Integrating a New Urban Teacher Education Center into a School and its Community

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A new Sacramento State University Urban Teacher Education Center (UTEC) is located at Jedediah Smith Elementary School, a highly diverse urban school whose students come entirely from two federally subsidized housing complexes. This paper documents the integration of UTEC into the school and its community, including descriptions of the initial set-up of the center, the incorporation of UTEC into its basic structure, how UTEC has expanded its realm into overall school functioning, and UTEC's movement toward learning about and becoming involved in the community agencies, community groups, and neighborhood efforts to provide support for children, their families, and their school.

An Urban Teacher Education Center (UTEC) was created in the Fall of 2004, in collaboration between California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) and the Sacramento City Unified School District. The two key components of UTEC are its field-based and community-oriented approach. Moving away from the traditional approach to teacher preparation, which holds courses on the university campus and puts students in the field only for student teaching, UTEC is based in Jedediah Smith Elementary School. Jedediah Smith School is a very low-income, highly diverse urban school whose students come entirely from two federally subsidized housing complexes. The school's demographics are as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Demographics of Jedediah Smith School

Demographic Characteristic	Percentage of Student Population
African American	53%
Hispanic	23%
Asian	14%
Mixed Race or "Other"	7%
White, Non-Hispanic	3%
Free and Reduced Lunch	100%
English Language Learners	25%

Jedediah Smith School is in "Program Improvement" status, which means that they have not met federally-mandated targets for test score improvement. The school is currently under "watch" for test score improvement, with a list of structural changes such as change in

personnel and curriculum as possible outcomes of not meeting the targets.

This paper documents the first year of the Urban Teacher Education Center's efforts to integrate with the Jedediah Smith School and community. It describes the initial set-up of the center, based in part on the results of student surveys. It lays out how the school incorporated UTEC into its basic structure and how UTEC has expanded its realm into overall school functioning. And finally, it documents UTEC's movement toward learning about and becoming involved in the community agencies, community groups, and neighborhood efforts to provide support for children, their families, and their school. The paper describes some of the outcomes for student teachers in terms of their perceptions of and activities undertaken within this setting, using data from surveys, interviews, and journal reflections of UTEC student teachers as they begin and complete their program.

Creating the Urban Teacher Education Center

One of the long-standing centers for teacher preparation at CSUS was called the Sacramento City Center, which placed student teachers in schools within the Sacramento City Unified School District. This center was traditional in that it offered its university courses on the university campus and then placed student teachers into 12-15 elementary schools for their student teaching experiences. The schools utilized for student teaching placements ranged from low income through to upper income. In the Spring of 2004, a group of faculty and administrators from the Sacramento City Unified School District and CSUS collaboratively created the Urban Teacher Education Center (UTEC). This center replaced the traditional Sacramento City Center, moving the program and the university courses into Jedediah Smith Elementary School and its community.

Student Teachers' Perceptions of Urban Schools

A major concern with teacher education programs, however, is that student teachers will be resistant to placements in urban or multicultural schools and communities (Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992; Valli, 1996; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). Some studies have attempted to determine how the placement of student teachers in urban schools impacts students' attitudes toward urban schools in general. Several studies have found that student teachers placed in urban settings show a greater skills (Cook & Van Cleaf, 2000) and greater desire (Mason, 1999) to teach in urban, low-income areas. Delgadillo and Haberman (1993) studied urban placement through the lens of teaching student teachers about the available resources and service agencies available for

connection with urban children, and found that knowledge of such agencies did increase future teachers' willingness to learn about and utilize such assistance when teaching, showing increased sensitivity to the needs of those in poverty. Some studies show mixed results regarding the outcomes of placing student teachers in urban areas. Pagano, Weiner, and Rand (1997) found an equal number of future teachers increasing and decreasing (four each) their motivation to teach in urban areas after an urban student teaching experience. And Guyton (1994) found that placement in a school of high poverty resulted in poorer practicum performance but greater student teaching performance.

Surveys of Sacramento City Center and UTEC Student Teachers

A survey of 153 student teachers at nine different teacher preparation centers connected with CSUS was given in 2002 to determine what factors helped student teachers select the center in which they were receiving their teacher preparation program (Noel, 2002). The survey included a frequency checklist, which allowed students to mark every factor that impacted their decision to select their center. It also included an open-ended question that asked for narrative responses to the question "Why did you select the _____ Center?" A subset of 48 of these surveys was analyzed from students who were in the traditional Sacramento City Center.

TABLE 2
Responses on Checklist of Factors: Students' Selection of Teacher Prepa ration Center

	Traditional Program	Urban Teacher Education Center
Diversity	60%	73%
Poverty	33%	65%
Location close to home	88%	60%

The additional open-ended narrative section helps to clarify the responses given on the checklist. For while students may have indicated a number of factors that impacted their decision, they only chose to write about those factors that were most critical to them.

The responses on these surveys were then compared to 21 surveys taken from UTEC students in the Fall of 2004, after the program description had been written to focus on the urban, community-oriented nature of the program. The following table lists the percentage of students in the previous and revised current programs who indicated that the three characteristics of the Sacramento City Unified School District of diversity, poverty, and location close to home, were important factors in helping them to make their decision about which program to enter.

TABLE 3
Narrative Responses: Students' Selection of Teacher Preparation Center

	Traditional Program	Urban Teacher Education Center
Diversity/urban/poverty/inner city/multicultural/low income/in need/disadvantaged	35%	67%
Location close to home	54%	10%
A chance to work with the community	1%	15%

The results of the survey in the Fall of 2002 helped to shape the direction of the new center, resulting in a new description of the center that would give entering students a more realistic picture of the program which they were entering.

UTEC. The Urban Teacher Education Center (UTEC) is a community-oriented, field-based program designed to prepare future educators for urban schools and communities. Student teachers in UTEC will spend their teacher preparation program in schools and communities in order to better understand the realities of urban education, including the social, political, and economic conditions impacting the lives and education of urban children and their families. To this end, student teachers will learn about the community agencies, community groups, and neighborhood efforts to provide support for children, their families, and their schools, and will take part in the important work of these groups.

Integrating Structurally into the School:
A Classroom, a Mailbox, a Nametag, and a Refrigerator

Jedediah Smith School immediately incorporated UTEC in the structural functioning of the school. We were given Room 7 for our classroom, in which we currently teach 75 student teachers on a weekly basis. To make us feel at home, the school also donated an old refrigerator for our program. We were given a mailbox within the set of teachers' and staff mailboxes, in which we receive copies of everything that the teachers and staff receive. This allows us to keep up on both the most important school events and the most mundane daily operations of the school. Faculty and student teachers each semester are given Jedediah Smith nametags, letting staff, students, parents, and the student teachers themselves know that they are part of the everyday operations of the school.

And crucially, every teacher in the school, including the Special Education teacher, has a pair of student teachers in their classrooms for at

least two hours each week while student teachers are in their first semester of their three semester program. Faculty have become integrated into the functioning of the school by serving as members of the school's Multicultural Committee and of the School Site Council.

Expanding into School-Wide Events:
A Library, MESA, and a Family Resource Center

As we have become more integrated into the school's educational efforts to improve the achievement of students, we have proposed and have been successful in initiating three major school-wide efforts: the opening of the school's library, teaching the MESA program, and opening the Family Resource Center. While the school's library has been open with a functioning librarian in previous years, the Fall of 2005 saw the withdrawal of funding for the librarian, thus the library was not open to students. With school district approval, UTEC student teachers now open the Library for free reading time for the schoolchildren. While not allowed to check-in and check-out books, opening the Library for one hour per day has allowed children access to enjoy reading the books in the library for an open period of one hour per day.

Student teachers in the Urban Teacher Education Center are also the teachers for the MESA (Math, Engineering, and Science Achievement) program, under the guidance of one university professor and one teacher at the school. While we were originally told by the district MESA office that we could expect only about 20 students to be involved at Jedediah Smith School, we are pleased that there are 60 students from 2nd-6th grades in the program, and that three of our MESA students recently won awards at the regional MESA math competition.

Jedediah Smith School and the Urban Teacher Education Center have created a Family Resource Center in one of the previously unused classrooms at the school, with student teachers serving as the coordinators of the new center. We have been operating with a consciousness of the research and theoretical literature on parent and community involvement. Our perspective is that parents in urban communities have been misunderstood regarding their desires to help their children in school, and that it is often a mismatch between what schools and parents understand to be supportive parental involvement (Noguera, 1999; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 1997). With this in mind, we wanted to be very careful to not impose our own ideas on the families who will utilize it, but rather to incorporate the community's ideas equally with our own. To this end, we held a community opening during which time the parents came in to help decorate and organize the room. They gave us their suggestions for what they would like to see and have available in the center. The center, still in its early stages, is providing computer and internet access, information

about job openings, applications to local colleges, and will eventually offer adult education courses. We also serve coffee and tea to parents who walk their children to school in the mornings.

<p align="center">*Integrating into the School's Community:*
Tutoring, Mentoring, and Talking to Community Members</p>

Several urban educators have proposed as part of their overall work on urban education that involvement with community should be an important part of teacher education. Howey (2001), for instance, in describing "The Great City Universities Urban Educator Corps Partnership Initiative," lays out 10 general attributes of a good urban teacher education program, including attribute #8: "The involvement of prospective teachers in a host of urban community and community agency activities" (p. 13). The CREDE (Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence) group, which includes educators such as Roland Tharp and Catherine Cooper, identifies a key theme within the research that they have conducted as "Schools, Family, and Community," which entails "methods and principles for local contextualization of instruction through school interrelationships with families and community agencies." Murrell (2001), as another example, proposes a particular framework for effective urban teaching that he calls "The Community Teacher." He presents a model of a community teacher that connects and engages teachers with the communities where their urban students live. And finally Luis Moll has advocated for teachers to become engaged with the families of their students, conducting home visits with an ethnographic eye. Teachers who learn the community's and family's "funds of knowledge" will be better able to connect to the daily lives and values of the children in their classrooms.

Student teachers and faculty from the Urban Teacher Education Center have begun to learn about and become involved in the community's social service and educational activities outside the school. Perhaps our most important connection to the community has come through our involvement with the Paul Robeson Acceleration Academy, an after-school tutoring/ mentoring program held within the housing complex across the street from Jedediah Smith School. It was founded and operated by two men (Tony Whitehead and Malcolm Floyd) who grew up in the complex and now give back to their community through this program. Following three years of operating the program alone, Tony and Malcolm now draw on the student teachers in the UTEC program to be the tutors/mentors. This has created a sense of consistency for the program. It has also enabled student teachers and faculty who volunteer to learn more about the lives of children, as it is held within the housing complex rather than on

school grounds. Student teachers in UTEC also have adopted the program and provide for the school supplies needed by the currently un-funded program.

Community Studies

The culminating project for student teachers in their first semester of the UTEC program is a "community study," in which they get to know the community, the neighborhoods, and the public housing complexes in which the children and families live. Prior to re-locating this program into the elementary school, when the program was still taught on the university campus, four students chose to do their community study on Jedediah Smith School. Two of these students did not visit the school or community, doing their research on-line, while one visited the school's pre-school and one visited the Head Start program in the community.

However, with the creation of UTEC and the location of the program on the elementary school campus and with work in the neighborhoods, the students now all do their community studies in the Jedediah Smith School-community. New approaches to this community study undertaken by student teachers include:

> • interviewing the director of the social service agencies complex on-site at one of the housing complexes;
> • interviewing and spending time on the job with the "crosswalk lady," and with the "playground aide," who both live in the neighborhood;
> • surveying the children in their classes about their views on whether the library should be re-opened;
> • talking with the workers at CalWorks, the agency that assists in job searches by residents of the housing complexes;
> • riding public transportation to meet parents; and
> • talking with members of a nearby church that has adopted the school to provide service to children, families, and teachers.
> • student teacher interviews

The first group of student teachers in the program was interviewed regarding their experiences in UTEC. While many responses described learning about how to teach, three types of responses were especially oriented toward being in a school on a daily basis, rather than in the university setting. As student teachers stated:

> We get to know the life of the school outside of the classroom.
> We get to know the teachers and children in many different settings.
> We become constantly aware of ourselves as teachers and mentors.

Final Notes

Since the university courses for UTEC were moved into Jedediah Smith School, we, for the first time, learned how to become part of an

urban elementary school and its community. The process of learning about the school's surrounding community has been a slower process than expected; yet deeper relationships have also been created than originally expected. We are most gratified that we have been asked to be major contributors to the Family Resource Center and the Paul Robeson Acceleration Academy. We hope to continue to develop and create further and deeper connections with community, benefiting our student teachers, the K-6 students, and the families who live in the Jedediah Smith community.

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