

Unpacking the “Urban” in Urban Teacher Education:
Making a Case for Context-Specific Preparation
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Introduction

Amid the complex debates about the nature and purpose of effective teacher education, a critical question continues to surface: Should preparation programs concentrate on preparing teachers for all settings and all students, or should they prepare candidates for specific types of contexts and the students within them? The first position assumes that knowledge about teaching and instructional approaches span boundaries, are essentially universal, and that “good teaching” transcends setting. The latter suggests that teacher preparation programs ought to more closely consider the varying needs of particular localities and tailor curriculum accordingly.

More than 15 years ago, Martin Haberman contended that the prevailing approach—which he referred to as “generic” teacher education—had wrongly persisted. He observed that university-based teacher education typically focused broadly and “generically” on three areas: learners and learning (child development), subject matter, and teaching children with special needs. He argued that rather than address these topics through a generic or universal treatment, teacher education programs should “emphasize the importance of contextual distinctions in the ways children develop, the ways they learn, and the nature of the content they learn” (Haberman, 1996, p. 749). Because university teacher preparation usually is geared towards preparing candidates for work in multiple settings, it tends not to focus on any particular context. Consequently, new teachers generally are not fully prepared for complex settings such as urban schools (Haberman, 1996; Helfeldt, Capraro, Foster, & Carter, 2009). However, consensus is emerging that urban school districts have a variety of complicated, interrelated issues that are

important for aspiring teachers to understand, including racial and ethnic heterogeneity, concentrations of poverty, and large and dense bureaucracies (Chou & Tozer, 2008; Hollins, 2012; Weiner, 2002, 2006). For this reason, an increasing number of teacher education programs are identifying themselves as preparing teachers specifically for urban schools (Carter Andrews, 2009; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Quartz et al., 2004; Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008). Very rarely, however, is the term “urban” explicitly defined (Chou & Tozer, 2008; Weiner, 2002). Even less frequently explored is the way the term “urban” often serves as code for “the conditions of cultural conflict grounded in racism and economic oppression” (Chou & Tozer, 2008, p. 1).

The call for teachers to work in urban schools, although loosely defined, is heightened by the frequently publicized problem of the “revolving door” of teachers in high poverty, urban schools (Ingersoll, 2001; Quartz et al., 2008). For example, in Chicago, the 5-year retention rate for beginning teachers is approximately 30 percent (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009). Relatedly, lower levels of student achievement—which are disproportionately concentrated in urban schools—have spurred national movements such as Teach for America that focus on urban schools. Certainly all of these factors, coupled with new federal funding for teacher residency programs that partner closely with high-needs districts (Berry, et al., 2008; Solomon, 2009) have collectively fueled an even stronger rationale for preparing teachers specifically for urban schools.

Exploring the distinctive ways in which *setting* or *place* affect human society has long been a staple of sociology research (e.g., Park, Burgess, & McKenzie, 1925). Research in other social sciences takes setting into account, for example, economics (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Krugman, 1991); politics (Hiskey & Bowler, 2005; Shin, 2001); public health policy (McLafferty, 2003; Zenk, et al., 2005); and across many geographic scales (DeBlij, 2009;

Fotheringham, Brundson, & Charlton, 2002). Indeed, the extant literature points to the importance of acknowledging setting (or a broader context) when planning to teach, but rarely are features of a specific context “unpacked” during the teacher preparation process. The particular features of a setting—for example, community/neighborhood demographics, or a city’s historical underpinnings—are not typically addressed during teacher preparation.

Neighborhoods and communities within geographical regions vary demographically and are quite distinct in terms of their history and sociopolitical climate. For instance, Frankenberg’s analysis (2009) of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core Data (CCD) finds that the racial composition of students across different urban districts varies considerably. Similarly, the history of school reform in Chicago differs dramatically from that of New York (Payne, 2008; Ravitch, 2000), just as the social and political history of Boston (Lukas, 1986) differs from Baltimore’s (Robinson, 2005). Yet we know little about how programs preparing teachers for Chicago are distinct from programs preparing teachers for New York, or how those in Boston differentiate themselves from programs in Baltimore.

Urban schools tend to serve concentrations of students whose experiences with and orientations toward schooling are often different from and sometimes in conflict with mainstream assumptions and attitudes toward schooling (Chou & Tozer, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). This has led to a substantial body of research developed over the past 20 years that examines pedagogy-related issues to support a more urban-focused, less generic approach to teacher preparation. This research has focused on identifying the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching in urban schools (Haberman, 1995a, 1996; Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002); teaching in multicultural settings (Ladson-Billings, 1995; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Sleeter, 2008); the design features and core principles for teacher education programs

(Banks et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2000); preparing teachers for urban and/or multicultural classrooms (Banks et al., 2005; Haberman, 1995b; Haberman & Post, 1998; Hollins, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner, 1993); and culturally responsive teaching (Gay 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994,1995; Lee, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Culturally responsive or culturally relevant teaching is understood as set of pedagogical strategies that encourage teachers to understand local students, cultures, and geographies (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). However, urban districts that predominantly serve students of color frequently base their curricula, instruction, and expectations on European-American culture (Hollins, 2012). Proponents of multicultural education assert the importance of creating relevancy to bridge the space between their students and a given curriculum. In her provocative analysis of some of the challenges facing urban education, however, Weiner (2002, 2006) notes the importance of differentiating the urban school setting and the academic characteristics of the children in that setting—two critical areas that, in her view, have been erroneously conflated. This suggests that integrating multicultural education—which is intended to focus on the particular cultures and experiences of children—into teacher preparation is necessary but perhaps not sufficient. In order to equip teachers to work effectively in schools that predominantly serve students of color, candidates need to develop the capacity to analyze the particular setting of any school in which they will eventually teach with an in-depth and nuanced understanding.

Finally, considering the ways that programs prepare teachers for specific contexts may be an especially important development in light of growing calls for teacher education to become more grounded in practice (Ball and Cohen, 1999; Blue Ribbon Commission 2010; Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009). Zeichner (2012) argues that inherent in the focus upon

research on core practices of teaching, there is also “a danger of narrowing the role of teachers to that of technicians who are able to implement a particular set of teaching strategies, but who do not develop the broad professional vision (deep knowledge of their students and of the cultural contexts in which their work is situated)” (2012, p. 379). These concerns echo Haberman’s critiques of “generic” teacher preparation—making clear the importance of understanding in much more depth how to teach core practices in a way that attends carefully to questions about culture and context. Examining how teacher preparation programs not only help student-teachers learn in ways that are grounded in practice, but also develop a nuanced understanding of students and the specific contexts in which they will work, may be a critical means of helping develop teachers who are thoughtful educators rather than technicians.

To that end, given today’s policies, initiatives, and investment in developing programs to prepare teachers for specific settings—and in light of the vibrant discussions about practice-based teacher education—it is vital to investigate the nature of geographically-focused teacher preparation efforts in more detail. We need to understand more about the specific features of a city’s context that might be most relevant to aspiring teachers, and then consider what it might look like for a program to prepare teachers to learn to enact core teaching practices in context. Once these issues are better understood, teacher preparation programs can create opportunities to help novices learn to work within a district, a community, and its schools.

To explore what it means to be a context-specific teacher education program, we draw from data from a larger longitudinal study of context-specific teacher preparation. This larger study was designed to examine how three teacher preparation programs and their teachers (serving urban public, urban Catholic, and Jewish schools) address the challenge of recruiting the very best teachers, preparing them to teach in particular kinds of schools, placing them in

challenging environments, and supporting their teaching and careers in teaching (Feiman-Nemser, Tamir & Hammerness, in preparation; see also Hammerness and Matsko, 2010, 2013). We use the term “context-specific teacher preparation” to describe this form of targeted teacher preparation. Our research on these programs suggests that not only do their graduates report being highly motivated and committed to the particular settings for which they were prepared, but that they do in fact remain in teaching longer than their peers, and further finds that teachers who were not as well prepared for their contexts are more likely to leave (Tamir, 2009, 2013). This larger study has also found that the teaching practices of the teachers who graduated from these programs are particularly attentive to and reflective of the context and to the students and schools in which they teach: Jewish private schools in the northeast, urban Catholic schools around the country, and public schools in one large urban Midwestern school district (Feiman-Nemser, Tamir & Hammerness, in preparation).

As a follow-up to this larger study, we wanted to understand more about the specific features of the context that different programs address in attending to their unique context as well as *how* particular programs addressed these features in their preparation. In order to examine these questions more deeply, we carried out a descriptive theory building study of the context-specific elements of one of the three teacher preparation programs: University of Chicago’s Urban Teacher Education Program (or, UChicago UTEP), affiliated with a private university located in Chicago, which was specifically developed to prepare teachers for Chicago Public Schools. We selected this particular program because it was the most “context-specific” of the three programs we had studied, and felt it would provide the most evidence for how teacher education programs target preparation for particular settings. We focused upon two research

questions: *What contextual features of the large public school district did the program address? How did the program help students learn about those layers of context?*

Methods

The Choosing to Teach research data collected from this program included interviews with program graduates and program faculty, classroom observations of graduates, and a review of program documents such as program vision statements, program descriptions, course syllabi, assignments for methods courses, and material available on program websites. The research team conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 10 randomly selected beginning teachers from the program (see Table 1 in Appendix). Subjects were interviewed during their first year teaching. In addition, the research team conducted semi-structured, open-ended group interviews with two to three program staff, and the program director.

To better isolate how this program prepared teachers for their specific context, we examined interview transcripts (coded using atlas.ti) program materials, and documents looking specifically for mentions of federal and state policy, district, community, and unique school and classroom contexts. We also looked for aspects of context that were not captured in our initial coding, but which seemed to be important to the program and the teachers. Next, we reviewed all program data using content analysis, searching specifically for references to Chicago, or the “urban” context. We then analyzed student-teachers’ opportunities to learn about the context in this particular program, by examining transcripts, statements about the program vision, program structure and design, specific assignments, and course syllabi.

An Overview of UChicago UTEP

The University of Chicago’s Urban Teacher Education Program began in autumn 2003 with two goals: prepare high-quality teachers to enter the Chicago Public Schools, and develop

an innovative model for teacher preparation. The program explicitly promotes teaching as “intellectual work” that requires deep context knowledge, subject-matter knowledge, and extensive pedagogical training. It is a 5-year experience—2 years of preparation followed by 3 years of post-graduation support—that awards a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) and state certification in one of three pathways: elementary school teaching (grades K–8) or secondary school (grades 6–12) teaching and endorsement in either mathematics or the biological sciences. The program remains intentionally small; a maximum of 25 candidates are accepted into each certification pathway each year. UChicago UTEP’s cohorts comprise undergraduates at the University of Chicago, along with graduates of other colleges and universities nationwide, and career changers. All candidates must express a commitment to teaching in Chicago.

The first academic year of the program, called the Foundations year, integrates four strands of work—tutoring, guided fieldwork, academic and methods coursework, and an introspective “soul” strand. In addition to working with children and adolescents in structured, supervised school settings, the curriculum includes systematic opportunities to reflect on one’s evolving teacher identity, learn the history of public schooling in Chicago, and participate in facilitated discussions about race, class, culture, and educational equity. This structure provides multiple entry points into the work of being a public school teacher in the Chicago Public School (CPS) district, and grounds candidates in various aspects of Chicago’s context.

During the next phase of the program, candidates spend a summer quarter in methods classes and clinical work, and then become immersed in a clinical residency that spans the academic school year. UChicago UTEP’s preservice residents are hosted and mentored by carefully selected classroom teachers who serve as the program’s clinical instructors. During the final summer of the program, candidates complete their final course, taught by the program’s

induction coaches, to smoothly transition candidates into their own classrooms. Goals of the program’s post-graduation support include assisting alumni to enact high-quality, culturally-competent instructional practices, and develop classroom-based teacher leaders in the system.

UChicago UTEP’s Context-Specific Approach to Teacher Preparation

As described in the methods section above, our analysis of UChicago UTEP was designed to help us to examine how a program can specifically organize itself around a particular context, what aspects of the context it treats, and how it helps new teachers learn about that context. In response to those questions, we share the conceptual framework that emerged out of our literature review and analysis of the data (see Figure 1). The framework represents the features of context that we found UChicago UTEP addressed in the development and enactment of high-quality classroom instruction for the Chicago setting. Indeed, through our analysis, we learned that UChicago UTEP seemed to treat context as *geographical*, incorporating attention to the specific historical, political, social and even physical features of the specific place. This framework illustrates the multidimensional aspects of UChicago UTEP’s context-specific focus which encompasses the racial, economic, and cultural particularities of Chicago, as well as localized knowledge about routines, procedures, and curriculum of the CPS district. It also sheds light upon the ways in which UChicago UTEP attends to other features of the context, which include the larger federal and state policy context in which the city’s district and schools operate. Our analysis suggests that these layers of context were nested, overlapping, and often interrelated in programs’ day-to-day work. For ease of exposition, however, we describe them in the framework as distinct categories.

The outermost sphere of influence depicted in the framework points to the opportunities the University of Chicago’s Urban Teacher Education Program offers candidates to learn about

the broader educational and state policy landscape within which CPS operates. Among other themes, this contextual layer surfaces the challenges of achieving equitable education when low expectations for students of color pervade in urban settings (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Milner, 2003, 2011; Sleeter 2008). It also includes discussion of calls for research to learn more about practices associated with intensive standardized testing and how such testing may threaten teaching for equity (Sleeter, 2008; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011).

The next layer, the “public school” context, refers to candidates’ opportunities to explore how features characterizing public schooling across the country affect the profession (Tyack, 1974). This category also draws on work by teacher educators such as Weiner (1993, 2002, 2006) and Hollins (2012), who highlight broad characteristics of American urban schools that new teachers must understand.

The “local geographical context” layer moves this discussion into features of Chicago’s setting. It captures candidates’ exposure to the history, demographics, and cultural and physical landscape of the city’s ethnic neighborhoods and as a whole. This aspect of context draws on work by scholars who argue for community-based field experiences to help preservice teachers develop their commitment, understanding, and ability to teach in settings with diverse student populations (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Buck & Skilton-Sylvester, 2005; McDonald et al, 2011; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996).

Progressing inward, the “local socio-cultural context” layer refers to opportunities to learn about the many ways that culture has an impact on learning. This layer reflects the work of a range of scholars who argue that teachers must understand and respect cultural differences among all those in the classroom—not only teacher to student, but also student to student—in

order to be effective (e.g., Au, 1980; Grant & Secada, 1990; Irvine 1991; Gay, 2000; Lee, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2001, 1994, 1996; Milner, 2003, 2011; Sleeter, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999).

The “district context” layer refers to the policies, regulations, and mandates that public school teachers must adhere to, which, in the case of UChicago UTEP, is Chicago Public Schools. This layer also includes the history of the district—an especially relevant category of context in this era of rapid policy change and school reform.

At the core of the framework is the context of students in the classroom. This feature of context refers to all the opportunities UChicago UTEP candidates have to develop the capacity to learn about the strengths, needs, resources, culture, and educational background of each student they will teach—underscoring the program’s value on treating each pupil as a unique learner. This category of context draws upon the work of scholars who have looked closely at classroom interactions and dynamics and the nature of teaching in diverse settings (Delpit 1986, 1988; Lee, 1995, 2007).

Figure 1: Features of Context-Specific Teacher Preparation. This figure illustrates the layers of context that are explicitly addressed in UChicago UTEP, and identified as important factors in the development and practice of high-quality classroom instruction.

[Insert *Figure 1* here]

Federal/State Context

UChicago UTEP recruits and attracts candidates who are invested in social justice and have the potential to become culturally competent teacher-leaders in the local public school district. Through coursework, candidates explore the notion of teaching as political and moral action, such that even students who do not consider themselves especially political seem to

develop an awareness of the connections across teaching, adherence to moral principles, and politics. One UChicago UTEP student remarked, “We’ve learned about the extent to which kids are subjected to things that just shouldn’t be happening to kids . . . it just seems like our [country’s] motives are completely amiss.” Learning about policy and politics helps students begin to understand the complicated array of challenges associated with achieving equitable education for all students.

The study of landmark court cases, such as *Brown vs. the Board of Education*; significant federal initiatives, such as *No Child Left Behind*; debates around standardized testing, school finances, and the movement toward national standards and assessments, such as the Common Core, all inform UChicago UTEP’s candidates’ political-educational perspectives and the ways in which they may heighten challenges inherent in teaching for equity (i.e., Sleeter, 2008; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011). Conversations about politics and education inevitably flow into discussions about the immediate context of Chicago. For example, candidates learn about the powerful organizations and individuals engaging in advocacy and local education reporting. In this way, aspiring teachers become informed about issues pertinent to educators in the city’s school district—and learn the value of remaining so. Candidates’ exploration into education policy and politics begins during the Foundations year and continues into the second, when as residents, they see, for instance, the intended and unintended consequences of shifting accountability structures that are emblematic of the current education environment.

The Public School Context

During their first year in UChicago UTEP, candidates begin defining and exploring prevailing research-based characteristics of urban public schools. These discussions help aspiring teachers understand the origins of what are typically named as marco-level constraints of

working within large urban schools districts such as inadequate resources; limited teacher influence in school wide and classroom decision making; teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001); and the disproportionate number of students labeled as low-achieving (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard, 2003). Candidates read contrasting portraits of urban schools, in particular, those captured in seminal works by Jonathan Kozol (2005), Charles Payne (2008), and Mike Rose (1995). At the completion of the 9-month Foundations year, candidates enter the residency better armed to experience the local urban school landscape. As one UChicago UTEP faculty member put it, “The reality of urban education is that we have to produce teachers who are capable of functioning in this environment of urgency; but we also want them to come away with a larger vision of what is possible.”

Local Geographic Context

Chicago is recognized as one of the most segregated cities in the nation (Rankin, 2009), with recent gentrification exacerbating its pattern of class isolation. Consequently, segregation in housing, schools, and virtually every other aspect of Chicago’s life is the backdrop against which UChicago UTEP graduates will teach. The University of Chicago’s Urban Teacher Education Program places most of its residents in schools located in communities that predominantly comprise African American and Latino populations. Chicago’s history as a former destination of the Great Migration has indelibly shaped its African American communities (Drake & Cayton, 1993). Although recent census data (2010) suggests that the city’s African American population is declining, the city’s Latino population continues to grow. These demographic shifts have profound influences on residential and economic patterns (and political agendas) that affect the city’s public school district, including decisions around school closings that students learn about from the work of academics like Lipman (2007), as an example, who tends to write about issues

specific to the Midwestern-city. UChicago UTEP candidates study the effects of depopulation on jobs and social networks in working-class communities (Wilson, 1996). After studying the geographical aspects of the entire city during their first year in the program, during their second year, UChicago UTEP residents complete their residency teaching in two different neighborhoods. As part of this experience, residents examine similarities and variations in each setting and analyze the impact of locality on the school environment.

Local Socio-Cultural Context

Beyond the geography of the city, UChicago UTEP candidates study various African American and Latino neighborhoods—the communities in which they may eventually be employed. Such exposure to the richness, traditions, and diversity within these communities prepares candidates to establish respectful and effective relationships with families and students. The social-political context candidates study includes teasing out nuanced relationships between culture and learning—a vital tool for candidates to acquire as they prepare to teach in Chicago (e.g., Au, 1980; Gay, 2000; Hilliard, 2003; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001, 1994, 1996; Lee, 1995; Sleeter, 2008; Tatum 1997; Valenzuela, 1999).

Candidates also reflect on preconceived notions they bring to the program, as well as dominant narratives about “urban” communities—which tend to be fraught with deficit ideoplogy (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard, 2003). UChicago UTEP therefore actively helps candidates debunk misconceptions associated with low-income communities of color. The private university, in which UChicago UTEP resides, for example, is surrounded by high-need African American neighborhoods. One student recalled, “Being at the [private university] makes you aware of the situation around you. . . . Ideas were (unintentionally) perpetuated that these were dangerous communities . . . communities you should not enter.” Forced to reconcile

conflicting narratives about the local surroundings, the student concluded that she “just had to reject” prior, more simplistic generalizations about urban communities after participating in UChicago UTEP, and develop more nuanced perspectives. To address stereotypical and deficit thinking directly, UChicago UTEP’s Foundations year curriculum examines the history, structures, key institutions, and resources of the communities surrounding the university. In their second year, UChicago UTEP residents participate in a yearlong seminar that provides a forum to share what they are observing in their preservice classrooms and learning about socio-cultural context. One student recalled how the program “presented an image of parents that has a definite basis in reality. . . . [M]ost of the parents that I’ve come across want their children to succeed . . . but they work two jobs [making scheduling a conference with them challenging] . . . so it’s sort of preparing me for those realities.”

Context of the District

Like many of its counterparts across the country, Chicago Public Schools is a large school district that primarily serves students of color. Despite many similarities, large urban districts across the country can differ profoundly in terms of curricula, standards, expectations, and ways of operating. For example, CPS operates under mayoral control, and yet has an unusually strong central office, but hiring first-time teachers is a function held by school principals. A novice entering the district must understand such governance structures, as well as the city’s complicated narrative about school-reform which includes closing neighborhood schools while opening new charter schools and engaging in school “turnarounds”. By visiting a variety of schools across the city through the program’s guided fieldwork strand, UChicago UTEP candidates become familiar with the array of public school options in the city.

Prospective teachers who have grappled with details of localized context will better understand the tensions inherent in how significant decisions are made. As one faculty member noted, “Residents receive ‘CPS 101’ throughout the program as a way of understanding the ins and outs of navigating the system to find useful resources.” If the program’s mission is to prepare students to enter the city’s public school system, awareness about structural details such as these will promote candidates’ success.

Context of District Classrooms and Students

The classroom is where UChicago UTEP candidates learn about instructional practice. Required clinical training at a campus of the private university’s charter school and other partner schools creates a common “text” for candidates to become familiar with some of the program’s favored curricula—such as balanced literacy. Students are not limited to an exclusive study of these curricula during their preparation, because knowledge of local curricular expectations and practices puts graduates on a much firmer footing when they enter their classrooms as teachers of record.

Because schoolchildren themselves are key to context, UChicago UTEP staff and faculty want candidates to understand relationships among students and teacher, their respective cultures, and the subject matter—all of which converge in the classroom. During the Foundations year, preparation for classroom context is infused in signature assignments such as a school study, a student study, and a study of a teacher. Candidates are taught to “see” individual pupils by developing astute observation skills and awareness of the various lenses through which their behavior is interpreted. Additive frameworks such as “funds of knowledge” help candidates focus on what students *can* do (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992).

More broadly, opportunities to understand classroom context are embedded in candidates’ learning about culturally relevant pedagogy. Making curriculum relevant and engaging to students by building on their own knowledge, interests, and experiences receive great emphasis in the program. According to one faculty member, “we want teachers to find out what kids are interested in and tailor the curriculum to meet those interests.” At the same time, UChicago UTEP candidates understand that cultural relevance is only one deciding factor in instructional material. One graduate elaborates, “[Just because my students say] . . . we want to read about 50 Cent . . . doesn’t mean that I’m going to structure my unit around 50 Cent or some other rapper. I’m only willing to use [material that is] useful in their learning . . . and tied to goals.” This observation highlights the complex decision making in which UChicago UTEP candidates must engage, relative to the classroom contexts in which they are working.

From “Universal” to “Context-Specific” Teacher Preparation: Two Key Assignments

Our research illuminates what UChicago UTEP staff identified as important contextual aspects of the CPS district. A focus group interview with faculty revealed that in addition to valuing knowledge about various features of the local urban context, they shared beliefs about what effective teachers must know and be able to do. Indeed, while faculty advocate that “the core of urban education” for teachers is both a conceptual understanding of “who you are in relation to the students and . . . the context in which this instruction takes place,” they also espouse a commitment to an approach to instruction that values both constructivism and inquiry. These instructional practices, in and of themselves, are not specific to urban schools or to children in Chicago; nor do staff suggest that particular instructional strategies are more suited to lower income communities of color than others. In fact, many UChicago UTEP practices actively counter what Haberman describes as the “pedagogy of poverty” (1991). UChicago

UTEP sets the stage for translating universal practices into specific ways of knowing and doing in the local district schools by attending to context—from urban-specific, to city-specific, and eventually to school- and classroom-specific.

Two key assignments—the school study and the interactive read-aloud—demonstrate how UChicago UTEP enacts context-specific teacher preparation. The first assignment describes how candidates solidify a broad understanding of a neighborhood school. The latter illustrates how an otherwise universal instructional practice is tailored for the district’s context and classrooms.

The school study. The school study is a first-year capstone project. Students research, in small groups, a district school and explore the complicated ways that its leadership, organization, and ethos affect teachers, students, families, and learning. Students must actively seek to understand the reciprocal relationship between the school and its local community. The project requires candidates to synthesize what they learn over a full quarter in their academic, fieldwork, and introspective soul strands. The charge to integrate learning across strands trains candidates to consider multiple layers of context (as depicted in our framework illustration) as they analyze teaching and learning in a school.

Groundwork for the project is laid early in the year when candidates are asked to reflect on their own early schooling experiences. They write about the organization of the elementary schools they attended as children, describing them in terms of strengths, weaknesses, core values, demographics, and available resources and extracurricular activities. This initial assignment both uncovers the diverse backgrounds of the cohort and provides a basis for comparing the schools that candidates will visit during guided field experiences. Reflecting on seminal school experiences also sets the stage for an ongoing exploration of teacher identity that

begins when candidates give voice to their basic assumptions about schooling within the safety of their cohort.

To complement this shared, reflective exchange, candidates are assigned readings that examine how school organization impacts student learning. These readings first explore the purposes of and policies associated with public schooling (i.e., Labaree, 2000; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1995) and then move to a specific focus on the city (i.e., Payne, 2008; Shipp, 2006, Lipman, 2007). Students learn about the trajectory of Chicago’s school reform efforts beginning in the mid-1980s and the structures that emerged, for instance, decentralized hiring and budgeting powers for principals and the neighborhood schools’ governance structure. Finally, candidates are introduced to the research conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which developed a conceptual framework for looking at the district Midwestern city schools (Bryk et al, 2009). Candidates use the 5E framework to organize their analysis and complete their school study.

The school study assignment intentionally broadens and complicates students’ perceptions of classroom, schools, and relationships with their surrounding communities and helps candidates recognize that teaching and learning does not occur in a vacuum. As noted in our framework, a variety of political, socio-cultural, and school-based forces affect a teacher’s work and capacity to be effective. From the perspective of UChicago UTEP staff, candidates need to be explicitly taught to recognize the intended (and unintended) effects of these forces early in the preparation process. One first-year candidate describes the kind of data she and her peers collected: “We got to interview teachers at the school, the principal, [and] parents. . . . The study helped me understand all the factors that are involved in [that particular] urban school.” For example, interviewed teachers may shed light on issues related to resources, working

conditions, or accountability structures, or the latest district initiative. Parents often discuss their communities, share views about feelings of access to the school, and consider the school in relation to the community it serves. Candidates analyze their data in light of the themes they have studied. The final result is a comprehensive portrait of a school and its surrounding community.

The school study allows candidates to begin to see the ways that geographical and socio-cultural contexts, as well as classroom contexts have content. Situated within a larger conversation about urban schools and educational policy, the school study brings into focus a complicated array of factors that influence the work of teaching. The study also reveals the uniqueness of each school and serves as a powerful (and personal) counter narrative to generalizations that exist about urban schooling.

The interactive read-aloud. Preparing candidates to teach schoolchildren how to read, write, and communicate is inarguably a universal focus of teacher education. However, in the Chicago Public Schools, this core concentration takes on a special urgency, given the number of students who are testing below their grade level. The University of Chicago’s Urban Teacher Education Program therefore emphasizes the teaching of high-quality, culturally relevant instructional practices based on a balanced literacy framework. One goal of the elementary program is to prepare candidates to teach literacy across the curriculum and provide differentiated instruction to the students they will have—a necessity, since a wide range of reading levels and disparities is the norm in most district classrooms. For these reasons, UChicago UTEP particularly emphasizes the interactive read-aloud, an instructional practice that can be used in virtually all content areas (Fountas & Pinnell 2001; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006). Recent work on core practices suggests that an interactive read-aloud meets the criteria of a ‘high leverage practice’ (Grossman,

Hammerness & McDonald, 2009; McDonald et al., in press). To demonstrate how a core practice like an interactive read-aloud becomes city/district-specific in UChicago UTEP, we deconstruct the manner in which candidates learn to enact the interactive read-aloud.

The format of the interactive read-aloud appears on the surface to be relatively straightforward: teachers read from a conceptually accessible text that ideally is slightly above the class grade/reading level. The teacher periodically stops reading to model authentic responses and to ask questions that encourage the class to engage with and think about the text’s meaning.

Candidates begin learning about the interactive read-aloud early in the program when they look inward to their own schooling experiences. They recall how they learned to read, and the role that being read to aloud played in their school and personal lives. This process generally uncovers the privileges that most UChicago UTEP students had in terms of access to print-rich environments, early childhood schooling, and other stimuli that sparked their enthusiasm and interest in reading—a useful point of reference for understanding their biases about the process of learning to read. Candidates are then asked to interview a student they tutor about early reading memories and experiences, and internalize the differences the interview uncovers.

Candidates view video depicting a high-quality enactment of an interactive read-aloud and begin to articulate its characteristics. UChicago UTEP staff also model the interactive read-aloud, including their decisions around book selection—highlighting relevance, development of teaching points, and follow-up activities. During visits to classrooms, candidates observe and document teachers reading to children and collect examples of student-teacher dialogue, with particular emphasis on questioning techniques. Attention to the universal practice of read-aloud is thereby coupled with understanding specific classroom conditions.

Classroom observation is followed by formal instruction. During the literacy methods class, candidates learn about the mechanics of leading an effective interactive read-aloud. Candidates then prepare to conduct an interactive read-aloud in the classroom where they are assigned to work during the year. Once the course instructor approves the lesson plan, candidates develop a detailed script for a lesson. They rehearse with their cohort and incorporate suggestions for improving it. As a final assessment, candidates plan and create two follow-up read-aloud lessons that incorporate children’s learning as well as the feedback obtained during the first cycle. Candidates then revisit their read-aloud lesson series during their second year in the program when, as residents in a new district classroom, they develop a 3-week literacy unit and assume responsibility for instruction.

Classroom observations of graduates of UChicago UTEP suggest that this high leverage practice of the interactive read-aloud remains a mainstay of their classroom teaching (Tamir & Hammerness, in preparation). Although only a small number of graduates were observed for this study, we saw each graduate enacting the read-aloud in their classroom in ways that reflected attention to questioning, rehearsing, and helping students with specific questions around vocabulary or concepts. One graduate explained that she had found the interactive read aloud such a useful strategy that she had adapted some aspects of it to help her work with small groups in mathematics: “I was taught how to do guided reading for literacy, like how to work in small groups with kids at their level, so you’re hitting specific skills for each group, and so I feel like that’s a really good way to teach reading and to make sure that what you’re doing is pertinent to other kids, so I decided to try to use that to figure out how to teach math.”

This meticulous process of teaching a central literacy instructional practice is just one example of how UChicago UTEP blends the imperative to teach both content and context.

Indeed, it demonstrates a powerful approach to teaching a core practice—the interactive read-aloud—while attending to the nuances and unique nature of a particular setting.

Implications and Conclusion

The demands associated with working in urban schools continue to be more challenging than ever before. In response, a growing number of programs—university-based, alternative, and residency—are trying to find models to prepare teachers for urban school settings. For this reason, we need to push for new understandings about how teacher education defines for itself and for preservice students *what* kinds of knowledge must be attended to and *how* such knowledge can be experienced, such that specifics of those urban settings are addressed (Bowman & Gottesman, 2013; McDonald, et al in press). As the rich conversations around practice-based teacher education suggest, however, important questions persist. These center in particular upon how teacher educators can help new teachers learn about teaching practices, while still attending to foundational knowledge not only about teaching and learning, but also about both culture and place (Bowman & Gottesman 2013; see also Zeichner, 2012). We deconstruct one program, the University of Chicago’s Urban Teacher Education Program to demonstrate how it defines and attends to layers of contextual knowledge that it deems important for teachers to know—in relationship to learning specific practices of teaching. In so doing, we begin to illustrate how a simple understanding of context as classroom “setting” can be expanded to include the state and federal policy context, the neighborhood, the district, and the American urban classroom writ large.

This more robust understanding of context serves another purpose: to unpack the “urban” in urban teacher education, and thereby demonstrate how knowledge about specific features of the classroom, school, community, district, and federal contexts all influence teaching and

learning at the classroom level. Such a focus, coupled with an emphasis on high-quality instructional practices, creates a “context-specific” design for localized and nuanced teacher preparation. Analysis of UChicago UTEP’s scope and sequence, assignments, and syllabi points to multiple entry points for candidates to grapple with various aspects of the context of Chicago. UChicago UTEP helps its candidates adjust and shape pedagogies that are otherwise deemed generic or universal to the specifics of the city’s milieu.

Researching key aspects comprising the “content” of context addressed by the program led to the development of a framework that articulates the features of context-specific preparation that matter for new teachers preparing to enter the workforce. The framework we offer, which is anchored in the research of multicultural education, begins to identify the broad array of factors that comprise context and hold important knowledge for new teachers. Opportunities to learn about these aspects of context may help deter candidates from forming simplistic generalizations about districts, cities, or geographic regions, and enable preservice teachers to move beyond cultural stereotypes and dig into the particulars of local schools and classrooms that at the end of the day will inform their teaching. Staff from UChicago UTEP note that their work is continually “in progress” as they work to stay current and responsive to neighborhood and district level shifts---changes to the teacher evaluation system, key curricula, or demographics, as examples. In this manner, we begin to see that UChicago UTEP’s context-specific approach to teacher preparation offers a pathway toward learning to be an effective teacher for Chicago—a far more nuanced approach for becoming an *urban* schoolteacher.

The framework that characterizes UChicago UTEP’s approach to teacher preparation may be a useful tool for other programs that intend to prepare teachers for particular settings. Although our research is focused on Chicago’s urban context, the framework can readily be

applied to other urban cities across the country to help both teacher educators and candidates identify salient features of their settings. We can envision how the framework might also apply to for a rural or suburban school setting in a particular geographic locale, by drawing on the content in that particular context. Similarly, the notion of context-specific preparation may also be applied to a parochial school system rather than the urban public one depicted in this analysis.

At the same time, our findings could raise new questions and possible limitations about the very notion of context-specific preparation. For instance, some practitioners might wonder whether targeted and localized preparation has some drawbacks. Given that teachers often do not remain in the same school—particularly in urban districts (Ingersoll, 2001; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002)—would teachers prepared with local specificity be less successful if they move to a different city? Others might say that characteristics of good teaching—careful observation, reflection, and thoughtful instructional decision making, to name a few—will carry over regardless of where they occur. However, we argue that the benefits of a context-specific approach outweigh these or other potential objections. While it is true that teachers may learn how to enact a universal practice like the interactive read-aloud without regard to setting, through a context-specific approach, preservice teachers are also learning what it means to use knowledge about the environment affecting the child in order to tailor instruction—an important teaching tool for any setting. Our contention is that a context-specific approach to teacher preparation may better enable new teachers to access knowledge about a broad spectrum of context, which in the long term will sharpen and fine tune their teaching. Furthermore, evidence is emerging that teachers prepared for particular contexts have higher retention rates (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Quartz et al., 2004; Quartz et al., 2008; see also Tamir, 2009, 2013)—Indeed, initial research on this particular program suggests almost 90% of all of its graduates are

still teaching (UChicago UTEP program data, 2013). It may be that such preparation enables teachers to more successfully navigate their contexts (and know how to learn about them) supporting them in their work and careers.

The field of teacher education is undergoing a new directional shift that calls upon teacher educators to reframe the ways that they teach practice, as well as re-designing programs that continue to advance agendas around equity and social justice (Grossman et al., 2009; McDonald et al. in press). Examining how teacher preparation programs can accomplish the goals of both teaching in ways that are grounded in practice but also manage to sustain a focus upon the context of teaching is critical. An approach that values the content embedded within context may help teachers enact the kind of teaching practices that may matter most in teaching—understand their students better; develop stronger working relationships with colleagues, parents, and students; learn how to navigate public schools effectively; and ultimately, teach in more powerful and successful ways.

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© University of Chicago's Urban Teacher Education Program , which prepares elementary teachers for the Chicago Public Schools. University of Chicago's Urban Teacher Education Program. Organization of University of Chicago's Program. Unpacking the "urban" in urban teacher preparation: Making a case for context-specific teacher preparation. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 65, pp. 128-144 © Feiman-Nemser, S., Tamir, E. & Hammerness, K. (2014). *Inspiring Teaching: Preparing teachers to succeed in mission-driven schools*. Initial teacher education (ITE) has been critically examined and found to be wanting (Darling-Hammond, 2006); it is no longer enough to simply replicate what student educators previously learned in the theoretical sense (Kissock and Richardson, 2010). Teachers of the Twenty-first century need including specific subject content skills. Context of the Study. This study stems from a TEI in Hong Kong that has recently made EL a mandatory component of a revised postgraduate diploma in education course (1-year in length) and on undergraduate teacher preparation courses. This paper describes an urban teacher residency program, the Newark Montclair Urban Teacher Residency, a collaborative endeavor between the Newark, New Jersey Public Schools and Montclair State University, built on a decades-long partnership. The authors see the conceptual work of developing this program as creating a "third space" in teacher education. We detail the ways in which we conceptualize epistemology and clinical practice in teacher education, and changes in the roles of the community, and P-12 teachers that occur in a third space. Providing an account of ou