"Context-Specific" Teacher Preparation for New York City: An Exploration of the Content of Context in Bard College's Urban Teacher Residency Program

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Abstract

In this article, we examine a residency program that was developed to prepare teachers specifically for New York City schools—the Bard College Master of Arts in Teaching Urban Teacher Residency program. This focused preparation on the particular urban context of New York City provides us with a unique opportunity to examine the nature of preparation—how such targeted preparation is conceptualized and organized, what it offers, and what might be missing and need to be strengthened. We also describe the development of a yearlong course aimed at preparing teachers for New York, which emerged from this study.

Keywords

teacher education, *Urban Education*, teacher candidates, preservice teachers

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"Context-Specific" Teacher Preparation: Preparation for New York City Schools

In this article, we hone in on efforts to prepare teachers for a specific urban context, in particular, examining both what that requires and what it might look like. To do so, we examine a program that was developed to prepare teachers specifically for New York City schools—the Bard College Master of Arts in Teaching Urban Teacher Residency program. This focused preparation on the particular urban context of New York City provides us with a unique opportunity to examine the nature of preparation—how such targeted preparation is conceptualized and organized, what it offers, and what might be missing and need to be strengthened. Bard College's Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program has been in existence for 8 years, at the main college campus in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Faculty recently received two grants to develop and support a new urban residency program at a campus in The Bronx, New York, currently finishing its fourth year of operation. The first author of this article, K.H., was on the faculty at Bard and the majority of her work involved developing a system of collecting data on the development and enactment of the Bard MAT programs, and gathering evidence about Bard's work preparing new teachers.[1] Drawing from that research, in this article, we focus upon two research questions:

> **Research Question 1:** What are some of the *particular* features of the New York City context that might be important to target in such focused preparation?
>
> **Research Question 2:** To what degree, in its early years, do the features and opportunities to learn in the Bard residency campus reflect such specific features of New York City Schools?

As Hammerness, Williamson, and Kosnick argue in the introduction to this special issue, articulating the specific features of urban settings such as New York City not only helps us unpack generic "urban" terminology but also enables us to surface the affordances, constraints, and specific features of the setting for teaching.

New York City—what Milner (2012) would call an "urban intensive" setting (due to the density of population, the size, the demand for limited resources, and the disparity of wealth and income, as well as the complexity of other factors)—represents a particularly complex site for teacher preparation. Even within the five boroughs of New York, the history, demographics, geography, and political culture vary dramatically. Yet this complexity means also that identifying the particular kinds of knowledge about New York that

might be relevant for teaching, and the kinds of practices new teachers might use to help themselves be successful in the complex setting of the city, are particularly important.

To examine these questions about what it means to prepare teachers for particular contexts and what features of contexts might matter, we begin by sharing a conception of the features of particular settings—the layers of context—that such programs might address (Feiman-Nemser, Tamir, & Hammerness, 2014; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). Next, we examine data from the case of the Bard MAT's Urban Residency Program to determine the degree to which the program's design and opportunities to learn reflect attention to those specific features. We also look at that data in relationship to specific features of the school settings in which our graduates are placed as new teachers as they may map on to these layers of context, to determine what features of New York City schools might be distinctive or need to be targeted in such focused preparation. Finally, we share a description of the experimental course we designed in response to the data that were designed specifically to help new teachers learn in even more focused ways about the contexts of teaching in New York City.

Features of Contexts in Context-Specific Preparation

In this work, we draw upon a framework that has been developed to characterize features of context that might matter for teacher preparation (Feiman-Nemser, Tamir, & Hammerness, 2014). This framework draws upon research in multicultural teacher education, research on culturally relevant teaching, and on research on the relationship between culture and learning (for a more elaborated description of the research that contributed to this framework, see Hammerness & Matsko, 2012; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014).

The purpose of the framework is to identify aspects of context that might matter for learning to teach—features that represent what new teachers need to understand and appreciate as unique aspects of the specific contexts in which they will be teaching. The framework offers four "layers" of context that might matter in learning to teach, and suggests that teachers may need opportunities to learn about each of these four layers. By using this framework, we unpack the generic "urban city" to an examination of the *specific* features of *particular* urban contexts that may matter for teacher preparation. We draw upon this conceptualization to illuminate the specific features of the particular contexts that may matter for teacher preparation across different specific settings in which we teach.
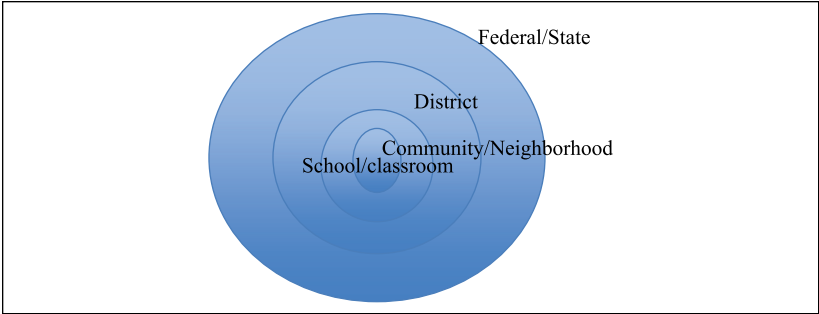
Figure 1. Features of context-specific teacher preparation.

The outermost layer of context, the "Federal/State Policy" layer, refers to candidates' opportunities to learn about federal and state policy, the social, political, geographical, and historical factors that shape it, and the impact of policy on the community and the work of teachers in schools. The "District" layer refers to candidates' opportunities to learn about the policies, regulations, and mandates of the district, as well as the district history. The "Neighborhood/community" layer refers to candidates' opportunities to learn about the history, demographics, cultural, and physical landscape of the neighborhoods and communities in which they will teach. Finally, the "School/classroom layer" refers to candidates' opportunities to learn about students and teachers in their particular school and classroom (see Figure 1).

Method

A case study approach lends itself to our research questions particularly well because of the specificity of the contexts and the particularities of the preparation (Yin, 2009). To address the acknowledged limitations of case study approaches, this in-depth examination of the Bard MAT Program is undertaken in light of a larger program of research that is intended to identify features of "context-specific" preparation across other programs in different institutions (Feiman-Nemser & Tamir, 2010; see also Dallavis & Holter, 2010; Hammerness, 2009; Hammerness & Matsko, 2010, 2011; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014; Tamir, 2009, 2010).

This article draws upon multiple data sources—both quantitative and qualitative—to examine questions about the development of context-specific teacher preparation in the Bard Urban Teacher Residency Program. In particular, the data are designed to shed light upon how the Bard program has

designed and organized the preparation of teachers for teaching in New York City schools; the nature and quality of the opportunities to learn about teaching in New York in the program. The data reported in this article come from the first and second year of data collection (the academic year 2010-2011, with the candidates who graduated in 2011 and were in their first year of teaching; and the academic year 2011-2012, with candidates who graduated in 2012 and are now in their first year of teaching).

Data Sources

Program materials. Data include all program syllabi and major assignments, rubrics used for assessment of the major assignments, as well as interviews about the goals and purposes of key courses with a subsample of faculty.

Candidate interviews. To examine candidates' characteristics as well as their opportunities to learn, K.H. interviewed approximately half the 2010-2011 program candidates (16 of 31) midway through the academic year, as well as at the end of the academic year. Candidates were randomly selected to represent the numbers of students within the three disciplines for which Bard prepares teachers (five English candidates, six history candidates, and five mathematics candidates). In 2011-2012, we interviewed 14 out of all 50 candidates—both upstate and in New York—a little over a quarter of the class. Again, candidates were randomly selected to represent the number of students within the three disciplines. The first interview focused upon teachers' educational backgrounds in terms of their disciplinary preparation, as well as any experience they might have had in New York City schools or other urban settings. The second interview focused upon their perceptions of opportunities to learn in the program, and, in particular, their perceptions of opportunities to learn about teaching in New York City schools.

Surveys. Data also include several surveys that were administered to the graduating cohorts on paper and in an online version to graduates. Table 1 gives response rates for the various cohorts across the years of the research project.

To compare and contrast the experiences of our candidates with others who have also graduated from programs based in New York, we adapted and used a survey instrument used in the "Does the Pathway Make a Difference?" study, which would allow us to examine the experiences of our students in light of the experiences of other teachers who had also been prepared to teach in programs based in New York (although not all New York City programs

Table 1. Number of Participants in Each Cohort of Graduates.

	Research project dates	
Class year	2010-2011	2011-2012
2009	(second-year teachers) 14/32, 40% response rate	[not surveyed]
2010	(first-year teachers) 17/39, 40% response rate)	(second-year teachers) 18/39, 46% response rate
2011	(current graduates) 46/51, 90% response rate	(first-year teachers) 25/51, 49% response rate
2012		(current graduates) 29/46, 63% response rate

explicitly define themselves as preparing teachers for New York—in other words, not all are context-specific programs).

Classroom observations and interviews. Finally, the case study is informed by data from a set of observations of the classroom practice of a sample of 10 graduates from the first year of the residency program (class of 2011), using an observation protocol developed at the University of Colorado (Whitcomb & Gutierrez, 2011). When possible, K.H. observed at least two periods of teaching practice, and coded each period separately. The observations are supplemented by post-observation interviews that focus upon their school contexts, the nature of the support and mentoring they received, as well as their perceptions of preparation for their particular teaching positions.

Limitations. Although the use of multiple sources of data allows for triangulation, there are some limitations of this research that should be acknowledged. In particular, with regard to the survey, the low response rate for the first- and second-year teacher surveys makes it difficult to draw generalizations. Furthermore, some of the sections that were designed for specific subject areas (such as math or science) had very few respondents. In addition, the standard deviations suggest a range of responses on each item, so the variability in responses on specific items is important to acknowledge. Thus, we are cautious in over-generalizing from such responses, but rather use the survey data as one of a set of sources from which we can start to draw toward better understanding of student learning and student experience in our program.

Furthermore, for the most part in this initial work, the data focus upon student perceptions of their opportunities to learn, and opportunities to learn in the program, but leave open questions about whether or not those opportunities

matter in terms of their teaching practice and work as teachers once they graduate. For this reason, the classroom observations are important, however, and more analysis of graduates' practices in relationship to their opportunities to learn will be included in this work as the study develops.

Data Analysis

With each of these sources of data, we looked for candidates' opportunities to learn about the layers of context as represented in the features of the context-specific teacher preparation framework as they pertain to the particular context of New York City (see Figure 1). In turn, we also looked at the features of these layers of the context that emerged through interviews, observations, and surveys that candidates and graduates reported as relevant and critical for their understanding, learning, and practice.

In doing this analysis, we acknowledge the limitations of trying to operationalize the layers of context. In this work, we have certainly not been able to capture all the features of the New York City context that may be important for new teachers to understand—furthermore, even within New York City, there is tremendous variation within neighborhoods and schools. But we hope that this work begins to identify possible arenas for further examination as we continue to think about preparing teachers for particular contexts.

The Bard MAT Urban Residency Program: Curriculum, Student Teaching, and Students

Before addressing the findings, in this section, we provide a brief overview of the vision, program design, and specific curriculum of the Bard MAT Urban Residency Program, including the design of the clinical work in schools. We also provide some descriptive data on who our candidates are, and their preparation, as well as the schools in which they teach, as first- and second-year teachers.

The Bard MAT is a small program that focuses, in particular, upon disciplinary preparation (preparing teachers to teach content), drawing equally upon faculty with disciplinary training (in biology, mathematics, English, and history) and those with educational training. Although the program continues to prepare teachers at the campus in Annandale-on-Hudson (90 min from New York City), a new "campus" was initiated on-site at a New York City high school located in a high-needs community. International Community High School (ICHS) is located in the South Bronx, New York, and serves students who have recently arrived in the United States as immigrants. In fact, students are not eligible to attend the school if they have lived in the

Table 2. International Community High School Demographics and Information (2012).

Number of students enrolled	% free lunch	Student demographics	% SPED	Weighted regents pass rate (science)	Weighted regents pass rate (math)	% ELLs	Graduation rate
371	95.1	3% White 24% Black 69% Hispanic 4% Asian	2.2	1.36	1.27	89.5	59

Note. ELL = English language learner; SPED = special education.

United States longer than 2 years upon registration (see Table 2). ICHS occupies the top floor of a large school building on Brook Avenue in the South Bronx. Two other small middle schools use the first and second floor of the same building, respectively. This configuration is quite common in New York City, due to recent attempts to try to create more "smaller schools" for local students.

The establishment of a residency program by Bard reflects both the recognition that there may be advantages to preparing teachers to teach *in* an urban setting as well as an attempt to increase the links between theory and practice in the program. The vision of the MAT program is to prepare teachers who will be not only committed to teaching but will also stay in the schools that need them the most. Over time, MAT faculty have hoped to have an impact upon the experience of public schooling for children in the South Bronx and other New York City schools and communities by contributing well-prepared teachers, and by providing linked professional development opportunities for mentor teachers and for the growing broader network of the Bard MAT community of teachers (alumni, mentor teachers, and preservice teachers).

The coursework and curriculum for the program reflect an emphasis both upon courses in an academic subject area and in pedagogy, as well as upon a variety of different clinical placements throughout the course of the program from summer through the following spring (see Figure 2). Starting in the fall, students have a set of residencies in different New York City schools, while still taking their MAT classes—gradually moving from observation to some teaching experiences, and ultimately to full-time student-teaching.

The graduating students of the MAT program replicate not only some characteristics typical of traditional teaching candidates but also some interesting variations. Candidates' racial and ethnic backgrounds reflect the population of the teaching workforce in New York City (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006; see also Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Using

	September 2012	October 2012	November 2012	December 2012	January 2013	February 2013	March 2013	April 2013	May 2013
Graduate Coursework	Fall Quarter Classes (September 4th - November 16th) Courses Include: Literature Discipline & Literature Lab; History Discipline & History Lab; Math Discipline & Math Lab; Pedagogy - Curriculum Planning & Assessment				Winter Quarter Classes (January 7 - March 22) Discipline & History Lab; Math Discipline & Math Lab; Pedagogy - Language & Literacy				
Clinical Curriculum (student teaching)	Apprenticeship I (September 4th - November 20th)					Apprenticeship II, Half-Days (January 28 - March 29)		Apprenticeship II, Full-Days (April 1 - May 24)	
Research Projects	Students work on Academic Research Projects throughout the fall		ARP Weeks (November 26 - December 21)		Classroom Research Projects				

Figure 2. Bard Master of Arts in Teaching Urban Teacher Residency Program of study, 2010-2011.

self-identification, the demographics of the class of 2011 were 80% White, 5% multiracial, 5% Black, 2% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (with 7% declining to answer), and 20% of our graduates reported speaking a native language other than English. The demographics of the graduating class of 2012 were 65% White, 7% Asian, 3% Latino, 10% multiracial (with 14% declining to answer), and 10% of the class had a language other than English as their native language.

There were some variations that suggest that our MAT graduates' profiles may share some similarities with those candidates who select alternative routes, for instance, the number of students who reported having a language other than English as their native language. Research suggests that those who enter traditional programs tend to be White, middle-class monolingual, whereas those who select alternative programs reflect a more diverse population (Hammerness & Reininger, 2009).

In total, 24 of the 31 graduates of the Urban Residency Program of 2011 reported obtaining first-year teaching positions, almost all of whom are teaching in New York City schools. Of the 24, half have remained in The Bronx (12 teachers) or in Brooklyn (four teachers)—the two boroughs with the largest proportion of high-needs schools. Two are teaching in Queens, and only three graduates are in Manhattan (two of whom are in Harlem), and only one has moved out of the city (and is teaching in Westchester County). Of the 37 graduates of the Urban Residency Program of 2012 who reported obtaining teaching positions, 22 are teaching in New York City Schools. Of these, nine are teaching in The Bronx, including two who remained at ICHS, and six are in Brooklyn. Ten of the schools in which graduates are placed have more than 60% of students eligible for free lunch. Of the 24 teachers reporting, none are teaching in private schools, although nearly half are teaching in a charter school—which reflects the unique and changing public school context in New York City. Recent reports suggest that there are between 123 and 136 charter schools across New York's five boroughs (New York City Charter School Center, 2012).

Findings

The initial findings emerged across interviews, surveys, and observations of graduates, in relationship to an examination of syllabi and coursework, and to research and policy related to schooling in New York City. We begin with the center of the diagram—the classroom contexts of New York City—and move outward to the broader political/educational context of New York. At each level, we explain briefly what features we focused upon in relationship to our findings, and when appropriate, we also point out the ways in which these layers are related and intersect.

Classroom Context of New York City

At this layer of "Classroom Context of New York City," we examine our candidates' opportunities to learn about those features that characterize the particular classrooms in which our graduates are teaching in New York City.

Across interviews with current candidates, one theme that emerged was that candidates felt strongly that Bard had prepared them not only to take the perspective that every individual child is unique but also to understand the ways that race, gender, ethnicity, and personal experience shape students' lives. As one candidate explained, he felt he had come to understand the particularities of working with individual children, noting that

> . . . you do need to differentiate in ways that are just really down to the individual child, rather than even types of learners. There's ways to address types of learners, but it just becomes so much about the kid in front of you, or the kid in this scenario dealing with these particular problems at this time.

Another candidate's comments exemplified this developing understanding: He explained that even with understanding something about the background of his different students, he also learned the importance of understanding students as individuals. He described a growing understanding about "issues of identity—and hybrid identities—you can still stereotype students. You might think that you know them because of their racial identity . . . but every student is unique."

In addition, a review of program syllabi suggested that students have a number of opportunities to learn about not only the relationship between race, gender, and ethnicity but also specifically about the schooling experiences of students of color. In particular, students read and discuss texts that examine the intersections of adolescence and race and public schooling such as those by Tatum (1997), Ferguson (2000), and Sadowski (2008). They also

read books specifically about urban students, such as *Urban Girls Revisited: Building Strengths* (Leadbeater & Way, 2007), and journal articles that examine the experiences of Latina girls and boys, and African American girls and boys (Noguera, 2008; Ward, 2007). They also have opportunities to read texts that addressed the experiences of immigrant students—a population of students they will work with closely in their first placement and likely later as well—through books such as *Learning a New Land: Immigrant Students in American Society* (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Through the course of the program, students are engaged in considering key ideas such as resiliency and risk, concepts such as Angela Valenzuela's "subtractive schooling," and the "model minority" and "perpetual foreigner" stereotypes described in the work of Stacey Lee, as well as research on "acting white." Survey results support this review. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being *no opportunity* and 5 *being extensive*), both 2011 and 2012 students reported "exploring in some depth" opportunities to "develop an understanding of how identity-related issues (such as race, gender, sexuality) affect adolescents and their schooling" (*M*s = 4.25 and 4.2, respectively).

At the same time, students reported that they did not have as many opportunities to learn about the demographics of the specific students in their classrooms, or to learn about the particular students with whom they would be working. So, although students had an assignment in the month of September that involved following one student at ICHS to all of his or her classes, they did not have opportunities to learn about the particular demographics of students at ICHS in general. For instance, one student noted in an interview that although he had understood that the public school "campus" of Bard was an international school serving recent immigrants, he did not fully anticipate the range of languages or backgrounds of students with whom he would be working. He noted he would have felt more prepared having particular information on "the demographics of the school. I think if I would've known that information, then it would've gave me—a better, a clearer vision of what the high school is really about." Candidates reported desiring that same kind of demographic information when they entered each of their spring placements, but said they did not know how to go about obtaining it.

A second key theme that emerged from interviews and surveys was that candidates across the different disciplines felt that they had considerable opportunities to identify goals, and to plan and design lessons within their subject areas. These finding were reflected in candidates' reports that they had substantial opportunities to think about the "big ideas" in their disciplines for student learning. Moreover, students across disciplines seemed to feel that they had "explored in some depth" opportunities to "develop lessons that reflect diversity of learning levels and learning styles."

At the same time, candidates reported fewer opportunities to learn about the particular curriculum they would ultimately be teaching in their New York City classroom. One student noted that while "it was kind of touched upon . . . [but] what I would like . . . learn more about the common core standards, New York standards." Survey results reflected this finding as well across the disciplines: For instance, English teaching candidates' reported that they had only briefly touched on "New York state learning standards and core curriculum for [English Language Arts] ELA" as well as on opportunities to "review the topics covered in New York State English Language Arts Regents Exam for middle and high school students" or "study, critique or adapt language arts state or district mandated learning materials" (see Table 3). In mathematics and history, students reported slightly more opportunities, reporting that they had spent time discussing "national or New York State standards for high school mathematics" and history. However, in comparison with other areas in which they reported more preparation, this was an area in which candidates reported wanting more opportunities.

In the Bard MAT program, how much opportunity did you have to do the following? Options: 1 = *none*, 2 = *touched on it briefly*, 3 = *spent time discussing or doing it*, 4 = *explored in some depth*, 5 = *extensive opportunity*.

Community Context: New York City Neighborhoods

One important feature of New York City is the distinctiveness of New York City neighborhoods and boroughs. These boroughs and neighborhoods vary substantially in terms of race, ethnicity and culture, socioeconomic level, class, and history. Although students reported opportunities to develop a deep understanding both of the uniqueness of individual children as well as the ways in which race, culture, gender, and ethnicity intersect with development, in interviews, students also reported wanting to know more about the *particular* demographics of the New York City neighborhood schools in which they would be placed.

One student's comments, for instance, were typical of such reports. She explained that she would have liked to have an opportunity to review some "statistics." She noted,

> if you're teaching in the Bronx, [I'd like to know . . .] it's most likely that this many students will be in poverty. How does that impact them in the classroom? And to help us be really aware of what we're dealing with. It's so important to know where your students are coming from.

Another student noted,

Table 3. Students' Reports of Opportunities to Learn About Teaching.

Discipline		M		SD	
		2011	2012	2011	2012
English	Learn how to plan for student engagement in disciplinary thinking (response from students across all discipline areas)	4.00	3.69	0.922	1.312
	Develop language arts lessons that reflect diversity of learning levels and learning styles	3.47	3.42	0.915	1.443
	Plan and design for small groups of students to engage in discussion of literature	3.87	3.50	0.915	1.314
	Learning to identify generative topics in literature for student discussion	3.433	3.08	0.9037	1.443
	Study New York state learning standards and core curriculum for ELA	2.53	2.50	[a]	1.732
	Review the topics covered in New York State English Language Arts Regents Exam for middle and high school students	2.73	2.50	[a]	1.382
	Study, critique, or adapt language arts state or district mandated learning materials	2.80	2.33	[a]	1.303
Math	Design math lessons	3.85	2.83	1.068	1.472
	Develop math lessons that reflect diversity of learning levels and learning styles	3.54	3.33	0.776	1.506
	Learn how to identify goals for my students' learning that are aligned with central mathematics concepts	4.23	2.83	0.832	1.169
	Study National or New York State standards for high school mathematics	3.38	3.17	[a]	1.329
History	Learn how to craft a unit by focusing on key ideas and themes in a historical era	[a]	4.71	[a]	0.756
	Develop history lessons that reflect diversity of learning levels and learning styles	[a]	3.14	[a]	1.069
	Learn how to integrate primary sources into lessons in ways that promote authentic historical work	[a]	4.71	[a]	0.488
	Study National or New York State standards for high school history	3.50	3.71	[a]	0.951

Note. ELA = English language arts.
[a]Missing data.

> I would've loved to take a class that talks about the history of . . . New York City urban schools in a sense, which has a lot to do with the community. We're talking about here [referring to The Bronx], 50 years ago, it's a Jewish-Irish community, and 50 years later, look, such a diverse community now. . . . and how our schools have been affected by that. That all of a sudden in this building [which] 50 years ago, was full of Irish and Jewish students, and now boom, we have this diverse community. How did that happen?

Survey results from both 2011 and 2012 graduating candidates supported this finding as well. On a scale of 1 to 5, candidates reported touching briefly upon opportunities to learn about "communities of students whom you are likely to teach" ($M = 2.95$ and 2.72, respectively), as well as "developing strategies to work with parents and families to better understand students and support their learning" ($M = 2.12$ and 2.24, respectively).

A review of the Bard MAT program syllabi and materials found that not all candidates had opportunities to learn about the particular neighborhoods and communities within New York City in which they would be teaching. However, the History MAT candidates did take a course titled, "Urban History," in which they studied the history of New York City through readings that led them through the colonial history of New York (Goodfriend, 1994), the economic boom of 19th century New York (Blackmar, 1991), and more current perspectives (Koeppel, 2001; Scobey, 2003). They also had opportunities to study recent shifts in the communities and neighborhoods of New York through readings such as Foner's (2001) *New Immigrants in New York*, as well as in Freeman's (2006) *There Goes the Hood: Views of Gentrification From the Ground Up*, which examines the gentrification of Harlem, Manhattan, and Clinton Hill, in New York. However, this course was only required of the history students; the other MAT candidates did not take this course.

A second theme that emerged from the analysis was that although some students had opportunities to learn about the development and history of New York City, they had few opportunities to learn about the local cultural or other community resources available to their students or themselves in their schools. For instance, in interviews, several students pointed out that while they were aware of neighborhood organizations, these resources had not been identified or addressed in the program. A review of program curriculum and syllabi confirmed that the students did not have many assignments or projects identifying or exploring such resources in current coursework in the program. However, in the first year, the program did start to include some opportunities: For instance, a community garden is located right next door to ICHS, and MAT candidates had two orientations to the space as well as an opportunity to meet

the founder of the garden. In the second year, the program included a community walk led by a student who had grown up in the neighborhood, but neither of these opportunities are established parts of the curriculum.

A final theme related to the particular settings in which many of our graduates ultimately are teaching in Brooklyn, The Bronx, and Queens. While graduates reported feeling prepared in many areas, particularly with regard to teaching their subject area and identifying big ideas in the discipline, interviews with current first-year teachers suggested that working in high-poverty settings presented some particular struggles that they might not have encountered in other settings. In particular, our first-year teachers reported, in interviews, struggling with addressing the substantive range of preparation, skills, and learning needs of students. They wrestled in particular with working with students whose skills ranged from reading at grade level to far below grade level, or with working with classes that might include substantial numbers of students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL) together with students who also had a wide range of academic preparation and skills. As one current first-year teacher noted, she faced a context of "higher stress, more difficult decision-making, students who have experienced/are experiencing trauma, and a school environment with extremely limited resources and a different set of expectations for learning than their wealthier counterparts." Surveys of the class of 2010 and 2009 reflected this finding as well: A number of first- and second-year teachers surveyed reported feeling unprepared to teach in "high poverty settings." History candidates, for instance, reported a mean of 2.67 on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being *well prepared* and 1 being *very poorly prepared*) to teach in high-poverty settings. These findings played out in the different disciplines as well; the ELA candidates reported fewer opportunities to learn strategies for working with children who come to school reading below grade level, for instance ($M = 3.27$), or for assessing student reading proficiency (2.63). Given the current emphasis on literacy and math and the standardization of the curriculum, it is not surprising that teachers in these particular subject areas feel greater pressure to keep students on grade level. Teachers may face more challenges in working with students who cannot keep up with the curricular demands because they may feel more pressure to remain on track with grade-level expectations rather than meeting the needs of struggling learners.

In relationship to this finding, we developed a set of survey items for the graduate class surveys (those who were already in their first or second year of teaching) that would investigate this aspect of their preparation in more depth. Items included: handle pressures of preparing students for standardized testing, handle student issues not related to academics, address the academic needs of students who were significantly below grade level, address

the academic needs of a broad range of skills levels, learn how to handle disruptive classroom behaviors, establish classroom structures that supported learning, and encourage students to be engaged in classroom activities. While these items are not unique to high-poverty settings, they were items that we were not addressing in other areas of the survey and seem to be of concern to students who were teaching (or about to teach) in high-poverty settings.

Among the first-year teachers, the teachers who felt the least prepared to teach in high-poverty settings were the English teachers. For the most part, they felt either very poorly prepared or poorly prepared on all of the items enumerated above. The mathematics and history teachers felt either poorly prepared or prepared on the items above. It is possible that this difference in perceived preparation could also relate to the increased standardization of the curriculum that is occurring particularly in schools that serve poorer communities and those with a high number of immigrant students. The increased standardization of the curriculum assumes that students have particular levels of literacy skills, however, when students have not yet met these levels and skills (in particular ELL students who are still developing English, or struggling readers), it is a challenge for teachers to address the needs of students, play "catch up" with their skill set, while also meeting curricular demands for a particular grade or class.

Surveys of the 2011 graduates in particular suggested that although they were placed in schools with ELL students, they had fewer opportunities to learn about strategies to teach, or modifications to use with, ELL students. Although the population of ELL students varies in the schools where our graduates were placed for student teaching, it can be large. In our placement schools, the percentage of ELL students ranges from 1% in one school in Queens to 86% at our campus site school, ICHS; this is also one area of context-specific preparation that may be important for teachers in New York City. On a scale of 1 to 5, all candidates reported they had fewer opportunities to learn about particular strategies or modifications to use when teaching with ELLs ($M = 2.84$). Results from the class of 2012 were quite similar, with students reporting that they only touched briefly on this area ($M = 2.10$).

District Context of New York City

At this level, "Urban Districts in New York City," we focus upon our candidates' opportunities to learn about features of the district of New York and, in particular, on the types of schools and school arrangements in which our graduates are teaching. One important feature of the New York City school system is the increasing numbers of charter and alternative schools cropping up throughout the five boroughs. In 2010-2011, there were 99 charter schools;

as of 2012, the Department of Education (DOE) listed 136 charter schools in all five boroughs.

As many educators have argued, charter schools and district schools can and often are associated with a range of different approaches to teaching and learning, and are built upon philosophies of teaching and learning that may be quite different from one another. These differences are manifested in multiple ways in schools—from the kinds of behaviors students are expected to engage in, to the kind of curriculum that is emphasized, to the priorities for learning that are declared. Indeed, the schools in New York City in which our graduates have gone to teach have very different cultures, ranging from a more military, behavioral, and rigid culture to mission-driven, collaborative cultures but also some reflecting a more atomistic, individualistic culture.

Interviews with graduates, as first-year teachers, began to reveal some of the complex challenges they faced in these settings. For instance, one first-year mathematics teacher, teaching in a charter school serving students on the East Side of Harlem, described the particular challenges she faced in a school setting in which the rewards and incentives for achievement on standardized tests are heavily emphasized. In a post-observation interview, she noted that she felt that for every kind of work or even behavior her children engage in, they seemed to expect a reward—whether it was as small as a "sticker or a pencil" or as substantive as a family trip. Under those circumstances, she asked, "how can I motivate my students to care about learning for its own sake, and to continue to push themselves to learn the challenging content of mathematics?"

A second teacher we observed, also teaching in a charter school in The Bronx, described another set of challenges. She reported that although she had learned about and planned to teach using a variety of instructional strategies in her coursework at Bard, such as group work or pair work, she found that a series of features of her particular school context made it particularly difficult to vary her instruction from a traditional lecturing format. She found that her students were not only unfamiliar with such structures (having rarely experienced them in their other classes), but that the administration of her school discouraged her from teaching her students to work in groups. And, when she attempted to teach the students to work in groups, she felt that the students were uncomfortable and resistant, having had little experience doing so.

Furthermore, there were other challenges that my observations revealed that may be specific to the varied contexts—for instance, two of the teachers in the charter schools K.H. observed used a number of classroom management and behavior strategies that were advocated by their school administrations. These included using timers frequently for in-class work and pressing

students to move rapidly through mathematical work, and offering merits or demerits for many kinds of behavior. In one classroom, I observed multiple demerits and merits being awarded to children in the course of one class period. In contrast, in the alternative school in which we observed another first-year teacher, we saw other challenges: students were frequently off-task, students could not hear one another talking and could not observe the brief documentary shown without having to see it again, and many students came late to class.

These teaching strategies might ultimately make it harder for the teachers to promote and assess student learning thoroughly if they are not paired with other strategies or approaches that allow for deeper assessment of understanding (as well as more sustained time on complex tasks). In some ways, the strategies some of the teachers K.H. observed were being asked to use in their settings contradicted and conflicted with the visions of good teaching that the Bard MAT program aims to support—in particular, a focus upon deep and sustained attention to student learning in the disciplines and to eliciting and assessing student thinking over time. Yet when asked about their experiences in their school settings, the graduates did not mention or articulate any specific challenges regarding their particular school cultures. Although these data come from our initial observations, they suggested that we may need to provide opportunities for candidates to not only be aware of but also to be able to evaluate school cultures and philosophies. In addition, it suggested the potential for learning some strategies and tools and approaches that might help new teachers to be better prepared for these varieties of school contexts.[2]

Examination of the curriculum of the Bard MAT program revealed that through their foundations coursework, candidates have a number of opportunities to examine the features of the U.S. school system from a broader perspective, as well as some of the long-standing challenges related to American schooling. For instance, they read texts by Tyack and Cuban (1995) about the grammar of schooling, as well as texts by Ravitch (2000) and Grant and Murray (1999) that address some of the persistent efforts to change and reshape schools. They read specific texts that focus upon the challenges of teaching, including Cuban (1993) and Lortie (1975). Yet at the same time, K.H.'s review suggested that there were no opportunities represented in the syllabi to examine how these features or challenges might play out in the New York City district or school system. In addition, there are no opportunities to examine some of the guiding assumptions or theories of action behind some quite different school contexts in New York City—such as different types of charter schools or alternative schools—and the ways that school cultures can shape (constrain, support, and influence) one's practice. This

finding in particular raised questions as to whether, in addition to learning about specific students in schools, whether some kind of study of different school settings in New York might also help candidates understand the ways in which administrators, teachers, and school staff create a culture reflective of and influenced by the school in which they work.

One of the first ways in which the different school cultures make themselves evident is in the way that teachers create a classroom environment. This is of particular concern to new teachers who often struggle to find their classroom management style (Veenman, 1984). In looking at the 2011 and 2012 curriculum and syllabi, there were few opportunities to learn specifically about school culture, classroom culture, or classroom management in the Bard MAT program. Although the topic was included (as a review of the syllabi for the teaching lab classes suggested) at several points in some of the teaching labs, across the program, there were few consistent opportunities to learn about strategies specifically aimed at setting up the norms that might undergird a powerful learning environment or at managing a classroom environment that might work in different school settings (or that might be required in such settings). More attention to the level of the New York City district—especially at the ways in which the range of school cultures intersect with classroom culture and environments—seems to be needed in "context-specific preparation." And, this is an area that the program has already started to address—the curriculum for the current cohort now includes an entire book about Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) schools (Matthews, 2009), and selections by Ravitch (2010) that focus upon New York City school reform.

Political/Educational Context of New York City

The final layer of particularities of the context that may matter in preparing teachers for New York City reflects the current political and educational context. There are a series of key issues in New York City education that are not only hotly debated and highly contested, but also that will certainly have substantial impact upon all New York City teachers' experiences and professional lives in classrooms. For instance, there are substantial ongoing debates among the public, policy makers, and teachers in New York City regarding how teachers should be assessed, for what purpose, and what measures should be used (Otterman & Gebeloff, 2012; Santos & Hu, 2012). New York City is also in the midst of adopting the P-12 Common Core State Standards. At the national level, the debates and conversations about the No Child Left Behind Act, and its impact upon equity, learning, testing, and children's experiences in schools, also remain a topic around which educators and policy makers have expressed deeply different (and sometimes divisive) perspectives.

Table 4. Candidates' Reports About Opportunities to Learn About Federal and State Policy Context.

	M	SD
Examine common core standards	2.9	1.145
Examine curriculum materials such as textbooks, curriculum guides, and other materials used in area	2.79	1.449
Learn about different teaching opportunities in New York State or New York City	2.534	1.2531
Learn about different kinds of schools in New York (public, private, charter, alternative)	2.41	1.296
Learn about new education policies in New York	2.45	1.021
Learn about teacher evaluations and observations in New York	2.28	1.131
Learn about teacher unions and their roles in schools	1.90	1.235

With these issues specifically in mind, we developed a new set of items intended to explore candidates' opportunities to learn about these federal and state policies (see Table 4). For instance, we asked candidates about their opportunities to learn about shifts to Common Core State Standards as well as the ways in which policies have been enacted in schools in New York City (e.g., charter school movement, teacher evaluation, role of unions). In Table 4, we present the data from these questions, which were measured on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being *no discussion or opportunities to address issues* and 5 being *extensive opportunities*).

In relationship to larger, framing issues of current education, Bard MAT students reported on their opportunities to consider a sense of possibility and vision for education. For instance, in the survey, they agreed that Bard faculty had communicated a clear vision of teaching and learning and had provided them with opportunities to discuss real schools against a backdrop of what schools could be like. They also reported that they had opportunities to learn "in some depth" about the relationship between education and social justice. Interviews also confirmed this finding: Students spoke articulately and with detail about the kind of teaching and progressive education they hoped to enact as teachers, as well as about the kind of good teaching Bard hoped they would enact. For instance, one mathematics candidate described understanding a very different approach to teaching than she had initially imagined coming into the program:

> And so through my experiences at Bard, I've definitely gotten a lot more comfortable and confident with *not* just saying, "Oh, here's a formula that

you're going to memorize." I think my middle school/high school math experiences were much the same as most people's, I think, where I sat, and I took notes, and then did problems, and I was good at it so I didn't see much of a problem with it. Before coming into this program, I don't think I envisioned exactly *that* in my classrooms. But I think there was a piece of me that knew that that kind of structure worked for me, and maybe that's how I would teach some of the time in a lot of my classes, and I don't want to do that anymore.

Bard candidates also gave illustrative examples about what they had learned from seeing strong teaching at ICHS, and the relationship between such experiences and their own perception of the potential for children. One history candidate gave a particularly insightful description of his experience at ICHS—which he says helps him see the possibilities for all students in any setting:

> . . . just to see how quickly with a group of people who's dedicated, who's passionate, who loves what they're doing, who really have the genuine care for individual students—to see them pour themselves into a group of incoming ninth, tenth graders, some who don't know the language at all—the English language—and to see where they can go, I think that was, for me, it was transcending. Meaning that that experience can be taken to any school, and so any student I can encounter at whatever level, I can say, "Okay, there is hope, there is possibility."

A review of the curriculum also suggested that in addition to thinking about vision and possibility, students also had opportunities to learn about some of the current discussions related to equitable education at the national level, examining, for instance, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), as well as recent political discussions of education by Barack Obama (2009) in their summer education courses.

However, both the survey data on these items and interviews with students revealed that they had few opportunities to learn about the impact of these larger, political discussions in relationship to New York City. As one student put it, he would have liked to know more about:

> . . . the way things are functioning in New York, I think, . . . I don't know if we were supposed to be reading a lot of the news about education in New York—I don't know—or just not, [maybe] it's not that big of a deal that we don't know. But especially with the job search . . . now, I'm starting to wonder if, am I going to sound like I know what's going on in New York City Schools in general, because I feel like I got a pretty good sense of what's going in the two schools I was at, but maybe not how the whole system functions.

Another added that she wished she had more opportunities to learn: " . . . more maybe about the school systems, and policy-wise what's going on. [Pause] Policies that are in place here, but how budgets are working . . . just some information, I think, would be helpful."

Relatedly, the interviews also revealed that some candidates felt that they had not had opportunities to become familiar with frequently used educational terms or local terminology in schools used in the city. Some candidates noted that when they went for job interviews, they felt that common terms used by principals and teachers were unfamiliar to them. Several students wondered whether knowing more of the local language or typically used terms in the public schools might have assisted them not only in a perception of their familiarity with the New York system on the part of those who would be interviewing them but a kind of content knowledge and common language that might assist them in their transition to full-time teaching in schools in New York City.

The Development of the "Contexts of Teaching in New York City" Course

The data from surveys, interviews, and observations suggested a number of ways in which the Bard MAT program provides students with substantial opportunities to learn—all of which reflected and captured central aims of the Bard MAT program vision. Yet the conception of "context-specific teacher preparation" and the layers of context diagram also helped shed light upon some features of the New York City context that the program could more specifically target. Building upon these findings, K.H. and Bard College then developed a yearlong experimental course that would address key features of the New York city context—from classroom, to school, to neighborhood and community, to district, and to state/federal—that the program could target specifically. We taught this course for the first time in 2013-2014.[3] In the following section, we describe some of the opportunities to learn that we developed to help students learn about the New York City context, using the layers of context as a framework.

Classroom Context

At the level of the classroom, we felt that students would benefit from developing a few shorter cases or studies of their own future students that might focus upon culture, background, and relationship to learning at their local placements. We developed two assignments that were intended to help

students take the perspective of a learner in a particular context, one of which was the "Student Shadowing" assignment. This assignment was designed to give candidates a sense of the school day from the perspective of the student; a practice urban teacher educators argue is especially important. Milner and Tenore (2010) describe this work as "immersion into student's life worlds." We felt that candidates also might benefit from conducting an interview with a teacher at their placement school, as another way of understanding the context of the classroom and school (similar to an assignment given in The University of Chicago Urban Teacher Education Program [UTEP]; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). Alongside this assignment, students read Haberman's (1991) "Pedagogy of Poverty" and were asked to consider the ways in which what they observed reflected (or did not) the pedagogical strategies Haberman described observing in urban settings.

One piece we would like to include in the future is some accompanying reading on the "funds of knowledge" that Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) describe as ethnographic methods used by teachers (and researchers) to learn more about the community and the resources available in the community. A key aspect of their work is that the information gathered through research in the community, the "funds of knowledge," were then used to inform classroom practices and curricula. It is essential that students not only learn how to learn about their students but also how to use this knowledge to create, design, or modify curricula that draw from students' "funds of knowledge" in meaningful ways. Students in the surveys expressed confidence in their ability to modify the curriculum and design lessons to meet the academic needs of their students, so this work of incorporating "funds of knowledge" work could build on their existing design skills.

Community Context

At the community level, we designed opportunities for candidates to learn specifically about local neighborhoods, communities, and school demographics that would help them anticipate and prepare more for the students with whom they will be working. Some urban-based teacher education programs have developed particular pedagogical approaches and assignments to help prospective teachers learn about the community and the local resources, such as conducting a community or neighborhood case study. At the University of Pennsylvania's teacher education program and in The University of Chicago UTEP, for instance, student-teachers tour the neighborhoods, interview parents and community members, and construct "asset maps" of the neighborhood (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014; Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008). We incorporated these experiences into our course, for

instance, designing an assignment for our students to conduct a "community walk" in the South Bronx neighborhood of their first placement, and to create an "asset map" of the geographical arena in which the school was located. We framed these community walks with some background reading about the geography, specific history, and the population of the South Bronx (e.g., Breslin, 1995; Mooney, 2011).

We see such efforts as reflective of the argument by Hollins (2012) that the "particular resources in urban communities offer many opportunities for collaboration between school educators and the community, for involving parents in positive ways and for building on what is familiar to students in teaching and learning" (p. 9). Knowing about local community-based resources could have the potential to contribute to new teachers' ability to draw upon the affordances of the settings in their classroom teaching—the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992)—as well as to integrate and connect to potentially important community resources that may be familiar to students and families. In addition, given that recent research in New York City finds that teachers not only choose to teach in locations that are similar to their childhood homes, but also that teachers prefer to teach in neighborhoods that have important resources and benefits such as libraries, grocery stores, and other conveniences (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff, 2010; Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005), it seemed important to us that helping new teachers identify key sources of support, and resources related to their work could be equally important to their persistence in such settings (Whipp & Geronime, 2015).

District Context

At the district level, we designed a set of opportunities for candidates to learn about the variations in schools and philosophies at work in New York City. In this economy, we recognize that our graduates have little control over the kind of school that ultimately offers them employment—but many also noted in interviews that they did not really understand the variety of schools and school options in New York City. In addition, more and more of our graduates are offered positions at public charter schools in New York, many of which are built upon a philosophy of teaching and learning that sits in considerable conflict with the vision of good teaching that Bard promotes.

To help our prospective teachers understand how to "read" and determine a school culture as well as how to discern the kind of support they might be provided—we designed a set of assignments such as the "School Culture Observation" that may not only help them make more grounded choices but may also prepare them to understand the school culture they are entering. The

"School Culture Observation" asked students to combine several data sources, the school's DOE progress reports, an interview with the principal, and a scaffolded observation of the school's hallways and classrooms to make predictions about the learning/teaching environment as well as to reflect on how they might create a strong classroom within the school. We modeled this assignment by asking students to do a whole group "school culture observation" in ICHS, our partner school, where our residency classes were located. Students then had to conduct a "School Culture Observation" in their own placement schools in the South Bronx. Alongside these observations, students read Jean Anyon's (1980) article "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work" and were asked to describe ways in which what they observed in their schools reflected (or did not) aspects of the work children had or did not have access to in the schools Anyon studied.

We also returned to these topics again in the spring, when candidates were beginning to interview for possible positions. We provided scaffolded opportunities, which involved looking at real teaching position assignments, and trying to "read" the assignments for signals about the school cultures, values, and philosophies. We also spent time in class helping our prospective teachers identify and develop strategies that would enable them to continue to practice in some of the ways they envision—even in a school context that makes that particularly difficult—and even if they have little choice in the school at which they have been offered a position. For instance, we spent time in class asking students to develop a set of norms and routines they would put into place in their future classroom—and to think about how they would enact those routines in different school contexts.

State/Federal Context

At the state (and federal) level, there are a series of policies being debated and considered in New York City that can and will have a direct impact on teachers' work, such as the use of data to evaluate teachers (the nature of the data, how reliable it is, and how to use it); the adoption of the Common Core frameworks, and value-added analyses of student achievement in relationship to school performances. In 2012, the state of New York decided to use a variety of measures to evaluate teachers, including student test performance (which will represent up to 40% of the evaluation), local school-based measures, and teacher observations (Santos & Hu, 2012). Because our graduates will themselves be evaluated using these tools and assessments, it seemed important that they have some understanding not only of these materials, but also of the nature and complexity of these larger debates, before they go out into schools. We wanted students to examine this specific issue more closely

and also to have a model of how to investigate any Federal/State policy that would have a real impact on their teaching lives. Therefore, we designed a set of activities that engaged students in looking at videos of real classroom practice (with a new teacher), using different kinds of instruments (including the Danielson framework), and engaged in an exploration of "what can different instruments tell us about the quality of teaching."

As a deeper dive into the topic of evaluating teaching, on the federal level, we also designed a set of experiences for the prospective teachers to investigate different lenses on teacher evaluation (from a research perspective, a policy perspective, a union perspective, and a teacher perspective). We not only wanted students to be able to summarize the main ideas, but we also wanted them to think about how they could articulate their own arguments around this larger debate. To do this, we asked students to prepare a short presentation for incoming mayor Bill DeBlasio, with a discussion about some cautions and concerns and suggestions for his policies regarding teacher evaluation.

Conclusion: Context as More Than Site or Setting—Context Has *Content*

In recent discussions of clinical work in teacher education, some teacher educators have argued that we need to think more broadly than schools for clinical practice as "sites" (Houston, 2008). Building upon that argument, we draw in particular upon the contention that rather than simply serving as the site or setting of new teachers' learning and work—that, in fact, *context has content.*[4] Building upon prior work with colleagues, we have tried to develop an approach to examining context-specific programs that begins to surface the features that such targeted preparation might address. In this article, we have tried to demonstrate some of the particular features of the New York City context that have particular relevance for learning to teach that might serve as some of the *content* for teacher preparation around context. We also share some of the pedagogical strategies we as teacher educators have designed that might help students develop an initial understanding of the content of context.

In examining these emerging findings, some may argue that the features of New York treated in this examination remain generic or general. However, we argue that context-specific teacher preparation is a means of looking at general issues through a lens of the particular—such as how race and gender might shape learning, or the philosophies and approaches of different school designs—in relationship to how these issues play out in the particular setting of New York City. Opportunities to learn about the ways in which such ideas, issues, practices, and experiences are enacted and how they "look" or "work" in New York City then represent the *content* of context.

This research also may suggest implications for considering the nature of learning opportunities in teacher education. Although examining larger and broader issues of teaching and learning may provide some basis for understanding teaching and learning, perhaps candidates need more scaffolded and concrete opportunities to examine how these issues play out (or look different) in their own particular contexts. Perhaps we need to allow for and support more "near transfer" of these ideas. For instance, while reading about the historical and persistent challenges of reforming and changing teaching and learning in schools, perhaps students need to have opportunities to learn about the specific kinds of schools and school cultures offered in New York and about the tools and strategies they may need to use to be successful in those very different school cultures. As another example, although candidates need opportunities to learn about the relationship between gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and learning—they may also need to study material about the background of the particular students they will be teaching in the South Bronx, or have opportunities to learn about the experiences of immigrant students in New York while they work in the context of ICHS. Perhaps an approach to thinking about the *content of context* also allows for more "near transfer" that helps teachers better see how the connections between some of the "big ideas" in learning and teaching are enacted in ways that more closely connect to their own experiences in schools and classrooms.

Overall, this research points to a set of interesting questions about becoming a "context-specific" program (and what that means) that could serve as a very productive program of research. Indeed, urban residency programs might be especially well-suited to pursue these questions, given their focus upon preparation for particular contexts. This research article may raise key questions about whether these are the "right" distinctive features that help distinguish what might make preparing teachers for New York City different from other particular settings, and it may not have identified all the features. But, at the same time, it also raises even more important questions about knowledge about context for *what purpose*. In preservice teacher education, there has always been the perennial challenge of trying to identify what the critical elements of preparation might be—knowing that we have only a short time during which we may hope to point new teachers in a fruitful direction and help them start to establish a productive practice—and knowing that they have already had years of experience in schools and will continue to do so once they leave our programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Given such constraints, we need to know what *content* about context is most critical in terms of helping new teachers shape their practice productively in their introduction to the profession. Some content may be critical in terms of directly supporting a powerful emerging teaching practice, while other content may be important so that they can "read" or interpret features of their initial

teaching contexts, and still other support may be important to ensure that new teachers can maintain an asset-based view of their settings and students—particularly important in schools with higher concentrations of children in poverty (Ullucci & Howard, 2015; Whipp & Geronime, 2015). To that end, we need to know more about the content of context that can most directly help new teachers be successful in their particular settings—and what might be the most appropriate scope of opportunities to learn such theories, knowledge, and practices. For instance, there may be some content about context that might be more appropriately treated earlier in a teachers' preservice experience, while some content might be important later on.

Furthermore, examining the content of context also raises concerns about what happens when new teachers, who are prepared for specific contexts, choose to move and teach in new settings. Even if we take a "context-specific perspective," we still need to help prospective teachers develop an understanding of how to read and understand contexts and schooling wherever they go, and to be successful teachers in new places. We need to equip new teachers with a *vision of reality* that takes into account the particularities and unique features of their contexts. But, at the same time, as argued in prior work, we also need to support new teachers to maintain a *vision of the possible*. From a context-specific perspective, a vision of the possible would both reflect and acknowledge core contextual support and constraints that might rest in the particularities. Yet such a vision of the possible would also continue to allow teachers to develop and maintain a sense of "reach" and possibility for their students, themselves, their communities, and their schools.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. Conducting research on a program where K.H. works as a faculty member can also contribute to bias in this research, and also represents an acknowledged weakness in research on teacher education. Although we cannot address all the

possible bias that might emerge from such a relationship, we have taken several steps to address this concern (K.H. does not teach any of the courses in the program, but rather teaches the induction course, and is not responsible for evaluating any faculty or students). Taken from another perspective, this research also reflects the need—as well as growing efforts—within teacher education to collect more systematic data on our own work and an effort to use this data to improve the program (Peck, Galluci, Sloan, & Lippincott, 2009; Peck, Galluci, & Sloan, 2010; Peck & McDonald, 2013).

2. Because teaching jobs remain relatively scarce and competitive, even in high-needs areas, our graduates may have little choice in terms of what schools they can select for their first positions in New York. Complicating the hiring picture, a hiring "freeze" has been in effect in some schools for several years, and in New York, city schools have greater monetary incentives to hire graduates from alternative programs such as the New York Teaching Fellows.

3. The course weblog can be found at this address: http://contextsofteaching.word-press.com/about/.

4. K.H. would like to acknowledge that the idea that "context has content" was described in a study of preparation for the clergy, one of the studies of professions at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. K.H. and colleagues have found it particularly helpful in thinking about the work of "context-specific" teacher education (Foster, Dahill, Goleman, & Talantino, 2006).

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