

From the Tightrope: Designing, Developing, and Delivering an Alternative Teacher Education Model

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In the fall of 2003 a number of factors came together to create a fertile environment for developing an alternative, pre-service teacher education model. The overarching goal of the model is to diversify a rural university's credential program(s) by developing and offering alternative paths toward teacher certification within the constraints of a traditional, fifth-year program. The vision of the model was a collaborative effort conceived by two institutions: Humboldt State University's (HSU) School of Education and the East Bay Conservation Corps (EBCC) Elementary Charter School.

The partner institutions are located 275 miles away from each other on the northern California coast. HSU, founded in 1914 as a normal school, serves a vast, rural area and enrolls approximately 7,500 students in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. Although HSU serves a geographically-diverse region that includes a high concentration of indigenous American Indian tribal communities, the HSU student population is primarily White. In contrast, the EBCC Charter School opened its doors in 2000 in metropolitan Oakland and serves an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, urban K-5 population of 190 students.

In "diversifying" the HSU credential program we mean to increase the different types of field placements available to HSU candidates, broaden the methods of course delivery through the use of technology, and diversify the HSU credential candidate pool by attracting students whose life situations or career paths don't align with our traditional program structure. In the pilot

year (2005-06) of the model's implementation, the HSU Elementary Education Program and EBCC launched a distance teaching internship cohort based at the Elementary Charter School in Oakland. Seven credential candidates are working full-time as interns for the K-5 school year while earning their multiple subject credential through HSU.

The required 40 units of credential coursework are structured as a combination of online distance learning and 16.5 days of intensive workshops/seminars on the HSU campus. The full-time internships do not require credential candidates to be the "teacher of record" for a particular classroom, but are designed as apprenticeships with each intern co-teaching with two mentor teachers over the school year (one upper elementary and one primary, alternating Fall/Spring semesters.)

In addition to co-teaching, interns have daily/weekly/monthly school-wide duties and responsibilities such as recess monitoring, tutoring, attendance at staff meetings, planning and implementation of school-wide events, before and after-school activities, and/or field trips. The interns are enrolled as EBCC AmeriCorps Education Award Only Members and earn a modest stipend of \$18,000 (plus benefits) in exchange for 1,700 hours of service at the Charter School. Upon successful completion of the program, each intern will meet the requirements for a California 2042 Preliminary Multiple Subject Credential and receive a \$4,725 post-education award.

In structuring the EBCC internships as full-time apprenticeships, our theory is that immersion in daily life at the school, without having to assume responsibilities as the "teacher of record" for the credentialing year, will broaden and deepen the learning opportunities for our student teachers. We believe that many of the most salient

learning opportunities are embedded in the daily life of the school, woven throughout the formal and informal situations and relations, inside and outside the classroom.

At the root of this thinking is Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory that views learning as being less dependent on a master teacher and more an interdependent aspect of the "organization of the community of practice of which the master (or teacher) is a part" (1991, p. 94). For Lave and Wenger, the character and structure of learning is formed—reformed and renegotiated over time—by the actual practice in which the learner is engaged.

Engagement in activity and the growing involvement and familiarity with the environment, participants, tools, and artifacts of the practice offer the learner a window into the history and traditions of the work, as well as a way of discovering and establishing one's place in the practice. Lave and Wenger argue that this participation in the community of practice "may well be a condition for the effectiveness of learning" (p. 93).

HSU and EBCC believe that the integration of the interns into the fabric of the school, from the EBCC staff orientation before school starts to the final day of school in June, allows credential candidates more time to experience and begin to make connections between teachers' work, learning, and the organization and politics of schools and school systems.

East Bay Conservation Corps Elementary Charter School

EBCC offers a very different pre-service teaching placement than is possible in the traditional HSU elementary education credential program. The Charter School is located in a busy, urban neighborhood on the Oakland/Berkeley/Emeryville borders and enrolls a student population that is 54 percent African American, 22 percent

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multi-ethnic, 14 percent White, 7 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Asian, and one percent Pacific Islander. The families and students are also linguistically diverse with home language backgrounds that include Spanish, Punjabi, Japanese, and Burmese.

Socioeconomically, 39 percent of EBCC families are eligible for free lunch, 22 percent are eligible for reduced-priced lunches, and 39 percent are above the qualifying level for lunches. In addition to the ethnic and linguistic diversity of EBCC, recent home surveys have found that many of the students come from homes where the socioeconomic level is low but the average education level of the child's caregiver(s) is quite high (e.g., two or more years of college.)

The Charter School was created as part of a natural evolution of the education programs and services already offered by the East Bay Conservation Corps, an Oakland-based multi-program, non-profit corporation whose focus is on social change through education reform, environmental stewardship, and community service. Since 1983, the organization has served over 85,000 children and youth in their service-learning and civic-engagement programs.

Founded as a program for young adults from underserved, inner-city neighborhoods, the Corps has expanded its focus to serve children and youth of all ages and walks of life within the context of improving public education and strengthening the larger community. Prior to opening the K-5 Charter School, the non-profit founded the EBCC Charter High School to assist drop-out youth in returning to school and satisfying the requirements for the GED.

The educational vision of the K-5 Charter School centers on the belief that public schools must prepare children for the challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities of life in a democratic, pluralistic society. EBCC strives to instill two kinds of literacy:

Academic and Artistic Literacy.

The ability to read, write, speak, calculate, and reason with clarity and precision and to express oneself creatively through the arts.

Civic Literacy. The ability to "let your life speak" by participating thoughtfully, responsibly, and passionately in the life of the community with concern for the common good.

The EBCC internships provide HSU credential candidates with site-based experiences which will (1) prepare them to work in small, autonomous, mission-driven schools that serve urban children

and youth; (2) provide training in meeting the learning needs of urban students from families who are ethnically, socioeconomically, religiously, and otherwise diverse; (3) include the teaching of the arts in the classroom, both as a discrete subject and as an integral part of other subject areas of the curriculum; and (4) model the utilization of service-learning as a key instructional strategy for the development of civic knowledge and engagement across the school curriculum.

Some of our interns indicated on an evaluative survey administered during the Spring semester that the "nice strong community," "innovative teaching instruction," and the curricular focus on "artistic literacy" at EBCC were their chief reasons for applying to the program.

The demographics of EBCC, the educational program, and additional factors such as active parent engagement, comprehensive extended day programs (before and after school), parent/family education, and proactive community relations provide a multi-dimensional and challenging urban placement for pre-service teachers. Combined with the Charter School's educational program, which places academic, artistic, and civic literacy at the core of the curriculum, the school context serves as a unique training ground for the HSU credential candidate.

Humboldt State University

HSU, situated between redwood groves and the Pacific Ocean, is the northernmost of the 23 California State University (CSU) campuses. Four of California's five largest Indian tribes—Hoopa Valley, Karuk, Round Valley, and Yurok—are located within our service area and their lands comprise more than 7,000 square miles or 4.5 million square acres combined.

The HSU School of Education credential programs—administrative services, elementary, secondary, and special education—working in close cooperation with the local school districts have educated most of the teachers and administrators in the region. The combined enrollment in the credential programs is approximately 200 candidates per year. Graduates of the programs advance to teaching and administrative positions in rural and urban schools and school systems all over California and across the nation.

Diversifying the credentialing experiences for our candidates, while simultaneously deepening their understanding of teaching and learning, is a challenge for HSU that we share across the teacher education community.

As already mentioned, one of our primary objectives in launching the EBCC-HSU partnership is to expand the types of field placements available to the HSU credential candidates. Although the Eureka City School district, which is located within the HSU service area, enrolls a more urban, mixed cultural, racial, and socioeconomic demographic, the majority of our HSU placement schools cannot offer our candidates field experiences that would adequately prepare them for working in metropolitan or inner city schools. In addition, Humboldt County is experiencing a decline in enrollment in K-12 schools, which directly affects the number of overall placements available for student teachers.

Another reason for expanding our field placement sites is HSU's need for more arts-rich field placements for our candidates. HSU is one of the few teacher education programs that includes the arts as a required subject in the elementary education credential curriculum. Partnering with the EBCC Elementary Charter School broadens HSU's elementary education fieldwork opportunities for its candidates in order to meet both of these challenges.

The second objective of the project, broadening the methods of course delivery, is being addressed by our combination of distance learning and onsite intensive courses. In the pilot year, three of HSU's elementary methods courses—Math/Science, Reading and Language Arts, and Social Studies—have been adapted to asynchronous and synchronous distance learning formats.

The interns take their synchronous distance learning courses at the California State University East Bay Oakland Center, a state-of-the-art technology facility which is only a short bus ride away from the EBCC Charter School. Over the course of the pilot year, the interns repeatedly expressed their satisfaction and delight for the CSU facility, the "beautiful" equipment, and the hospitality of the onsite staff. As one intern exclaimed, "They're always so nice to us. They even seem happy to see us when we get there . . . last week the guy asked me if I wanted a more comfortable chair!" This partnership with the CSU East Bay Oakland Center was a critically important component in launching the pilot in 2005 and continues to grow in value as a model for collaboration between the CSU campuses.

The foundation seminars and Health/Physical Education courses are taught on the HSU campus in concentrated, day-long workshops held in two-week, one-week, and one weekend intensives. In the onsite intensive courses all of HSU's elementary educa-

tion credential candidates—those placed in distant schools and those students who are enrolled in the regular program—have the opportunity to take classes together.

We are finding that the bringing together of all HSU elementary education candidates in the onsite intensives builds community among our student teachers, allows face-to-face contact for the EBCC interns with HSU faculty, and reinforces a connection or bond to HSU, even though the interns' time is primarily spent in Oakland at the Charter School.

The third objective, diversifying the HSU candidate pool, is being facilitated by: (1) The opportunity to earn a stipend, plus an Ed Only award, for co-teaching full-time in a school during the credentialing year; (2) The program's appeal to San Francisco Bay Area residents who would not otherwise be interested in attending HSU; as well as, (3) the prospect of student teaching in a challenging, urban, charter school for those HSU graduates who do not want to spend their credential year apprenticing in rural or suburban schools in Humboldt County.

Of the seven interns in the pilot year, only one is a recent HSU graduate of the Liberal Studies Elementary Education (LSEE) undergraduate program. She is White and is the youngest of the interns. The other six hail from the Bay Area and are mid-career professionals: Three are White men; and of the women, one is Latina, one African American, and one White. As expected, in recruiting for the internships we are finding that diversifying the HSU credential program racially is and will be a great challenge. More time and resources must be accorded to recruitment if we are to realize this potential of the program.

The chief reason that underscores HSU's drive for launching such an ambitious effort is recruitment. HSU, along with other CSU campuses, is experiencing a decline in applications to the credential programs. Two main issues have been identified as reasons for this decline across the CSU system: tuition increases and *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) requirements. The solution to this challenge cannot be met by simply "beating the bushes" for more applicants to our existing programs. Our faculty and staff must be creative and innovative in our thinking as far as the design and delivery of our services in order to attract potential candidates to our programs.

After the pilot year, we will expand the distance learning program to candidates living in remote Northern California communities who need to student teach close to home because of family and/or work respon-

sibilities or are discouraged from traveling on unsafe roads to HSU to attend classes.

Lessons We Are Learning and Challenges To Be Addressed

At the point in time of submitting this article (late Spring semester 2006) six of seven candidates are still enrolled in the pilot program. One student dropped out of the internship program in early March and has negotiated with HSU to resume second semester field and course work next year in Humboldt County. The intern's reason for discontinuing the EBCC internship was "stress" due to the intensity of the daily/weekly responsibilities and work schedule at the Charter School.

In the Spring evaluative survey and in face-to-face discussions, all of the interns reported that negotiating a balance between their daily/weekly responsibilities at the Charter School and the HSU coursework is extremely difficult. The following intern comments reflect their struggle:

- ◆ I did not know I'd be working such long days—teaching is all about endurance, I did not know I had to be the authority figure, constantly upholding school rules . . .
- ◆ I've been given lots of opportunities to teach and lead class activities, plus I've been introduced to many teaching philosophies and techniques that I can apply to my teaching style. Somedays the workload is manageable, but most of the time I feel that there is lots to do and I'm behind.
- ◆ There are too many expectations for interns' time and not enough planning time to follow through.
- ◆ Workload and school are challenging to balance. Balancing obligations to work with the overall goal of obtaining a credential was challenging. Priorities for school and work may have been in conflict.

In planning for the pilot, we believed that designing the internships as co-teaching positions rather than having the interns assume positions as teachers-of-record in charge of their own classrooms would minimize stress, but we were wrong. The nature of teachers' work at EBCC is such that the interns, as co-teachers, were expected to plan, prep for, and teach classes, as well as participate in school special events; attend staff meetings, participate in before/after school care and yard duty; and prepare for and attend parent/teacher conferences—all in addition to their credential coursework and fieldwork assignments.

The EBCC mentor teachers' opinions about the interns' overall workload and performance was dependent upon their

personal experience of working with particular intern(s) and varied greatly:

- ◆ Interns are given too many out-of-classroom responsibilities (e.g., morning care, tutoring, family nights).
- ◆ Interns do not seem as prepared as I would have expected . . . Many interns have not stepped up to the role as a "real" teacher and are still waiting to be told what to do.
- ◆ Reliable interns. People who are committed and excited about teaching. Both of my interns have been full of good ideas and are almost always ready to step in.

Although the HSU administration and EBCC Executive Director and Board have been extremely supportive of and eager for this partnership to succeed, the reality of the state and national economy and the political landscape undermines the building of a firm foundation for the work. Budget cuts in higher education, the heightened focus on standardized test scores in K-12 schools, and the tight and highly competitive fundraising market are just a few examples of the mega-issues that impact the work.

Because of the tight operating budget, the part-time consultant hired by the EBCC non-profit organization to assist HSU in developing the partnership left the project the summer before launching the pilot. Therefore, coordination and management of the project was absorbed by the administration at the Charter School and the faculty and staff at HSU, which meant that once the project was underway there was little time for reflection and communication between EBCC mentor teachers and HSU faculty. "Small brush fires" that could have been extinguished early on were left unchecked.

Unfortunately, the consequences—stress and burn-out—are familiar to those of us who have developed and fought to sustain innovative programs in public education institutions and non-profit organizations. This does not mean that the overall work being accomplished is not worthwhile or meaningful or that it should be abandoned. Note the following comments by the interns about the ways in which the program met their expectations:

- ◆ It's given me hands-on classroom experience, full-time in a K-5 setting. It's provided on-going professional development training in a collaborative setting.
- ◆ I've received lots of experiential, in-class teaching opportunities. I've observed and learned from my mentor teacher and I've been given a steady pay check. My expectations have been EXCEEDED (their emphasis) by the care and attention given by HSU professors.

- ◆ (It has) provided a real life context for time management, prioritizing, and collaborating with others.

- ◆ I feel lucky to be part of this program. There are definitely flaws, but it's in its first year and I think I'd have opinions about any program.

Also note these follow-up comments by EBCC mentor teachers and administrators:

- ◆ I have gotten to work with two intern teachers. Our conversations have made me more aware and conscious of my practice. I have learned some strategies in mentoring other teachers—for example, reflecting on lessons.

- ◆ Some interns are able to thrive in this program and recognize its value. (The) on-site university supervisor is a great resource.

- ◆ Having young men teach young students—what a wonderful experience for all!! I feel so fortunate to have male teacher interns! Many of my male students lack positive male role models. Many of the children have absent fathers.

- ◆ I think it's great to have interns, that it really benefits them and the school.

Admittedly, we suffered from the effects of a not-so-favorable funding environment. This, however, motivated our discovery of some rich resources and cultivated some critically important relationships. For example, because EBCC could not fundraise enough money to equip the Charter School with distance learning technology, we approached CSU East Bay Oakland to ask if they would allow the interns to use their facility for the distance learning coursework. The CSU administrators and tech support staff agreed and welcomed the interns with open arms.

Another example is the North Coast Beginning Teacher Program (NCBTP). The NCBTP intern program has supplied the pilot project with funding and training for an onsite supervisor at EBCC, as well as workshops/classes in basic teaching strategies. We also tapped a key source of funding through the University of California, Berkeley's Arts Education Initiative (AEI). The AEI is a regional initiative whose mission is to infuse and integrate the arts into pre-service teacher and school leadership education programs. HSU and EBCC are partner institutions in this regional initiative which is funded by the Ford Foundation.

Another AEI partner institution, the California College of Arts in Oakland, is providing professional development in the arts and arts integration for the teachers and interns at EBCC. Without the generosity, assistance, advice, and/or funding of

these institutions/organizations, the pilot would never have gotten off the ground.

Conclusion

Because of my prior history of partnering with EBCC Charter School in the development and implementation of a two-year Multiple Subject Credential and Masters of Art in Teaching Program at the University of San Francisco, I was the HSU faculty member who was approached by the Executive Director of the EBCC non-profit organization to pilot this distance learning internship program at the EBCC Elementary Charter School.

When we began researching the feasibility of such a partnership, the funding climate appeared fruitful for such an enterprise and the administration at HSU was very interested and eager to develop its distance learning capacity as a tool for boosting recruitment. At that time I was new to HSU, having just been hired as a full-time, tenure track faculty member.

Since then, I have assumed the role of Elementary Education Program Leader and my responsibilities in the School of Education have increased exponentially. Needless to say, I feel like a tightrope walker juggling fifty balls in the air. But we're moving forward and as a result, the HSU elementary program has now adapted three of its required courses to distance learning formats and two more distance learning courses will be developed by next year.

Nine candidates have been accepted for the 2006-2007 EBCC internships. In addition, we will be offering three student teachers that live in the Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District (KTJUSD) the opportunity to take their credential courses using the same two-way video-conferencing method used by the EBCC interns. The student teachers in KTJUSD will be teaching at the elementary school on the Hoopa Valley Reservation, 50 miles from HSU. Eight more student teachers in Del Norte and Humboldt Counties will be joining the distance cohort, bringing the total to 20 distance learning credential candidates during 2006-2007.

As for other developments in the HSU School of Education, at the end of the 2005-2006 school year the graduate faculty approved the decision to move forward on the creation of a Master of Arts in Teaching program that would provide our elementary, secondary, and special education credential candidates the opportunity to earn a teaching credential and a Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) in two years.

In the pilot years, the M.A.T. option would be limited to those credential candidates participating in paid intern programs. For the EBCC intern, this would mean that he/she would still be able to earn a teaching credential in one year, continue co-teaching for a second year at the Charter School in their preferred grade-level classroom while enrolled in HSU distance learning graduate courses, and then graduate at the end of the second year with a multiple subject credential and an M.A.T.

Prioritizing Teacher Education

Developing an innovative program-within-a-program, as well as piloting substantial improvements to an existing program, can be accomplished by a hard-working staff during periods of inadequate funding and budget cuts. However, continuing to rely on the tenacity of a few creative individuals to chart new territory and reform the teacher education landscape will not reap sustainable, long-term change. In order to foster the development and implementation of innovative pre-service pilots that have the opportunity to grow into long-term programs, colleges and universities must prioritize *teacher education*.

The quality of teacher education impacts the number of creative, smart individuals who apply to our programs, enter the profession, and continue teaching for five or more years. The health and vitality of the public education system is dependent on good teachers—veterans as well as novices—who foster student learning beyond today's standards.

University chancellors, presidents, and college deans must take a position on the front lines with us and fight to ensure that innovative, high quality, teacher education programs are continually researched, funded, developed, and sustained.

Note

Mentor teacher and intern quotes are from face-to-face discussions with the HSU Elementary Education Program Leader and an evaluative survey administered online by the HSU School of Education in the Spring of 2006.

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