has

increased by 33% in the last 10 years. In addition, one in four is a child of color and one in eight has moved in the last 12 months. The numbers of rural children are growing rapidly. (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012).

Just as the numbers of rural children have grown, so have the issues faced by rural schools and districts, including the issues of teacher preparation and retention. In a 1983 review of the teacher preparation literature, Meier and Edington noted that the challenges faced in rural areas included working in isolated communities, often teaching multiple subjects, and or more than one grade level with little in-service support and limited budgets. Unfortunately, in a study dated 25 years later in 2008, researchers identified many of these same issues persistent in rural education. The challenges they outlined included “social and collegial isolation, low salaries, multiple grade or subject teaching assignments, and lack of familiarity with rural schools and communities (Strange et al., 2012, p. iii).

As a result of these challenges, teacher recruitment is a persistent problem. One key issue is the need for “highly qualified” teachers as defined under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. In order for a teacher to be deemed “highly qualified” he must hold a bachelor’s degree with full state licensure, and be able to demonstrate a thorough understanding of each content area he is to teach as evidenced by passing a state-mandated test or other method (Bailey & Brigham, 2008). Finding “highly qualified” teachers for multiple subject areas continues to be difficult.

Higher education bears some responsibility to assist rural districts in serving their growing student population. Warner and Kale (1981) indicated that higher education has not responded to the needs of rural America. “Although professional educators and public school decision makers have attempted to respond to increased educational demands and a broader spectrum of students, the education of rural youth is a neglected area both in higher education

and in educational legislation” (p. 1), and indeed, that response still has not been heard (Bailey & Brigham, 2008; Strange et. al, 2012; Wilcox, Angelis, Baker, & Lawson, 2014). Bailey and Brigham further indicated five rural-focused program components that would improve teacher preparation and retention in rural areas:

a) options for obtaining multiple certifications, b) access to teacher preparation for those living in rural areas, c) efforts to recruit to teaching residents from rural settings, d) the use of rural schools for practice-teaching placements, and e) the availability of online courses for rural teachers. (2008, p. 2)

The challenges faced by rural districts, where over 22% of students in the United States are educated, make focusing on rural education difficult for higher education institutions to continue to ignore (Bailey & Brigham, 2008; Strange et. al, 2012; Wilcox, et al., 2014).

Suggestions for higher education in working with rural schools and districts include assessing rural concerns, providing special training programs for rural schools and teachers, collaborating with rural schools, being responsive to their needs and concerns, creating off-campus centers to meet teacher professional development needs, and finally, building expertise in understanding and organizing curriculum for rural schools (Meier & Edington, 1983).

Not all rural districts are struggling, however. In a study of rural schools with higher than average graduation rates, several themes emerged: “a) the qualities of academic goals, expectations and learning opportunities; b) the nature of individual and collective educator efficacy; c) the strategies educators use to develop and maintain family relationships and engage community members; and d) mechanisms for adapting instruction and employing interventions for students at risk of dropping out” (Wilcox, et al., 2014, p. 12-13).

### **Teacher Education Perspectives**

For several decades, the field of teacher education has called for more culturally responsive curriculum and instruction (Banks et al., 2005; Cochran-Smith, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) indicated that culturally relevant pedagogy “must provide a way for students to maintain their cultural identity while achieving academically” (p. 476). This holds true for Native American students and rural Indigenous communities as well. Writer and Chavez (2002) indicated that the number of Native American teachers has decreased in the past few decades, resulting in increased numbers of Native American students being taught by non-Native teachers who may or may not have preparation in cultural competency; this is a dominant theme in the extant literature on Native American education (Klug & Hall, 2002; LaFrance, 1995; Writer & Chaves, 2002). Culturally relevant curriculum in rural Indigenous communities involves more than simply including culturally and socially appropriate materials. It calls for a high level of reciprocal engagement between the school and the community (Lipka, 1989). Culture is viewed not as individual traits, but rather as “the constellation of ways in which people think, act, and make sense of the world; ... causally distributed patterns of ideas, their public expressions and resultant practices and behavior in given ecological contexts” (Bang, Medin, & Altran, 2007, p. 13873). The need for more tribal members as teachers and the need for increased cultural competency among teachers and students provided the framework and goals for the ETAC project.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of this self-study was to better understand the ways in which our values were enacted in our work as teacher educators, serving in an outsider’s role. This was a unique



situation for us, as we had rarely experienced being *outsiders*, who were needed, but not entirely welcomed, collaborators. Our self-study was based upon these questions:

1. What values do we hold as teacher educators?
2. In what ways do we respond to our perceptions of being *outside*?
3. What changes have we made in our work as teacher educators as a result of our experiences?
4. In what ways do we navigate the tensions of outside/inside?

### **Methods**

In order to better understand interactions in our work, we employed collaborative self-study, a reflective mode of inquiry focused on examination of the space between self and practice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Zeichner (2007) stated, that self-study research can “open up new ways of understanding teacher education” (p. 43), and we position ourselves within this framework. A collaborative investigation allowed us opportunity to explore across cases and to question individual understandings of practice more critically (LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, 2007). By organizing our “reflective processes around a particular focus” (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 85) we were better able to investigate changes in our practices along with challenges to our perceived beliefs. Methods for this collaborative self-study were iterative as we moved cyclically (Griffiths, Poursanidou, Simms, & Windle, 2006) between individual and dyad examinations of our practices over a 12-month period. We met bi-weekly to document, discuss, and analyze our work. Documentation of this self-study includes individually written self-reflections, journals and analytic memos, as well as transcriptions of audio-recorded dyad conversations. Data analysis occurred both individually and in collaborative conversation.

Coding schemes, begun informally at the individual level as we both read and reread our data, allowed us to more closely examine data together in the dyad setting.

### **Outcomes**

Our findings indicated that we came to understand ourselves and our work in this context within *duality*. Although we grew more comfortable with the outside position, almost an acquiescence, we continued to seek acceptance by the dominant culture. We encountered cross-cultural confusions (Delpit, 1995), and grappled with embracing and working within a rural and a Pueblo Indigenous community with rich cultural norms and an ancestral heritage about which we had little prior knowledge. The work of relationship building within a different culture was continually balanced within *duality* and *wondering*; a sense of not really belonging, yet always seeking to accomplish the goals of the ETAC project; a sense of wondering if we are wanted as partners or viewed as additional outsiders with views towards colonization. As an example, in our typical “Western” mode, we typically work directly with school district leadership and personnel and have ease of access to key personnel; we did not initially understand the importance of, or know how to engage elders and community leaders in the process of education, especially tribal leadership. As outsiders our access to tribal leadership is limited. We believe that authentic collaboration necessitates the elimination of a hierarchical structure in order to engage all partners and participants in learning and social-organizational change, yet we remain unsure that this has fully occurred.

### **What Values Do We Hold as Teacher Educators?**

Both of us strongly value our work as teacher educators as making a positive contribution to the lives of teachers, students, and, more broadly, to the future. MK indicated,

I value teachers who understand the students who they are teaching. Teachers need to know where their students live, understand their challenges, recognize their assets, and look at each child's needs individually. I value teachers who work to know their students' families and their community. I value teachers who know what their students do before and after school, understand their concerns, and know their strengths, and build on those throughout the year.

CT echoed these values, and spoke about the importance of preparing and supporting teachers across the professional life span to

be reflective practitioners, to advocate strongly for their students, to balance that with the political constraints that we are accustomed to. It doesn't help to prepare teachers to sacrifice themselves on the altar of our ideological beliefs and I think, we want teachers also who are able to look at assessment data to make informed decision about the curricular choices that they make as well as their instructional decision making. For me personally, I value work with and in schools in a true collaborative manner and I think this isn't always a 50/50 because there are K-12 constraints. We, too, have constraints, so how do you mush those together to meet all needs with a view towards preparing the best teachers as is reasonably possible?

One of the most fundamental values we hold as teacher educators is that of collaboration with PK-12 and community-based partners. Each of us stated, numerous times, that relationship building is key in developing and maintaining partnerships. "So much of this work has to do with establishing relationships and just listening and understanding where the schools are, where the teachers are, and just understanding what they are facing and how we fit in" (MK). CT echoed this stance, "...we need the relationship with schools more than the schools need a relationship

with us. The PK-12 school will move along just fine without a university presence, however, we cannot do our work without schools being amenable and willing to at least host our teacher candidates.” Both of us came to this ETAC project with years of PK-12/university partnership and collaborative experience, clearly expecting experiences similar to those we had experiences in previous collaborative work.

We also entered this experience with a great deal of confidence. It was through these lenses that we worked, responded, and reflected. In reflecting on the very beginning of the project, MK commented,

When the W. K. Kellogg Foundation liked our project idea for teacher preparation and professional development but wanted to see it implemented with the PSD and not a local urban school district, I was floored; I knew nothing, but I *did* know that if anybody could do it, CT and I could do it. So I think I went in a lot more confident than the people in the district did about this project.

### **In What Ways Do We Respond to Our Perceptions of Being *Outside*?**

On one hand, we have been welcomed and been treated kindly. For example, at the beginning we were pleased by this. MK commented that early on in the project,

The people have been very friendly; they have a great sense of humor. The participants, I guess I would say, have been very appreciative and yet, there’s a lot of things that I don’t know exactly how to say or ask. I remember we met just before Thanksgiving with the participants and I didn’t say “Happy Thanksgiving,” to them because I don’t know if it *is* happy for them,...and then one person ended up offering to have a Thanksgiving dinner after one of the workshops....Maybe this time next year I will feel comfortable to ask if Thanksgiving is okay, but that is still a quandary for me.

As time passes, we have seen initial responses of kindness and friendliness having been just surface-level responses grow into genuine responses to us as deeper trusting relationships have been developed. Culture and past history between our two cultures (Anglo and Native American) have an impact on our being truly accepted as “friends.” According to CT,

I know for me that I filter things a little more. I don't know that I have [done that] at any time in my professional life. I think to a lesser extent at times in our personal lives we've encountered situations where we have felt like outsiders...Even in situations, whether it was that I was the only non-Ph.D. in a meeting because I was a classroom teacher in a meeting with University professors, there was still a little more common ground. I don't pretend to understand much of anything about the Indigenous culture and religion because I am not a tribal member.

In relation to our response to how we are responding to our perceptions of being outsiders, CT's response was

Not well apparently, because I keep trying to fit in, be accepted, and acknowledged in a manner that is comfortable for me. In a discussion regarding the work of ETAC, in regards to us, the superintendent stated, “They've really been supportive. They've really been helpful. They've gone out of their way, you can tell that they're people who really care about what they're doing”. This is nice to hear, but I believe what the superintendent wants for this project, and for the school district as a whole, is much beyond the scope of the project.

It is evident in our data that we both still desire to be accepted in a way that is comfortable to us and that we view this sense of non-acceptance or skepticism as our fault. MK was very surprised when a Native American university faculty member from main campus

questioned her basic understanding of why “*our* way of doing things” was damaging to Native American students because she brought up the importance of teaching the Common Core State Standards in one of the professional development sessions.

I was really taken aback when she said to me, “You don’t even understand why this Common Core is really just more Western Colonization do you?” Well I admit I don’t totally understand the whole experience, but I did say to her, “I do believe I understand that Common Core could be perceived as just yet another form of the White government telling Native populations how to raise their children.” At the same time I have the belief that it is still my job to prepare their teachers to be able to teach their children the content necessary to pass the State tests and graduate from high school. It really is a quandary that I don’t think we are going to be able to answer any time soon. (MK)

Even after having worked with the PSD for over a year, we still felt like outsiders. We knew people’s names, they recognize us, we are treated kindly, “but there is definitely still a distance” (CT). Although trust is developing and growing, we remain careful as we seek to meet the needs of all project participants and goals.

I am so worried about offending anyone that I don’t want to ask the real questions that are on my mind. But if I just asked, seeking to understand, then I would feel less of an outsider. I wonder if they treat me as an outsider, or if I just feel like one because of my lack of understanding. This was one of the few times in my professional life that I was starting from scratch with a level of professionalism that I had to earn every iota of trust and I think we have....I don’t think that the people of the Pueblo thought it was going to work out okay. Very interesting to think about. (MK)

In our work, we consciously became more flexible without appearing nonchalant; this was a dramatic change for us. The rural Pueblo Indigenous community culture in which we were working had different norms and ways of working than to which we were accustomed. For example, “one of the tribal core values is asking questions. People do not offer advice, they are to ask for it” (MK). On one occasion, MK hugged one of the ETAC participants. She was pushed away, and was told that tribal members were engaged in several days of fasting, and this particular individual had chosen to give up physical contact as part of her fast. MK stated, “I had no way of knowing that there was a fast being practiced, nor any context upon which to even ask a question.” This sense of being pushed away also emerged in our self-study.

The main feeling of being outside comes from not being asked what we think, what our professional opinions are. “We ask for their opinions, but PSD representatives don’t ask for ours” (MK).

CT wondered,

Is it more than not being asked, but rather not feeling included? I am still somewhat confounded that no one from the PSD told us that the community would be involved in a “no exchange of money” during the week of one of the professional development sessions. This meant we had to drive 40 miles each way for gasoline and meals. Perhaps we need to ask more questions.

Coming to terms with feeling like our professional expertise wasn’t valued was somewhat embarrassing to us. As MK indicated, “I wasn’t aware that I had become so accustomed to having my opinions valued”. CT stated, “Frankly, I am a bit troubled by this in myself, I didn’t realize having a ‘voice’ mattered that much to me”.

Although important to support many of the university deadlines and structures, we became more comfortable with *exceptions being the norm*. CT wrote, “I think we get ourselves worked up because we value scheduling, deadlines, and the whole notion of time, in a very Western manner...as if this means you value something...we determine value by the adherence to organizational structure.”

Communication was another issue we needed to address and de-Westernize our expectations. MK said,

I always feel like I am gently tapping at the door, saying “Hello, it’s me again.” It’s like I am bothering them with this work because they have so many other issues going on in the district. I can’t count the number of emails that haven’t been responded to, so what’s the proper length of time to wait before I ask again...One time we needed to communicate and their email system was out for a whole two weeks...

CT shared, “Communication about scheduling workshops and sessions has also been an issue.” MK concurred, “Time, planning, and communication are issues, I think because there are different worldviews about all three of these things.” We wonder if this perception of a lack of communication is cultural, and a different worldview, or perhaps this project just does not have as high a priority for PSD as it does for us.

In juxtaposition to our challenges with structure and organization, we are grateful and humbled by what we have learned about the ancestral heritage and culture of the Indigenous tribe. In recalling a poignant moment, MK said,

One moment was when we went to the ancestral sites and saw all of the excavations in the very rural areas of the Pueblo and saw all of the pottery shards, and human bones, and the thing that was most poignant about that was that the tribal members did not know that



existed and that was just a big surprise to me and helped me to understand how the issue of communication really is a different one out there. I don't know if they see it as an issue but it is very different.

For CT,

Probably the most poignant time for me has been when the Cultural Advisory Committee gave that one day presentation of the findings in the Grand Canyon; in the Petroglyphs and all the other ancestral materials that are still there, and how unique it is and how they are working so hard to protect it. I was honored to actually be in a room where that was being shared, and few of the tribal members had heard or knew of any of this. I remained humbled and honored by that because I considered that a great privilege; and it's interesting because for a lot of this work I continue to still feel somewhat very much as an outsider. I totally understood them code switching between English and their native language because there were some things that only tribal members could know. I didn't feel like an outsider at all then.

Regarding the same situation, MK wrote,

The obvious experience of being "outside" was when the tribal Cultural Advisory Committee was presenting about their trip to the Grand Canyon and they begin speaking in their native language. That did not bother me at all. There are things I am not supposed to know. I was allowed to be in the room, which I thought was a very welcoming, inclusive sign. At that time I was obviously an 'outsider' but did not feel like one. It is when I am 'speaking another language' to them about planning, scheduling, etc., that I feel more like an outsider.

We wonder if some of our feelings of inclusion resulted from the open sharing by the tribal members; in this domain they were considered the experts. Our role was clearly one of *outsider* to all present. We surmise that when conversations center on areas where we consider *ourselves* as experts (i.e., teacher preparation, teaching strategies, working with parents, assessment, school-community relations) and are still not asked our opinions, this is when we feel the most like *outsiders*. In trying to sort through this thinking and still work to make progress in PSD, CT noted that,

I think what's worked well for us is that we keep coming back to what's the goal of this? You know, really what are we trying to do? What's the goal of this grant? And it's to increase the capacity of Indigenous teachers from the Pueblo to integrate better teaching strategies of the tribal language and culture and also to help prepare more Indigenous teachers. If we come back to that, we may always feel that we are on the outside because we are not the dominant group, but that is our common goal.

We also realized that we were not the only ones being seen as *outsiders*. MK recalled when a pair of Native American university faculty from a different tribal Pueblo conducted a professional development session, PSD representatives commented that they were not *insiders* either, just because they were Native American.

We had the misunderstanding that our Native American faculty from another Pueblo might be more welcomed because they were Native American, even when in fact, no, there were actually workshop days that were cancelled because the ETAC Pueblo members did not want these different Pueblo Native American faculty members involved.

(MK)

In addition, we came to understand the role of outsiders when it came to making curricular recommendations. We both commented on the issue of cultural issues in curriculum. We have many ideas about integrating *place* into curriculum, but we quickly realized that our ideas were not their ideas, and therefore they would not work in this place. “We don’t know Pueblo Indigenous history and culture, so I don’t feel like I am being helpful...I’m getting to be more okay with this—that it’s not up to me to come up with ideas about how to teach this curriculum” (MK). CT added, “But we can provide them with the tools for them to teach this and how to teach it effectively.”

We are resigned to the fact that time will tell whether we have had an impact on teaching, culture, and increasing the number of Indigenous teachers teaching in PSD. Current impact is success on one level, but sustainability with Indigenous community teachers teaching other Pueblo Indigenous teachers effective teaching strategies and curriculum is a different measure of success.

### **What Changes Have We Made in Our Work as Teacher Educators as a Result of Our Experiences?**

As teacher educators, we teach our university students to meet the needs of their K-12 students, yet in our role with ETAC we found ourselves confronting numerous situations in which institutional norms have caused us to deviate from the very practices we espouse, such as planning, communication, and transparency; all Western values to some extent. Additional changes were across a continuum of obvious to sublime; our knowledge of this culture increased, our advocacy increased, substantive changes were made to the programs within the department (i.e. course offerings, advising, greater support for non-main campus sites), and the university

branch campus (increased hours to the bookstore and library), and our values were re-examined, self-analyzed and clarified.

One of the “ah-ha” moments for us was the realization that many of the issues encountered in our work were not Indigenous but rather a reflection of *rurality*. CT journaled, I am almost embarrassed to admit that it took me nearly a year to articulate that so many of the issues encountered by the ETAC participants (university students, classroom teachers, educational assistants, community members, PSD personnel and university field center personnel) are due to the fact that they live in an extremely remote and rural setting.

The notion of rurality and its impact on access became the focus of our conversations driving to and from the rural Pueblo. In reflecting on our work with the PSD and their concerns with teacher preparation we realized we have successfully been doing a lot of the work suggested in the extant literature as important for improving education in rural areas. CT indicated, “You know, we really have focused on helping teachers connect with their families and the community in our in-service workshops, especially those sessions that focused on the cultural issues of the Pueblo and how to teach those in the classroom.” MK continued, “Because our university does have a small field center campus on the Pueblo, we are one step ahead, but we have a lot of work to do in this area to really collaborate and understand their needs—and then how we can prepare teachers to work there.”

We also have recognized the many rural issues faced by the ETAC students that, we, as university representatives never realized were roadblocks. MK wrote the following journal entry as an example:

The United Parcel Service (UPS) only ships to residential addresses. This does not sound like major problem for the majority of the population, but Sandy, a resident of the rural Pueblo who needs to receive textbooks from the main campus bookstore, it is a major problem. One would surmise that a solution for a teacher in a rural area to obtain a master's degree, resulting in a \$10,000 annual boost in pay for her continuing education, that an online master's degree program would be the answer. This is not nearly as simple as it seems.

Sandy's story represents just another chapter in the epic battle between the urban high-research university system and the rural student of higher education, trying to take advantage of the seemingly simple task of taking classes online for degree completion. There are many roadblocks for our rural students.

First, Sandy has taken some classes from the urban university's *branch* campus only 40 miles away from the pueblo. This in itself is a benefit for Sandy to be so close to this campus to be able to take many classes face-to-face, to receive advising, and to see financial aid advisors. However, even with this opportunity, Sandy faced hurdles. First, she is a teacher, so her teacher-day does not end until 4:00 p.m. She lives 40 miles away, and she found that the financial aid office closes at 4:30 p.m. She would have to take time off work in order to see a financial aid advisor. In addition, we were informed that the student services area and the bookstore at the branch campus also close at 4:30 p.m. Therefore, Sandy could not get her student identification card to use the library, and could not purchase her books at the campus bookstore.

Because of our relationship with our students in our project, Sandy and others relayed their frustrations to us and we were able to work with the Director of the branch

campus to keep the student services office and the bookstore open until 5:00 p.m. for the first two weeks of each semester.

However other problems arose when Sandy began to work on her upper division courses and needed online access.

Internet access is a problem in rural areas—and yet, we tout “online education” as a viable solution for students in rural areas to obtain their degrees. Sandy did not have internet access at home. She did try the local Pueblo community library, however, the lines were long, and typically the internet was “down” more often than it was “up.” Taking an online class requires extended and frequent internet access. There is a local field center of our university in this small, rural Pueblo community. However, this building closes at 6:00 p.m. In order for Sandy to complete her state- and university-required teacher preparation course, Sandy would sit outside this field center building in the evenings, trying to complete her online course on her phone. This, in the end, proved to be too difficult and she had to drop the class. This would postpone her graduation with her teaching license for yet another semester.

Once we discussed this journal entry, we realized that we really *did* understand much more about rural student issues than ever before, and more than the majority of our colleagues. We knew we would have to be the voice for these rural students as our college continued to make changes to its teacher preparation program. As a result, we have worked with the PSD to keep one of their school buildings open in the evenings to provide internet access.

Another significant change for both of us was captured by MK, “I pay much closer attention to *place*. I seek to understand the balance between the need for good teachers, as

measured by Western standards (higher grade point averages, higher teacher test scores, etc.) and teachers from Pueblo community who teach the children.” CT noted a more personal change,

I’ve become slightly less of a control freak...I tend to hold on too tight when I get concerned about the outcome of things in which I have little control. I have also come to wonder if too many Western values have oozed their way into my work-life and wonder if I have become too rigid and focused on outcomes rather than seeking a balance between outcomes and processes.

Programmatically and institutionally, we made several adjustments in our university program as a result of our ETAC work. For example, we have instituted distance education courses to the university field center on the Pueblo. “This never would have happened had we not been working in this project” (MK). We have hosted tribal students on campus, and “this has increased our communication with American Indian Student Services and other support organizations on main campus. This has opened up the world of higher education to more K-12 students from the Pueblo (MK)”. These changes and activities have provided additional educational support for Pueblo members and a vision toward Pueblo members being teachers, which are part of the goals of ETAC.

We also realized how much easier it currently is to get an elementary (grades K-8) teaching license through the programs offered at our branch campuses than a secondary (grades 7-12) teaching license. We knew that undergraduate secondary licensure was difficult, but then realized that secondary licensure was literally impossible without taking classes at our main campus. The secondary upper-division content courses required for secondary mathematics, social studies, science, and language arts licensure are simply not available at branch campuses or online. This restricts those rural students who are place-based because of obligations for

family, religion, tribe, job or other concerns. Prior to this study we would have seen these as simply choices. Now we understand that our institution makes this a difficult pathway for future Native American teachers who live in rural areas of our state. MK commented on the implications of this seemingly “institutional” decision:

I never ever thought about how easy it is to get an elementary license compared to a secondary license for our rural communities. There are Pueblo Indigenous licensed elementary teachers in the PSD, but none at the secondary level. I never considered that. I always knew that getting a secondary license in rural New Mexico was difficult, but use to wonder why it is such a big deal to come to main campus. It *is* a big deal and it is something we, as a teacher education program, need to figure out. We need to figure out a pathway for people to get secondary licenses.

Because of this work, we have new ideas about what we can do in teacher preparation to better prepare our teacher candidates for their work in all areas of our state. CT pointed out,

For me personally, working with schools and within schools and with teachers and educators is what I am most passionate about doing and that is renewal for me. One thing that I would like to do down the road is to conduct interviews with kids around their historical understandings because that could benefit some of the specific methods courses that I teach.

As a result of our experiences, and specifically those of Sandy and her access to purchasing books in a timely manner and also internet access, we have been able to make some changes. We have been able to extend the hours of the bookstore at the branch campus; the larger main campus bookstore has changed their policies to allow for P.O. Box shipping for rural students. We have been able to expand the offerings of courses via ITV (interactive television)



in addition to more online course offerings, so students at distant campuses and rural communities have increased access to courses. In addition, the university field center campus on the Pueblo has agreed to share its internet access with the PSD high school, so there will be wireless internet access for all students, teachers, and staff in the building.

### **In What Ways Do We Navigate the Tensions of Outside/Inside?**

Neither of us feel as though we navigate the inside/outside tensions well. MK's response was, "I would say 'not well' for myself". CT's response included,

I think we continue to do as we have been doing. Doing our best to be collaborative, [we] acquiesce often in regards to the content of this project. And, I think we continue to bring ideas to the table, for example, having main campus teacher candidates conduct their student teaching in the rural tribal community. It's doable, but I'm not sure if it will gain traction or will it be seen as more "colonization" and "culture vultures"?

We both acknowledge that remaining hopeful about an increased and long-lasting partnership will take sustained efforts. The PSD superintendent's vision for the future of the ETAC project "to see it become more community-based." As the outsider teacher educators, we certainly support and understand his position. In fact, we are proposing that the university develop a 'grow your own' teacher preparation support program to better serve the rural communities throughout the state.

In more than one instance, we as university-based teacher educators have been disappointed by the way in which the field center campus on the Pueblo is supported by the university; nearly to the point of referring to this as "institutional oppression." CT said,

There is a university field center on the Pueblo, it's a beautiful building with many classrooms, facilities for technical courses as well and vocational courses and half the

time the wireless and the internet doesn't work and then there is an excuse that "that all comes from another branch campus," apparently so does controlling the heat. So then somebody has to call the larger branch campus and you hope that the guys are working when you call because they take their lunch and apparently a lot of breaks. The University should be asking, "Do they have what they need and if not why don't we get it taken care of so that the students are well served?"

As we have delved into this issue, we have often questioned our institution's commitment to and understanding of serving rural populations through our branch campus system. Are we truly working to meet their needs? CT stated,

I was surprised at the lack of oversight and follow through and, at some point, initiative for people who are responsible for that campus. Do they have what they need and if not why don't we get it taken care of so that the students are well-served? Another issue that has surfaced and this relates to our administration piece, is the lack of support for our branch and field center campuses in terms of financial aid and sound advising for students. Clearly some of the onus is on the students, but we have taken advisors to the Pueblo to do advising sessions, we have made phone calls to advisors while out there. We have taken financial aid folks out there. There isn't a systematic way at the University for those sorts of things; they have not yet become systematic or made it into a routine from the institution.

CT's concluding point was important: "I think it matters a great deal in the perception of how our university's main campus really cares for and supports the students across the state."

The tensions of outside/inside were navigated from a stance of respect for a culture and for a people of significant importance and from our commitment to teacher education. The

realization that this relationship between a K-12 district and university was not a true partnership, as we define partnership, was a startling outcome of our self-study; we came to realize that it was a relationship of convenience. As the institution of higher education, we hold the responsibility to provide coursework for teacher licensure, and it seems as though the PSD is working with us simply because they must, not because they choose to. Frustrations have emerged for us, and we are sure for the PSD representatives as well. CT indicated that she has learned “to be more flexible,” adopting the attitude that,

If that is what they think is best or if that turns out then that’s fine because we don’t have the same kind of control over this as we would even if the same project was within a different context. The outcome is going to be more successful if all parties have a vested interested and have their say....So, I think that both of us have learned to sort of step back and say, “Okay,” because it is almost a different way of working. There are simply additional considerations and the needs of the PSD are vital.

This was particularly troublesome for us and caused us to reconsider our positioning as well as our enactment of many of the foundational documents related to K-12/university partnerships (e.g. AACTE, 2010; NCATE, 2001, 2010); that traditionally guided our work. For example, many organizations are calling for higher admission criteria to teacher preparation programs, along with increased diversity of field experience opportunities. Teachers who will teach the students in this rural Pueblo Indigenous community need to know *these* students and *this* culture, not others that are represented in other parts of the state in order to fulfill a national organization’s idea of diversity of experience in teacher preparation. A field experience in this rural community is one situated in a monoculture, not a diverse culture, and yet experience with *this* culture is exactly what those who will teach here need in order to be successful.

Are we outsiders? Yes. Are we partners and collaborators? Yes, somewhat. The ways in which we continue to manage the relationship to meet the goals of the project are up to us. It is our responsibility to work within our university to determine how we can modify our practices to prepare excellent teachers to serve this rural Pueblo Indigenous community and ensure student success. Still in progress are on-going changes related to our stances, beliefs, and positions as teacher educators working within a highly politicized educational environment. We are continuing to grow into our position as *outsiders* working from within, and are learning to navigate this culture. This self-study has taught us that we now have more questions about this work than before we began.

### **Lessons Learned and Suggestions**

Through this 12-month experience, we have grown as teacher educators, and as people. Through our role as *outsiders*, we have come to understand the importance of connecting school, culture, place, and values for a successful school district. This experience has also changed our experience as *insiders* in higher-education. In this role, we have questioned many of our institutional practices because of the difficulties they impose on our rural students, and particularly our rural Pueblo Indigenous students.

We have been fortunate that our partners in this work, the leaders of PSD, their teachers, and future teachers, took a chance in trusting us, and this continues to grow. Through reflecting on this experience, we have confirmed our beliefs and understandings about the need for excellent teachers in all classrooms; but we have also learned that not any “great” teacher can be successful without valuing the culture of her students. Culture and community has to be an integral part of the students’ classroom experiences. Our teacher preparation program needs to adopt this as a central theme, and to help our future teachers learn how to explore, observe,

listen, and watch as they enter into a new place to teach, wherever it may be. Just because one has license to teach, does not mean that she knows everything about teaching—especially teaching the specific children in her classroom in regards to *place*.

With a greater, deeper understanding of rural education issues, we are better able to advocate for change at our university. As we began setting goals for the ETAC project, the PSD leadership discussed the grow your own model and the need for recruiting Indigenous teachers from the Pueblo to return home to teach. In following this model, we were implementing the idea that,

One way to help solve the problem of the localized teacher market is a grow-your-own strategy. The idea is to take advantage of aspiring teachers' tendency to prefer to return "home" to teach, by working harder to cultivate interest and skill in teaching in areas with hard-to-staff schools. (Monk, 2007, p. 169)

We are committed to this idea of helping rural areas grow their own teachers, who will be equipped to handle the curricular and leadership challenges through teacher preparation, as well as the social isolation issues that are often challenging for some teachers relocating to rural areas (Bailey & Brigham, 2008; Meier & Edington, 1983; Strange et al., 2012).

One of the benefits of our work in ETAC is that we are *present*. We *go* to the Pueblo at least once a month, and stay for a while. We *hear*, first-hand, the struggles of rural students who are wanting to earn bachelors' and masters' degrees. Through this self-study, we have been purposefully studying our responses to these challenges, so we can make and *advocate* for institutional changes to better support and serve our rural students.

Additionally, we approach our jobs differently now. We understand that just because the university has institutional systems that seem to work for the majority of the students, they can

be altered to meet the needs of our rural students; it takes advocacy and persistence. We have been fortunate to meet and come to know rural Pueblo Indigenous students, to understand their roadblocks and what could be changed so that a higher education and teaching degree is more accessible for all students. We have also learned patience in the development of trusting relationships, and that true partnership begins with listening and learning. We have listened. We have learned, and we continue to collaborate to create even deeper partnerships with our university and this rural Pueblo Indigenous community.

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