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Context as Content in Urban Teacher Education: Learning to Teach in and for San Francisco

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Abstract

Urban teacher residencies have emerged as an innovation for recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers for high-need urban schools. Though residencies aim to prepare teachers for specific urban contexts, we know little about how context is conceptualized in the teacher education curriculum or what teachers learn about it. This study finds that participants in one residency in San Francisco came to see context as complex and layered, interrupting stigmas often associated with urban schools. Participants felt well prepared to teach in particular high-need settings, but their knowledge and skills did not necessarily transfer to other urban settings in the same city.

Keywords

teacher education, student teaching, teacher residency programs, pre-service teachers, field experience, urban education, teacher candidates, teacher development

Introduction

Although the call for "home grown teachers" has long been a part of the national discourse about how to better prepare educators who can meet the

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specific needs of urban schools (Aaronson, 1999; Cuban, 1970), the current push for teacher education to be "turned on its head" and to be grounded more directly in the development of clinical practice refocuses our attention on the contexts where teachers are prepared and the content they must learn to be and feel successful in these settings (Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning, 2010). New scholarship suggests that intentionally addressing the particular people, places, politics, systems, cultures, affordances, and constraints that will shape the emerging practice of new teachers can help them thrive in settings that are often considered challenging (Boggess, 2010; Feiman-Nemser, Tamir, & Hammerness, 2014; Hollins, 2012). Such approaches may be particularly important in urban teacher education given the complex and interrelated issues that are at play in many urban school districts (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). Focusing teacher education more centrally on the teaching of clinical practice necessarily means, among other things, teaching about the clinical settings where they will be working. In this article, we examine how the context of a particular urban setting serves as the content of the San Francisco Teacher Residency (SFTR) program, which aims to prepare teachers to be effective practitioners in San Francisco's urban schools.

The charge to attend to context as part of the content of the teacher education curriculum echoes Haberman's decades old argument that "generic," university-based teacher education too often ignores the actual places where teachers will work. He argued that reforms should "emphasize the importance of contextual distinctions" in how children grow and learn as well as the diverse ways children experience content and participation through cultural activities across their communities (Haberman, 1996, p. 749). Teacher education that prepares educators for schools generally does not focus on these particular aspects of student learning, which means that coursework and fieldwork are often unaligned with the goal of helping teachers develop contextualized expertise.

Given that teacher turnover is 50% greater in high-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012), preparation programs must help future practitioners develop competencies that will enable them be successful where they are most needed. Though conventional wisdom and some research (e.g., Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004) holds that teachers tend to leave high-need schools because they are frustrated with low achieving students who seem unmotivated, other studies indicate that teachers leave not because of student characteristics but because of the contextual realities of the schools where they work (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & May, 2011a, 2011b; Johnson et al., 2012). Administrative support, physical facilities,

professional collaboration, and opportunities to contribute to school leadership decisions are all stronger predictors of teacher turnover than student characteristics (Loeb et al., 2005). Teacher education programs have been described as too disconnected from the settings where new teachers will work (Levine, 2006; Zeichner, 2010), and they rarely explicitly address strategies for negotiating these contextual factors through the formal curriculum. Despite the ongoing debate about the features and methods of quality teacher education, significant evidence indicates that many new teachers feel underprepared for the complexities of urban schools (Hollins, 2012; Ingersoll et al., 2012).

The urban teacher residency model has emerged as a context-focused way to build upon best practices from professional preparation in fields like medicine to improve teacher quality and leverage the strengths of existing credentialing pathways (Berry et al., 2008). Despite the rapid expansion of residency programs, few studies have examined the assertion that residencies provide more practice-based and contextualized learning. Most research has focused on program goals and design (Klein, Taylor, Onore, & Strom, 2012; Solomon, 2009), highlighting differences in clinical work and efforts to develop substantial partnerships with districts.

Some new studies have begun to explore the actual curriculum of programs in cities like Chicago, Boston, and Seattle to determine what about an urban context is being explicitly taught and how (Lampert et al., 2013; Matsko & Hammerness, 2013). For example, Matsko and Hammerness (2013) examined the Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP) program in Chicago to determine how they attend to the "layers of contextual knowledge" that new teachers will need to be successful in Chicago's public schools (p. 137). By studying the program's curriculum and structures, they found that learning about urban teaching "extends well beyond one's immediate physical surroundings or 'setting' . . . to include the state and federal policy context, the neighborhood, the district, and the urban public school classroom writ large" (Matsko & Hammerness, 2013. p. 137). Unpacking the layers of context that shape Chicago's public schools involves drilling down through the Federal and state policy contexts, the public school context, and the local geographical and social-cultural contexts that affect the district, school, and classrooms where teachers and students work. This emerging scholarship extends the seminal research on the effects of context on teaching conducted in the 1990s (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Talbert, McLaughlin, & Rowan, 1993) by considering how professional preparation programs can help novices develop skills and understandings for mitigating these effects.

Preparing teachers to be successful in challenging schools by purposefully training them in those very settings can be fraught with pitfalls as well as

promises. As Sykes, Bird, and Kennedy (2010) warn, the conditions of practice that teachers experience play a significant role in how their competency develops. The complexity of urban schools is certainly part of the reason they are frequently seen as unstable, and it is difficult to develop professional competency in unstable settings. Milner (2012a) argues that educators must strive to understand the many "opportunity gaps" that shape urban schools, and that too often teachers develop "context-neutral mindsets" that blind them to the "deep-rooted and ingrained realities embedded in a particular place, such as a school in a particular community" (p. 707). Hollins (2012) warns that teachers who learn to "swim with the tide" in low performing urban schools have adopted the low expectations, the stale practices, and the dysfunctional ideologies of those communities. Alternatively, teachers who "swim upstream" (Hollins, 2012) have learned to engage students in relationships and enact practices that enhance student learning. This difficulty highlights a tension that is inherent in the work of residency programs, given that locating teacher preparation within the most challenging settings runs the risk of having new teachers learn dispositions and practices that will allow them to accept rather than disrupt the norms that reproduce inequity.

Context and Place

The context that is at the heart of these residency programs is urban. However, the term *urban* is often poorly defined, and there is great variation in what is considered urban or not (Milner, 2012b). While urban may typically be used to describe schools found in large metropolitan cities, it is also sometimes code for people or communities that are deemed as "disadvantaged," which foregrounds a negative, deficit view of the context (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Chou & Tozer, 2008; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). For us, Milner's (2012b) framework for conceptualizing urban settings provides a useful starting point for describing what we mean by urban as it relates to urban teacher residency programs. In this work, the term *urban* is meant to refer to the social context within which the schools are located, as it relates to the size, population, and density of the city. Yet, as Irby (2015) suggests, limiting our understanding of urban to focus on size, population, and density of the city may "mask differences and similarities of city spaces in terms of the unique cultural landscapes, spatial organization of schooling, conflicts over space, and flows of global capital into cities, districts, and schools" (p. 18). Thus, the challenge for urban teacher residency programs is to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach in a particular urban environment, while recognizing the similarities and differences that may exist across different urban contexts, particularly as it relates to their unique cultural

landscapes, organization of the schools, conflicts over space, and the flow of capital.

While there is broad consensus that expert teaching in urban environments requires special skills and understandings (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Grossman & Loeb, 2008; Young, 2007), there is less agreement about how we can achieve what Zeichner and Payne (2013) call an "ecology of expertise" for urban schools that brings together knowledge from communities, teachers, administrators, and universities. Haberman (1995, 1996) has convincingly argued that urban teachers have distinct attributes and behaviors, and Hollins (2012) recently added that "[l]earning to teach in an urban context involves coming to recognize, accept, and take advantage of the challenges, opportunities, and possibilities that exist in urban schools and communities to facilitate learning and to enrich students' lives" (p. 3). What specific knowledge might be needed to prepare teachers for particular urban environments, how is that knowledge generated, and how might it be learned?

From a sociocultural perspective, people and places are mutually constitutive (Casey, 1993), and understanding the connections between the places students inhabit and the ways they can act on their surroundings can help educators know more about how student identities are formed and how identities shift as students move among the in-school and out-of-school environments of their daily lives. Theorists such as David Gruenewald (2003a, 2003b) offer rich arguments for the importance of "place conscious" education. Noting that places are "profoundly pedagogical" in that they play a significant role in how we learn about and experience the world, he posits that attending to place in schooling allows educators to connect the curriculum to the lived experiences of students and communities. For educators in urban schools, place-conscious preparation may help them develop tools for looking beyond the "danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2009) narrative that uses the term *urban* as code for "the conditions of cultural conflict grounded in racism and economic oppression" (Chou & Tozer, 2008, p. 1). It can also provide educators with a framework for examining how some spaces are explained away through terminologies like "inner city" and "urban blight," allowing people to apply an "otherness" to places that have been marginalized and, to some extent, abandoned (hooks, 1994).

Drawing upon sociocultural theories that highlight the role that culture and context play in the learning of new practices, we look to the concept of "activity systems" (Engestrom, 1999; Leont'ev, 1978) to consider how the norms, behaviors, belief systems, and practices of particular places are related to how they are organized and how people within those systems engage to make meaning (Engestrom, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). When examining the residency model for contextualizing teacher education,

we view the settings of this work as activity systems, allowing us to consider how academic, school, and community knowledge come together to create what some have called "hybrid spaces" for challenging the contradictory or conflicting understandings that reside in these spaces (Zeichner & Payne, 2013). For example, disruptive student behavior can be seen as disrespectful on one hand, or as evidence of a student's needs being unmet, on the other. We view schools as places that are mediated by particular policies, discourses, and tools, and the people in those places as having particular goals and understandings that are sometimes aligned and sometimes not. Activity theory allows us to look at pre-service teachers' learning across the multiple contexts of a program to consider how those spaces constrain and expand learning opportunities. It also provides a lens for considering how novices become more accomplished practitioners as they learn the norms and practices of their schools and engage the "discourses" (Gee, 1996) of students' communities and the district.

The residency model grounds teacher education in clinical apprenticeships to leverage the power of learning from experience in particular settings. Novices are immersed in urban schools so that they can fully participate in the practices of those contexts and become experts in the norms and policies that shape them. It also allows them to learn with and from the communities they will serve. The dramatic spread of the residency model makes it necessary for us to have a clearer understanding of what it means to prepare teachers for *particular* contexts, and how the nested nature of these contexts differ in different places. Scholarship on teacher preparation has remained largely general and has not analyzed how *different* urban settings may present specific, unique opportunities and challenges. This article aims to address this gap.

Method

This article draws upon qualitative data from a larger study of the SFTR program. The larger study explores SFTR's programmatic coherence as well as its approach to recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers for urban schools. Data include interviews and observations as well as surveys that aim to document the residents' beliefs about students, schools, and teaching, both during the program and into their first years of teaching. While the larger study aims to understand the key pedagogical features of the residency model, this article homes in on how the program approaches the teaching of context-specific knowledge, the origin and nature of the knowledge itself, and the ways the program constituents such as residents, administrators, and mentors, conceptualize the knowledge base for teaching in a particular context. Finally, this

article aims to explore how residents "take up" the program's curriculum for teaching in San Francisco, and how this informs what teacher educators can learn about preparing people for specific urban environments.

Although large-scale, comparative studies of program outcomes are currently in high demand in educational research (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005), a qualitative case study design is appropriate for answering our research questions in that it allows us to examine the understandings of individuals across the activity settings of SFTR and then to examine these ideas in light of similarly contextualized understandings from other organizations that are undertaking this work (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994).

The subjects for this study were purposefully sampled (Miles & Huberman, 1994) from the constituents of the SFTR program, including residents, graduates, program and school administrators, supervisors, induction mentors, university faculty, and San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) classroom teachers who are serving as cooperating (or mentor) teachers.

The data for this article are drawn from interviews and program documents such as course syllabi, curriculum maps, and assignments. Residents were interviewed toward the end of their residency year, and a subsample of residents participated in follow-up interviews during their first and second years of teaching. Thus, 3 years of interview data are included in this analysis (2010-2013, see Table 1). Residents were selected to represent candidates for each of the credentialing areas of SFTR, including math, science, multiple subjects, and bilingual education. The questions guiding these interviews focused on the residents' experience of the program, their readiness to become teachers of record, and what they believed they were learning about teaching in San Francisco's public schools both during and after the residency. To reduce the potential for the subjects' interview responses to be influenced by connections they might have with the researchers, interviews with current and former residents were conducted by faculty and graduate students who had no connection with the residents.

Interviews with cooperating teachers occurred over 2 school years and included 14 of the 26 cooperating teachers from those 2 years (53%). Cooperating teachers were selected to include those who had worked with SFTR during two of the program's 3 years at the time of the interviews. Interviews with supervisors and mentors were conducted during the summer and fall of 2013, and included 6 of the 7 supervisors and mentors for that school year (86%). Interviews with school and program administrators were conducted during the fall of 2012 and included all the principals affiliated with the program at that time (six). Interview questions focused on their beliefs about what teachers need to know and be able to do to succeed in San Francisco's public schools.

Table 1. Interviews With SFTR Constituents.

	2010-2011 Cohort 1	2011-2012 Cohort 2	2012-2013 Cohort 3
Residents	7 of 15 (47%)	13 of 24 (54%)	15 of 24 (63%)
Math	3	5	4
Science	2	4	5
Elem	2	4	6
Bilingual	1	5[a]	4[a]
Graduates	—	7 of 12[b] (58%)	4 of 12 from Cohort 1 (33%) 9 of 22[b] from Cohort 2 (41%)
Math	—	2	4
Science	—	2	4
Elem	—	3	6
Bilingual	—	—	4[a]
Supervisors	—	—	6 of 7 (86%)
Induction mentors			2 of 2 (100%)
Cooperating teachers	—	8	6
Administrators	—	6	—
University faculty	—	—	3
SFTR staff	—	—	1 (program director)

Note. SFTR = San Francisco Teacher Residency.
[a]Some bilingual residents are also math and science residents.
[b]The lower number of graduates than residents from the previous year indicates the number of residents who did not complete the program.

To further understand the SFTR model and the ways that the program aims to contextualize the teacher education curriculum, we analyzed program documents such as syllabi and professional development materials provided by SFUSD personnel and other education agencies.

Data analysis involved looking across the transcribed interviews to develop codes for identifying broad patterns and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) about how subjects described their ideas about teaching in San Francisco. Using Hyper Research software as a tool for analyzing qualitative data across transcripts and artifacts, we applied our initial codes together as a research team to ensure the validity and reliability of the scheme we developed. For example, a list of codes was developed to capture subjects' ideas about and language for working in schools that had been labeled as "hard to staff" by the district and teaching students who had been historically underserved. In addition, a list of codes was developed to capture the various layers of teaching contexts and "place," such as the classroom, the school, and the

district. While these overlapped with codes focusing on the activity systems of schools, we also developed additional codes to capture the program-level activity settings of coursework, fieldwork, and supervision. After coding additional data independently, we checked our understandings and refined our codes to realign them with our research questions and themes that we identified as emerging in our data (Merriam, 1988). Working in teams, we double coded each data source to confirm the patterns we identified and validate our findings. By running reports on these refined codes, we were able to distill central themes regarding both SFTR's explicit and more tacit curriculum for preparing teachers for San Francisco, as well as the more nuanced understandings of various stakeholders in the field.

Limitations

Although the use of multiple data sources allows for some triangulation (Miles & Huberman, 1994), our analysis in this article is limited in that it does not take into account the actual practices of residents and teachers in the field. Furthermore, more longitudinal and comparative data would allow for a more robust description of how practitioners make use of context-specific information about the school district, local recourses, and the specific issues facing San Francisco's youth and communities. Though we are able to report on patterns regarding what local educators believe to be important, these data do not allow us to conclude that residents are more or less prepared to teach in San Francisco than another new teacher coming to the district via another teacher education pathway.

Also, this research examines a program where the first author works, which can result in data contamination as well as contribute to bias in the findings. To mitigate these threats, our research team was comprised of faculty and graduate students from two departments in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco that had no connection with SFTR.

The SFTR Program and Curriculum

We begin by providing a broad overview of SFTR and some of its key structures for enacting a contextualized teacher education curriculum. Drawing upon the Matsko and Hammerness (2013) framework for examining the nested and often overlapping contexts that might be addressed in a curriculum for studying urban schools, we briefly describe the SFTR curriculum by examining the layers of context that are explicitly addressed by the program. Following this description, we turn to our analysis of how constituents from across the SFTR program understand that knowledge, and what they believe

teachers entering the district should know and be able to do, organized by themes that emerged in our data.

SFTR is a collaboration between SFUSD, the University of San Francisco, Stanford University, and the United Educators of San Francisco. Launched in 2010, the program's mission is to recruit and prepare highly qualified teachers who can commit to teaching in San Francisco's highest need schools and subjects for a minimum of 3 years after graduation. Residents who successfully complete the program are guaranteed early contracts with the district, and district staffing needs govern how many residents are annually admitted for each high-need subject area. Now in its sixth year, SFTR has focused recruitment and admission on high-need content areas as well as candidates who are historically underrepresented in teaching.

To embed the teacher education curriculum within the district and schools where residents will teach, they apprentice for a full academic year in the classrooms of expert teachers at one of SFTR's "teaching academies." Building upon a professional development school model (Darling-Hammond, 1994), SFTR collaborates with the faculty and administrators of these K-12 schools to strengthen instruction and support resident learning. Schools are eligible to become teaching academies because they have been identified as "hard to staff" by the district based on a range of metrics that include teacher turnover and student demographics, while they have strong leadership and teaching.

Though the residents complete the majority of their credentialing coursework at one of the two partner universities, residents from both University of San Francisco and Stanford participate together in a weekly Practicum that is focused specifically on teaching in SFUSD. The Practicum curriculum is developed in collaboration with each of the SFTR partners, and it draws upon experts from the district and the universities to address key issues, policies, and practices in San Francisco. It begins 2 weeks before the school year starts to serve as an orientation to the program and the district, and at the time these data were collected, it was facilitated by the SFTR Director, a former SFUSD principal.

During the residency year, candidates receive weekly supervision and participate in weekly group supervisory sessions. Selected because of their deep understanding and experience of San Francisco's public schools, supervisors bridge the university and coursework settings of the program, helping novices contextualize and align what they are learning at the university and what they are experiencing in the field.

A drawback to the yearlong fieldwork placement model is that residents can come to know one teaching context extremely well, but they may have limited access to other contexts across the district or even within their own

schools. To broaden their view, SFTR conducts clinical instructional rounds (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009) with residents to help them see a range of teaching practices and settings. Through rounds, residents traverse the landscape of the district to visit classrooms of different grade levels, schools, and neighborhoods. Some visits are organized so that residents can see particular pedagogical practices such as Complex Instruction or project-based learning; other rounds are organized so that residents can develop a deeper understanding of the system itself. For example, residents visit the school inside the juvenile jail to consider ways of serving students who exist at the fringe of our schools and society (Williamson & Hodder, 2015).

The SFTR Curriculum for Teaching in San Francisco

During orientation and throughout the year, residents study the *Federal and State policy contexts* of public education in the United States through readings and activities that examine the purposes of schooling and the tensions that exist within a system that was developed to achieve a variety of conflicting goals. For example, residents read histories such as Carl Kaestle's (1983) *Pillars of the Republic* alongside contemporary reflections on schooling like Mike Rose's (2009) *Why School* to consider how schools are structured to prepare an educated and professional electorate or, conversely, to reproduce societal class norms and respond to labor needs. They also examine Federal and state initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind legislation and the Common Core State Standards to consider how implementation varies and the degree to which schools are constrained or supported through standards-based accountability measures. As one SFTR graduate noted,

> We really tried to get our minds around the possibility that schools in this country were not set up to achieve the goals that we teachers have for our students, and that policies can be more about regulating institutions than they are about helping students learn. We were learning about our roles as teachers in a system that has its priorities mixed up.

Building upon their understanding of the historical purposes of schooling, residents examine key issues in education that shape our *school contexts* as well as our national conversation about how schools should be "fixed." For example, in the Practicum, residents study education funding policies and how the distribution of resources affects urban, rural, and suburban districts differently (Kozol, 1991). They also investigate various perspectives on the achievement gap and how it is reframed as an "opportunity gap" (Milner, 2012a) and an "educational debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In courses with

titles like Curriculum Currents and Controversies, the residents look at the debates that have shaped schools such as the "math wars" and various perspectives on teaching history and literature through multicultural and ethnic studies. Reading Diane Ravitch's (2010) account of the dangers of school privatization and corporatization, residents consider how the public school system is influenced by "reforms" that affect school stability and, as some argue, the viability of the school system itself. The consequences of the charter school movement in places like New York and New Orleans are hotly debated.

To orient residents to the *SFUSD context and the communities of San Francisco*, they examine how policies and other influences like immigration affect specific San Francisco's schools. Residents explore historical demographic and socioeconomic trends in the city as well as the formation of SFUSD and its retention and graduation rates over time. After reading the district's strategic plan, residents dive deeply into the current data for the teaching academies where they will be placed.[1] Looking across these data, residents consider what they can learn about their schools from pupil achievement scores, demographics, attrition and suspension rates, student safety and health, community perceptions, and teacher retention. They also consider what they cannot determine from the data, such as the nature of faculty collaboration and the particular social climate of each school. The Practicum also focuses on specific curriculum and policy initiatives in the district as well as issues facing youth and families in San Francisco. For example, the residents are introduced to district-adopted pedagogical practices aimed at improving students' social and emotional skills such as Restorative Justice strategies. Teaching for social justice and equity are themes that frame conversations about religion, race, class, gender, and sexuality in the city. As these examples illustrate, the Practicum aims to provide residents with information that will help them understand the particular promises and pitfalls of teaching in San Francisco's public schools.

Finally, to study the *individual school and classroom contexts* where they will teach, residents are charged to combat the data-driven "danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2009) of underperforming schools by creating asset maps of their fieldwork sites, interviewing teachers and administrators regarding school initiatives and strengths, and participating in rounds within and across the schools where they are placed. By participating in nearly every aspect of their school's daily life from the first day of school to the last, residents get to see the arc of the school day and year and also participate in most of the available professional development. Though the residents' course schedule makes it impossible for them to take on the responsibilities of a full-time teacher, their fieldwork is more extensive than many other pathways into teaching (Levine, 2006).

Findings

Drawing upon our conceptual framework for examining how context-knowledge emerges from or resides within the various activity settings of a UTEP that aims to capitalize on the "hybrid spaces" where the academic, school, and community knowledge come together (Zeichner & Payne, 2013), our findings are organized into three themes that foreground what the residents seem to understand about teaching in San Francisco as well as how residents and other program constituents describe the necessity or sufficiency of that knowledge.

First, the residents seemed to develop "context-conscious mind-sets" for considering the various factors that shape the educational opportunities of their students. Second, residents developed context-knowledge that allowed them to adopt an assets perspective toward historically underserved schools and communities in San Francisco. And third, the residency program appears to prepare teachers well for particular schools and contexts, while it may narrow their view of teaching contexts generally, limiting their ability to transfer that knowledge to other settings. By inquiring into the knowledge that practitioners need to be successful in San Francisco's urban schools, these themes highlight both the promises as well as the challenges of learning to teach in such a context-focused model.

Developing "Context-Conscious Mind-Sets" for Teaching in Urban Schools

As Milner (2012b) highlights in his framework for explaining "opportunity gaps" in educational practice, educators who develop "context-neutral mind-sets" do not attend to how the social and political contexts of schools shape both students' and teachers' opportunities in some urban settings. The result is that educators and researchers tend to focus on student-level evidence such as the test scores and graduation rates that are commonly at the core of debates about closing the achievement gap.

Our data indicate that SFTR residents appeared to be developing *context-conscious mind-sets* for working in urban schools, and that teaching this sort of context-oriented stance was a key focus of how SFTR support providers framed what San Francisco educators needed to know. For example, interviews with current residents and graduates revealed that they were keenly focused on understanding equity issues relating to school and community resources. Program participants discussed how the geographic location of schools in the district were linked with issues relating to equitable funding and perceptions of students. One resident said that "there's a separation

between the haves and the have-nots and the east and west part of the city, and part of teaching in this city means understanding that stuff." Another resident said that she learned that

> all schools are not created equal . . . and being in the residency program opens your eyes to that on a very real basis, because you can read about it and take a social justice class and be like "Oh, it's so unequal," but you don't see just how much that affects a 6-year-old's learning.

As these quotes indicate, the residents seemed to develop a kind of nuanced, specific, grounded understanding of what these issues looked like in SFUSD.

Residents reported developing an awareness of the importance of being open to understanding students' backgrounds and community contexts to be an effective teacher who could "advocate" for students. For example, one resident described how a situation with a student who was in foster care opened her eyes to the challenges many students face outside of the classroom. Another graduate discussed the importance of being aware of her own background and identity so that she could be open to understanding her students' family needs:

> I grew up in a very suburban area in a very just different setting. Obviously, I can't totally let go of my past background, because it's always there. But just being very open to what resources the kids need and what resources the parents might need—they may not be familiar at all with the school structure or with expectations about different behaviors and things. But having a sensitivity to explain it in a way that's not like demeaning or trying to take over their culture or ignore where they're coming from.

Residents recognized that their own cultural identity and background is at play in their interactions with students and families, and that being aware of this could help them better understand how to communicate across these differences. Residents also seemed keenly aware of the diverse student population in the district and came to understand the importance of how these contextual factors can influence in-school learning experiences.

> I know now that I only know only so much about what is going on for my students. It's like the tip of an iceberg. What [students] show me in school is only part of what they are dealing with on a daily basis.

Another resident described how program structures like instructional rounds helped her think more deeply about issues of equity regarding race and the school to prison pipeline. Her visit to the jail influenced her understanding of

how historically underserved youth are disproportionately placed in remedial programs and incarcerated.

> Throughout this program there's all this talk about social justice and social inequities. And you don't really know what that means until you really see it. And I think that observing in the jail and seeing the demographics there was more powerful than reading any number of books that talk about it—Just putting faces to a societal problem was really powerful.

As these examples illustrate, in-depth field experiences and across-system visits helped to ground the teacher education curriculum relating to equity and access in real examples that could bring these issues to life and help them adopt context-conscious mind-sets for understanding their students and schools.

Our data also indicate that the SFTR support providers emphasized the importance of new teachers understanding diverse family structures, cultural differences, and the fact that that many local students experience post-traumatic stress disorder. For example, one principal argued that teachers need to understand that students often have non-traditional family arrangements, "from having two fathers to having a single mother or [two mothers] . . . and that the range of families in San Francisco is an important part of knowing where your students are coming from." Teachers must be able to accept "alternative gender norms and identity, and that these norms may be different than what students experience in other parts of the state or even the Bay Area." In San Francisco, the relatively controversial topics of gay marriage can be central to students' understandings of family and community, and teachers must understand this to build relationships with their students.

Other principals extended the consideration of diverse family structures to immigrant families and argued that teachers needed this understanding as well. One principal said,

> I can be the best teacher in the world, but if [my student] doesn't live at home because dad was deported and mom had to go work in another person's house, it's important that you take the time to know that.

The implications of immigration emerged as theme that highlights a possible disconnect between the students' and the teacher's cultural backgrounds. One supervisor argued that novices need to examine their assumptions about race and class if they want to connect with San Francisco's youth:

> They need to know the ways their experiences are different and how that impacts their thinking and interactions so that they can really be reflective

> about the lens they bring . . . the thing about the White woman feeling like a Black boy's being defiant when the Black boy feels like he's saying what he needs. Then how that can then snowball into this being a bad kid or someone who's no longer engaged in school.

Support providers also stressed the importance of teachers recognizing that many of the students they will teach exhibit traits of, or may have a diagnosis of, post-traumatic stress disorder. One cooperating teacher said,

> Over one third of our students qualify for a formal diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. It has a big impact on how they learn and the challenges that they present in the classroom. I think it's easy for teachers to internalize misbehavior as being either directed at them as an issue of defiance or coming from some internal deficit of the child. . . . Having a trauma-sensitive lens helps residents not make excuses for students' behavior, but to respond proactively to behavioral issues and generally have a safer, better climate for learning.

For support providers, an important part of developing a context-conscious mind-set was understanding the history of the city and the inequities between the different regions of San Francisco's east and west side schools. Though San Francisco is an affluent city with a long history of activism around issues of social justice, it is also an increasingly segregated city with many of its poorer neighborhoods concentrated in the southeastern corner. Support providers stressed that successful teachers must develop an understanding of how these "invisible lines" determine school funding structures as well as which students have access to which schools. For example, a cooperating teacher said that teachers

> coming into higher-need schools should know where the levers of power are in the district and how to impact those . . . to feel comfortable advocating for students even when it is uncomfortable or they are being told to stop.

These data indicate that the program is helping educators develop the context-conscious mind-sets that SFTR constituents such as supervisors and administrators think is needed to be successful in San Francisco, developing educators who can critically examine and interrogate the system where they work. What we do not yet know is how this mind-set is shaping their teaching practice in the field.

Developing Context-Knowledge for Taking an Assets Approach to Working in "Hard-to-Staff" Schools

Another theme that emerged from the resident interviews is connected to their understanding about what it means to teach in "hard-to-staff" schools.

When residents were asked what they learned about the skills and knowledge that teachers need to be successful in these schools, many responded by problematizing the notion of what exactly a hard-to-staff school might be. For example, one resident questioned the terminology itself, saying,

> So there's this label "hard-to-staff," and you can sort of come up with what makes a school hard-to-staff. But then in your experience, it like seems like a really desirable place to work, and so I don't really know where that comes from . . . Is it just because it's kind of a transitory population with a hard place to live and be middle class? Is it hard to work with these students? So I don't feel like I have a real, like, focus on what makes teaching at [this school] distinctly different.

Residents frequently questioned the designation of hard-to-staff schools and cited supports such as strong administration and opportunities for collaboration with other teachers as reasons that their particular hard-to-staff schools were actually desirable places to work. For example, one resident said that people assumed that hard-to-staff schools were filled with challenging students, but her school had a strong professional community that she believed "trickled down" to the students.

> When students see that relationship between teachers, it trickles down to the way that humans should interact with each other and the way that humans should respect each other. I wonder if hard-to-staff schools have such high teacher burnout potential that teachers forget to lean on each other for support and don't collaborate as much as they should . . . So students don't really see their teachers interacting as much as they need to. And maybe that's why it's called a hard-to-staff school. But that is not what is happening at my school, so something seems off.

Combating deficit views of urban schools, residents seemed to understand that the quality of a school cannot be defined by its location and demographics. Residents also reported that they believed that there are certain attitudes, stances, or dispositions associated with expert teaching in San Francisco's high-need schools. For example, many residents reported that that having a desire to build strong relationships with one's students must be more important to a teacher than their love for the content they will teach. One resident said that he learned that teachers in high-need schools learn to put relationships first, which makes it possible for them to teach content as well:

> [I learned] that it's actually not about the content; it's about the students . . . [My cooperating teacher] keeps pointing me to one of the gurus in the math department here, who says that it's not about the math . . . I mean, he cares

> [about the math] but his primary concern is not for them to learn math; it's for them to learn how to think and to become courageous people. But as a result, his students learn a ton of math. They learn more math than in any other class.

As these examples illustrate, the residents seemed to develop an understanding about what strong professional community and support can look like at schools that, from the outside, are labeled underperforming or high-need. Apprenticing in the specific contexts of these schools allowed them to establish strong ideas about the role of professional collaboration, relationship building, and holding a common vision at schools where deficit views could easily take hold. Given that many high-need urban schools do in fact face significant challenges regarding staffing, maintaining high expectations for students, and building professional community, these examples illustrate the importance of selecting activity settings where residents can be apprenticed to the kinds of attitudes and practices that will allow them to envision the possible in urban education. In these cases, the culture of the context was an important part of the context-knowledge that was learned.

Similarly, support providers and administrators problematized the perceived differences between "good" and "bad" schools within the district, arguing that what counts as good teaching on one side of the city would not be considered effective on the other. Supervisors attributed the difference in how good teaching is defined to the contextual knowledge that teachers need to be successful with particular groups of students. One supervisor said, "even if they're really good teachers on the west side doesn't mean they're going to be a really good teacher on this side because they don't understand this side." One principal said,

> People equate west side schools with good schools because of test scores or information along those lines. But I think a lot of [west side] classrooms are also along traditional lines, which are really a lecture format and not necessarily as engaging . . . And what I have seen in east side schools is that there is much more creativity and struggle and trying to discover what is engaging and what is successful in terms of instruction.

Administrators and support providers repeatedly indicated that east side teachers were more successful in meeting the needs of historically underserved urban youth, and that test scores were not a good indication of what counted as success in high-need schools. Furthermore, they seemed to discount the teaching in schools that were considered to be less challenging, arguing that challenge was an important ingredient for inspiring engaging pedagogy.

Finally, residents came to believe that a key characteristic of effective teachers in San Francisco's hard-to-staff schools involved being emotionally

strong, demonstrating resiliency, and maintaining a professional vision. One resident described how emotionally draining it could be to live with the challenges that students bring to school such as violent crimes and murders in the community, and concluded that

> teaching in a high-need school means that you have to realize that stuff is going to go down and you're going to be affected by it . . . it's not something that you can just clock in and out of.

Another resident suggested that urban teachers required an "internal motivation" to continue working in environments that are challenging for both students and teachers:

> You have to have a clear vision of your role in these schools. It's not going to be easy but you need to be honest to yourself and be able to [endure all] the difficulties you're going to face, but there's ultimately an internal motivation that you have to have and keep it alive. And that's going to be [like] your reward at the end of the day. You're like, okay, I will work hard today, but you go to bed and you're like, "I'm doing something."

By having residents apprentice in teaching academies with professional communities that embrace the goal of "swimming upstream" (Hollins, 2012), SFTR constituents claimed that context-knowledge can help novices embrace the objective of disrupting deficit views of students and communities (Flores, Cousin, & Diaz, 1991). For example, an induction mentor argued that new teachers in San Francisco needed to maintain

> almost a kind of undying optimism . . . the idea that, yes, the state of education might seem like it's in dire straits at times in this city in terms of where kids are in terms of preparation. But [teachers] need to be optimistic that they can have a positive effect.

Mentors and cooperating teachers alike stressed that successful urban teachers need to be able to "defend" their practices and beliefs even within their own professional learning communities, highlighting the degree to which dispositions such as resiliency and undying optimism might be essential in the face of district mandates, accountability systems, and rigid curricula. Though the degree to which these stances or dispositions can be explicitly taught remains an open question, these data reveal that both support providers and residents believed that such qualities are essential for success in San Francisco's high-need schools.

Preparation for Particular Schools and Contexts, While Narrowing Residents' Ability to Transfer Knowledge to Other Settings

One argument against traditional teacher education is that it is too generic and does not prepare people for the specific schools and communities where they will teach (Haberman, 1996). Our data indicate that both residents and the administrators who hired them believed that they were better prepared to be successful than other new teachers who came through different pathways, but they also expressed doubt that this advantage would transfer to other teaching contexts.

In an interview with a principal who had hired multiple graduates of the program, he discussed his observation that they seemed both more prepared and more ready to fully participate in the culture of the school. He believed the residents had a clear advantage over other new teachers at his school:

> The residents who are now teaching here definitely have a leg up. They understand the students and the wee micro systems we have created to accomplish specific tasks like getting students off of the courtyard in an emergency or passing out snack on rainy days. They know the curriculum, and they usually know the parents . . . the kids already know their faces! It would be great if all new teachers could come in with that sort of knowledge, able to start off without being overwhelmed by everything and anything.

While principals were generally enthusiastic about the deeper context-knowledge that graduates brought to their practice, they also believed that the program should find ways of allowing residents to become more embedded in schools so that they could more fully participate in activities they were missing because of schoolwork and other obligations. For example, one principal argued that residents would be even more prepared if they were able to "dive all the way in" to her schools' after school professional development programs and staff meetings, and another principal said that "it is just such a shame that [the residents] only get part of the story about what it means to teach here." These perspectives highlight the tension that exists between learning to teach from experience through practice and learning from coursework, even when these are more tightly integrated to attend to context across activity settings.

Residents who were hired at the schools where they did their fieldwork reported feeling more prepared than other new teachers at their schools. One graduate said that she could "see a clear difference in how [she] was able to start [her] class with the right norms and expectations," and she observed that another new teacher at her school "struggled with the most basic stuff like

how to get the kids to recess." Another graduate reported that she found herself mentoring the other new teachers at her site within the first month of the school year. Across interviews with graduates who were hired to teach at the teaching academy where they did their fieldwork, they reported feeling confident about becoming the teacher of record at the beginning of the year.

Graduates who were hired at schools other than those where they did their fieldwork also said that they felt more prepared than other new teachers at their sites, though their responses were more measured. One graduate reported that she was "closer to the starting line" than the other new teachers on her staff, but that she was "rushing to figure out some school-level stuff that [she] felt like [she] should know already."

> We had this orientation for new teachers in the district and I was glad I went, but I was also thinking about how I already know a lot of this stuff about School Loop[2] and how to communicate with parents. But then I started getting my classroom ready and I realized—wow—do I really know where to begin? I mean I do know, but I also sort of woke up to the fact that this is a new school with a new set of rules, and I need to learn them fast.

As these examples illustrate, graduates felt better prepared to teach in the broader context of San Francisco's schools than their counterparts from other credentialing pathways, but they also noted that what they had learned about their school-level context may not transfer to other schools or even grade levels. One graduate remarked that moving from second grade to fourth grade seemed like a "whole new ballgame," and he worried that he was not ready for the challenge of teaching older students:

> Sure, I feel confident about knowing how to teach [here]. But to teaching in San Francisco- what do I know about that? What if I were placed at a school on the west side of the city? Or what about down the street? I think I would be a new teacher all over again, having to learn everything about the expectations and the school and the parents.

Another resident voiced a similar view, indicating that he was so focused on his local context that he was somewhat unaware of being prepared for the broader contexts of teaching in San Francisco or even the school district. His context-knowledge seemed to home in on his immediate experience and surroundings, and did not attend to how these were situated within or shaped by the other contextual layers around him.

> I don't know because this is the only place that I have taught now. So I am used to teaching here, I am used to the kids I'm working with. I know what a lot of

> words that sound ridiculous mean. But I think that's another thing where I would have to teach somewhere else to recognize [this]. Because for me, this is it. I am not teaching in San Francisco, I am just teaching . . . So if I went anywhere else I'd have to learn how to adapt to a different city and I could reflect on it but I just don't have a comparison to work with.

These data highlight a challenge of contextualized teacher education: Preparing novices deeply for practice in one particular setting with specific norms and characteristics may narrow their learning in ways that more general teacher preparation may not. Although the residents reported that they had a deeper understanding of district policies and practices, they felt less prepared for the district context as a whole. Instead, they developed a deeper understanding of how complex and layered the different contexts of the district can be, highlighting gaps in their context-knowledge that might be addressed through different kinds of experiences during their residency year. For example, would they feel better prepared if they had experience observing and possibly teaching in west side schools? To what extent did the residency program limit or even determine their view of what good teaching looks like and how schools are organized?

Discussion

While teacher education that is focused on developing competency for effective instruction in high-need schools runs the risk of having new teachers learn dispositions and practices that will allow them to accept rather than disrupt the norms that reproduce inequity, these data indicate that it is possible for novices to develop deep context-knowledge and context-conscious mind-sets that might allow them to "swim upstream" (Hollins, 2012) in schools that are otherwise stigmatized as overly challenging places to work. The residents in this study seemed to develop frameworks and strategies for combating beliefs and norms that sometimes dominate the discourse about teaching and learning in urban schools. Rather, the residents saw these schools as being places that work to provide students with lots of support and where faculty collaborate and "lean" on each other.

These findings suggest that there was alignment between the program's goals and how the program constituents conceptualized the knowledge base for teaching in San Francisco's high-need schools. The findings also indicate that the residents developed a keen awareness of how the equity issues facing the district might shape their practice. Even so, the residents generally described these challenges as being a source of continued motivation for working in San Francisco, frequently reporting that they felt more prepared

to begin teaching than people who entered the classroom through other routes. Still, the residents' confidence seemed to be located more in their understanding of particular local systems and practices than it did in domains related to content knowledge expertise or more general management strategies. The residents felt prepared to teach in specific schools and grades while they were unsure how this competence would transfer to other settings beyond those where they were prepared. This finding raises the question of how narrowing the contextual focus of the teacher education curriculum might affect teacher learning, and how programs might seek to help novices develop contextual and general expertise simultaneously.

Looking into the activity settings of this urban teacher residency program reveals patterns in how academic, school, and community knowledge came together to create "hybrid spaces" for challenging the contradictory or conflicting understandings that can inhabit urban schools (Zeichner, 2010). This research illustrates how teachers, administrators, and support providers across school and classroom contexts adopted particular norms and beliefs about working with historically underserved youth and schools, and how the novices in a residency program were apprenticed to this assets-orientated approach. It also indicates that these activity settings were somewhat limited or closed in the degree to which they encompassed the diversity of the broader district and city where they were located. By focusing on hard-to-staff schools in a particular corner of a large urban school district, the residency program seemed to home in on the particular strategies and beliefs that were perceived as successful in one category of school, while discounting or even dismissing the practices of other schools in the city. As a result, the residents learned to identify with the struggles and dispositions of one sort of school to the exclusion of the others.

Given that the residents and other SFTR constituents shared an explicit, specific vocabulary for discussing issues of equity in the classroom, school, and district, these findings point to a high level of coherence across the activity settings of the program regarding the need for teachers to approach their classrooms from an assets-based perspective (Flores et al., 1991). Drawing upon our conceptualization of context-specific knowledge being both generated and learned within and across the activity settings of a teacher preparation program, it seems noteworthy that participants within those settings can participate in the same "discourses" and have similar dispositions even if these are not the dominant discourses of the district or of other schools in the city. This begs the question of how many different contexts can be the content for teaching in San Francisco, and what has been left out of the SFTR curriculum because it is not the focus of the members of that community. What information gets privileged over others? Can such alignment occur across

communities within a district, and how would it change if it did? The participants in this study seemed to believe that the "west side" schools valued different knowledge and skills. What would be the content of their context?

While the participants in this study seemed to espouse common vocabularies around issues of equity, there is still much to study about the impact of the program on the actual classroom practices of the residents. Our findings illustrate that language in and among participants has been acquired, but more work needs to be done before we can know how deeply this language is embedded in practice in the field.

Further research will explore how contextualized teacher education can be confining or even limiting. Does being deeply prepared to teach at one elementary school prepare you to teach at the school down the street? How do contextualized skills transfer from one school or even grade level to the next? How might knowledge practices for teaching transfer across different school and district settings? We hope to understand how graduates feel prepared for their new school settings and what the program can do to better prepare them to work across different settings within a district.

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Notes

1. Data sources include the *School Accountability Report Cards* for each of the teaching academies, as well as the results of the annual *Healthy Kids* and *Parent Satisfaction* surveys for each site.
2. School Loop is an online parent and school communication tool.

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