

Striving for Authentic Community Engagement: A Process Model from Urban Teacher Education

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Abstract

This article presents an urban teacher education center as a process model of how a university can cultivate authentic community engagement. Three essential steps of the process model are identified: (1) being physically located at the school or community site in order to build trust and become integrated into the life of the school or community, (2) conducting community studies in order to learn about and understand the lives of community members, and (3) becoming involved in community engagement activities.

Introduction to Urban Community Engagement

A goal of urban universities in recent years has been to make stronger connections to the urban communities in which they are located (e.g., Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, Great City Universities, Urban Education Service Corps). One approach to developing connections has been through community engagement (a term used here to denote service-learning, civic engagement, and community-oriented field experiences), which has been repeatedly shown to generate positive outcomes for university students as well as communities (*Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Eyer & Giles, 1999; Kerrigan, Gelmon, & Spring, 2003; Kirlin, 2003; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002*).

Similarly, educators within the field of urban teacher education have proposed that involvement with communities should be an important part of teacher education. Howey (2001), for instance, lays out 10 general attributes of a good urban teacher education program, including “involvement of prospective teachers in a host of urban community and community agency activities” (p. 13). CREDE (the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence) identifies a key theme of teacher education as “Schools, Family, and Community,” which entails “methods and principles for local contextualization of instruction through school interrelationships with families and community agencies” (2004). And Haberman (2000) proposes that urban teachers must learn through

their teacher preparation program to “expand their knowledge of students’ culture groups through direct personal contacts with students, parents, caregivers, and community” (p. 4).

A number of socially transformative implications of connecting teacher education with urban schools and communities have been documented, including building trust and commitment with local communities (Murrell, 2001; Reed, 2004); participating in community organizing (Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006); creating a sense of civic engagement through a commitment to service-learning (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000); preparing culturally responsive future teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2006); increasing the number of preservice teachers who choose to teach in urban or diverse settings (Noel, 2006); and transforming the educational system (Giroux & McLaren, 1996; Haberman, 2000; Solomon, Manoukian, & Clarke 2005; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996).

Despite the successes of community engagement in general, and in urban teacher education in particular, these efforts have also been criticized for having a university-led focus. There is often an inequality of roles, with university programs and faculty members setting the tone for interactions. A number of these approaches to school and community involvement center on universities bringing in programs for urban schools and communities to implement. Even when there are multilevel groups that involve a university, schools, community members, and community groups and agencies in the discussions, it is often the university that provides the impetus and expertise to initiate change, not the community’s own authentic efforts at change (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Murrell, 1998; Reed, 2004; Weiner, 2000). Persons residing in urban neighborhoods know when outside institutions and agencies come in with new ideas intended to “help” them; furthermore, they know that those outsiders, the ones with the power to propose the change, can also leave the community just as easily as they entered. As Reed (2004) describes,

Low-income neighborhoods are jaded by the comings and goings of organizations that have no grassroots base in the community. . . . Local residents are weary of seeing new initiatives come and go. They are tired of the disruptions caused by those who live outside the neighborhood who try to offer solutions that, no matter how well intentioned, are not grounded in the realities of the street (p. 81).

Recognizing this concern within communities, Harkavy and Hartley (2009) urge institutions of higher education to “go beyond a rhetoric of collaboration and conscientiously work with communities, rejecting the unidirectional, top-down approaches that all too often have characterized university-community interaction” (p. 12).

The purpose of this article is to examine how universities can strive for greater authenticity within the communities and schools where their faculty members and students work. It focuses on how universities can move toward what Harkavy and Hartley (2009) describe as “the establishment of deep, lasting, democratic, collaborative partnerships aimed at addressing pressing real-world problems” (p. 9). It draws on theories of community engagement, trust, and socially transformative education, and describes one process model of an award-winning¹ urban teacher education center’s efforts to become a more authentic part of its community. It presents the results of an evaluation of the Urban Teacher Education Center after its fifth year of operation, including results from Likert scale surveys, questionnaires, interviews, reflective journals, and a focus group.

The focus of this article is on how to ensure that a community develops trust in the university through employing three strategies. First, the university program should be physically located at the school or community site in order to build trust and become integrated into the life of the school community. Second, university faculty members and students should engage in community studies to learn more about the lives of the community’s members. And third, after becoming an integrated part of community life, and after learning about the community, the program should undertake authentic community engagement activities.

The Sacramento Urban Teacher Education Center

In 2004 the California State University, Sacramento Urban Teacher Education Center (UTEC) was created. UTEC is a teacher preparation program designed to prepare future teachers to work in low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse urban schools and communities. The Urban Teacher Education Center moved teacher preparation off the university campus and into Broadway Circle Elementary School, a low-income, diverse elementary school in a large city in Northern California. Broadway Circle Elementary School serves children from two public housing projects, with demographics of 94% free-and-reduced lunch (a federal measure

of poverty), 94% children of color, and 60% African American students. Nearly all of the university's teacher preparation courses are taught in the elementary school, with opportunities for daily engagement with the school and community. University students spend three semesters taking courses on site at the elementary school as they earn their teaching credentials.

“[M]oving teacher education into urban schools and communities will enable both university faculty members and students—future teachers—to better understand the realities of urban education, including the social, political, and economic conditions. . .”

A key to this center's methodology is the recognition that moving teacher education into urban schools and communities will enable both university faculty members and students—future teachers—to better understand the realities of urban education, including the social, political, and economic conditions that affect the lives and education of urban children and their families (Noel, 2006). In such teacher education programs, there is acknowledg-

ment that in order to effectively educate children in urban settings, teachers must learn about and engage in the communities of their students, becoming part of the daily fabric of the urban community. As Reid (2007) writes, “teacher education embedded within the context of inner-city education” (p. 228) can lead to transformation of teacher education, schools, and communities.

Three Steps of Authentic Community Engagement

The Sacramento Urban Teacher Education Center uses a three-step process model to ensure that community engagement with the Broadway Circle Elementary School community is authentic. These steps were intentionally built into the Urban Teacher Education Center from the start, and helped drive the development of community interactions. In this process model, the three steps must be sequential. For example, first, the California State University (CSU) Teacher Education Center integrated itself into the school community by “being there” at the school. Second, faculty members and administrators conducted community studies. Finally, after Steps 1 and 2 were completed, UTEC faculty members and students took

part in community engagement activities. If the Urban Teacher Education Center had started at Step 3, “Become involved in community engagement activities,” without (1) physically becoming a part of, and (2) learning about the community, it would have risked promoting and perpetuating the community’s feeling of disconnect from the university. Elaboration on this three-part process model follows.

Step 1. Become Integrated into the Community: “Being There,” Developing Trust

Collaboration is easier and more effective when trust has been developed between a university and a school community. Step 1 of the process model draws from Murrell’s (2001) concept of teacher education programs “being there” in schools and communities. As Murrell (2001) and Reed (2004) both describe, communities ask that teacher education programs be physically present in schools in order to learn, to show commitment, and to build trust with community members. As Reed (2004) explains, “From a neighborhood perspective, presence is especially important” (p. 81). Murrell (2001) describes these efforts as “building community through our actual physical presence in schools. . . . The measure of our success as agents for change is not the expertise we bring as university people, but rather our capacity to learn in the company of others” (p. 33). Rosenberg’s (1997) sense of “dwelling” is another way to describe the meaning of “being there.” As Rosenberg discusses, “We need to think about what it means for us to ‘dwell’ in the institution. To ask our students and ourselves to ‘dwell’ is to ask ourselves to exist in a given place, to fasten our attention, to tarry, to look again. We take root, day after day” (p. 88).

Developing trust.

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) have identified five facets of trust involved in establishing trust between people and organizations: benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. A key thread weaving through these facets of trust is the confidence that one person or organization has in the partner’s intentions toward the people and project. As Tschannen-Moran (2004) writes, “Perhaps the most essential ingredient and commonly recognized facet of trust is a sense of caring or benevolence; the confidence that one’s well-being or something one cares about will be protected and not harmed by the trusted party” (p. 19).

Collaborative relationships, however, do not begin with all five facets of trust already in place. Rather, trust builds over time. “Trust is a dynamic phenomenon that takes on a different character at different stages of a relationship. As a relationship develops, trust ‘thickens’ (Gambetta, 1988)” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 570). A number of authors (Bottery, 2003; Gambetta, 1988; Hands, 2005; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) describe three stages in developing trust between two institutional partners. At the first stage, when partners do not have a professional or personal relationship, they will make a calculation about the worthiness of a potential collaborative partner based on factors such as the amount of risk connected with the collaboration, or whether the activities and partners can be monitored (Gambetta, 1988). This calculation of possible trust may be based in part on an already implied trust between organizations. Since there often are both regulatory and ethical characteristics attached to institutions such as schools and universities, these characteristics may be used as part of the determination of trust between the organizations at this initial level (Bottery, 2003).

The second stage occurs when the collaboration begins and activities commence, during which time partners can gauge the level of commitment of their partners based on repeated activities. At this stage, trust moves beyond a speculative calculation, and reaches a new level based on knowledge of practice in a common realm (Bottery, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). This signifies a developing knowledge of individuals’ work, commitment, and trustworthiness.

The third stage occurs when partners spend time working together, and repeated collaborative activities have been effective. Partners come to recognize (1) that they have developed relationships based on shared goals, procedures, and beliefs (Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2002); and (2) that they can act on behalf of each other, comfortable and confident in the decisions, activities, and outcomes of the partnership.

Once these stages of partnership development have been reached, a nearly authentic partnership can be realized. Flexibility is a hallmark of a mature partnership that has gone through this three-step process of trust development (Hands, 2005). An effective partnership, built on trust, deals with challenges with flexibility—enacting change and incorporating new community needs and institutional demands when needed.

Diversity.

Trust is considered to be more difficult when there is diversity within and across organizations. “Trust is more difficult,” Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) write, “because people are uncertain about the cultural norms of others” (p. 560). In what is termed social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), “individuals gain their sense of self-worth in part from the groups that they are part of or identify with” (Noel, 2008, p. 47). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) continue by pointing out that “People have a tendency to extend trust more readily to people they perceive as similar to themselves” (p. 560). The end result is that people are uncertain about what to expect from other individuals, other organizations, and from collaboration when working in a diverse organization. The key is to recognize that uncertainty may exist in a partnership, but that diversity does not need to be a deterrent to collaboration. People can work well within difference in order to make decisions that draw from multiple perspectives, and that will affect multiple constituencies in transformative ways.

The Urban Teacher Education Center example.

Differences among members of partnership organizations are especially evident within the Urban Teacher Education Center and Broadway Circle Elementary School. As a group of largely White, middle-class university faculty members and students located within a school and community characterized by a 94% poverty rate, and in which 94% of the residents are people of color, UTEC faculty members and students must consciously and continually consider how people in the neighborhoods may take a racially, economically, and educationally marked view of UTEC within their community. The Urban Teacher Education Center must continually consider the impacts that privilege, race, class, and school-community dynamics have on building trust within the community. Essays on White privilege (Giroux, 1997b; McIntosh, 1988; Rodriguez, 2000; Sleeter, 2001) remind us of the taken-for-granted privileges and positions of power held by Whites. Daniel’s (2007) definition of community lays out this relationship.

The community to which I refer is a group of persons wherein the members remain aware of the intersections of oppressions, the multiple relational dynamics inherent in that space, and are continually working at

making the community a comprehensive learning space for all of its members (p. 32).

This is the ultimate sense of trust that can develop from “being there.”

Today, the Urban Teacher Education Center–Broadway Circle Elementary School collaboration exemplifies a mature partnership. UTEC spent 2 years building trust by “dwelling” and “being there” in the Broadway Circle Elementary School and the neighboring community. UTEC took the time needed to build trust within the community. Over the 2 years, the UTEC coordinator and her students have attended community barbecues and back-to-school events, sometimes volunteering, and sometimes just enjoying the events. The UTEC coordinator also met the matriarch of the neighborhood housing projects. In 2006, the coordinator took a sabbatical semester from the university to serve as “community liaison” between the school, the university, and the community. Presuming to serve as a liaison between these three disparate groups would have been unthinkable prior to spending time daily at the school, slowly gaining the trust of community members, and finally becoming somewhat integrated into the life of the school and community.

Through seeing UTEC faculty members and students at the school every weekday during the university school year, the school’s principal and teachers began to trust the program’s purposes. Teachers demonstrated trust in the program by inviting the university students to take part in more and more schoolwide activities. Over time, the K-6 students began to tell their parents and guardians about the “university people” at their school. Parents no longer saw UTEC faculty members and students as strangers; rather, they began to trust the intentions of these “university people.”

Evaluation of trust in the Urban Teacher Education Center.

Results from a fifth-year evaluation of UTEC illustrate the level of trust developed over time (see Table 1). Based on the research demonstrating the importance of developing trust in community partnerships, as well as the research discussing issues of “outsider” status in urban settings, all participants in the evaluation were asked to respond to questions about “level of trust.” They were also asked to provide their perceptions of the university program as an “outsider” in their school and community. In the Likert scale survey of

schoolteachers, support staff (including the reading coach, library aide, office staff, custodial staff, and playground staff), and administrators, 100% of the survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that “I feel that I can trust UTEC faculty and students.” In another measure of trust, 91% of the respondents either agreed or agreed strongly that “I feel comfortable expressing my thoughts and opinions about UTEC to UTEC faculty.” When asked if they had any concerns about “outsiders” coming into the school or community, two respondents indicated that they originally had concerns, but that currently those concerns had disappeared, and thus no respondents expressed concerns about UTEC as “outsiders.”

Table 1. The Evaluation Process

Instrument	Participants	N	% of total in group	Time of data gathering
Likert scale survey (LS)	Teachers	5	38	Second-to-last week of 2008-2009 school year
	Support staff (reading coach, library aide, office staff, custodial staff, playground staff)	5	38	
	Administrator	1	50	
Interviews (I)	Teachers	2	15	Second-to-last week of 2008-2009 school year
	Support Staff	2	15	
	Administrators	2	100	
Focus group (FG)	Community leaders	3	N/A	Two weeks after 2008-2009 school year ended
Open-ended survey	Parents	17	30% of parents attending Open House 10% of school's total population of parents	2009 Spring Open House: a 15-minute time period just before event began Raffled two \$25 Target gift cards

The responses of the community leaders in the focus group give narrative meaning to the development of trust with “outsiders.” Participating community leaders included members of the community’s neighborhood association who had each created at least one community-wide program designed to transform the lives of children and families. The community leaders expressed two concerns held at the outset of the partnership, but now alleviated, related to “outsiders.” One, they had been concerned that the program might bring in a set of stereotypical judgments about

the lives of the people in the housing projects (*à la Foucault, 1977*). Two, they had felt certain that UTEC would not “stick around” (*à la Reed, 2004*). In the focus groups, the community leaders reported that they were “amazed that UTEC is still around and is so active after five years.”

Another key aspect of trust is a perceived level of equality in the partnership (*Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Murrell 1998; Reed 2004; Weiner, 2000*). When asked in the Likert scale survey whether they felt they “have a say” in what activities UTEC undertakes at the school and in the community, 63% of the teachers, support staff, and administrators either agreed or strongly agreed. Interestingly, more teachers perceived a lack of voice in the selection of these activities (50%) than did support staff (20%). This is consistent with the interviews, in which one administrator described not having much say in the program, while the community leaders in the focus group felt empowered to make decisions regarding the particular UTEC-community collaborative activities that they co-coordinate.

And finally, in order for trust to develop, there needs to be a perceived level of honesty and openness (*Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999*). To evaluate participants’ perceptions, the survey, interviews, and focus group protocol included questions about perceptions of honesty and openness in communications regarding UTEC. All interviewees (teachers, support staff, and administrators) and focus group members (community leaders) stated that they feel comfortable and confident in communications with UTEC, and that information flows both ways (from university to school, and from community to school) smoothly and frequently. Responses to the Likert scale survey of teachers, support staff, and one administrator indicated that 73% agreed or strongly agreed that “an appropriate level of effort has been made to gather input from school and community members about UTEC structure and activities.” Parents also need to be part of this communication feedback loop. One question on the open-ended parent survey asked, “Has your child ever told you about the university students at Broadway Circle School?” Of the parents who took part in the survey, 23% said yes, and 77% said no. The three parents who answered the open-ended question regarding suggestions (each with children in grades K–1) expressed the desire to have more UTEC-led activities available for primary-aged children (since the focus of most UTEC activities is grades 2–6).

Step 2. Learn About the Community: Community Studies

Murrell (2001) introduces the term “humility of practice,” which serves as a caution for university faculty members “to avoid the fatal assumption that they know all they need to know about the culture, values, traditions, and heritages of the people they purportedly serve” (p. 31). When going into a school or community, university faculty members and students must come to recognize that they will be working with organizations, groups, and individuals whose lives are different from their own. The university faculty members and students may be “cultural outsiders” within the community. Giroux’s (1997a) concept of “the discourse of lived cultures” helps explain this point. Giroux begins by pointing out that people from different backgrounds have different lives, and are likely to see the world in disparate perspectives. They have different “lived cultures.” In learning about the lives of people in a community, “the discourse of lived cultures” leads toward “an understanding of how [community members] give meaning to their lives through complex historical, cultural, and political forms that they both embody and produce” (p. 140).

Murrell (2001), and Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González (1992) describe practices that allow universities to learn about and gain a greater understanding of the lives of people in the communities where universities do their community engagement. Murrell (2001) promotes the concept of a “community teacher.”

Community teachers are developed through a system of practice-oriented, community-dedicated, and urban-focused instruction and assistance based in rich field experiences. The key to the system of practice that prepares community teachers is the immersion of candidates in rich contexts of collaborative activity and inquiry (p. 6).

Once they have been through this process of collaboration, community teachers can then “draw on a richly contextualized knowledge of culture, community, and identity in their professional work with children and families in diverse urban communities” (p. 4).

In advocating for a similar approach of learning about the communities and lives of the communities they serve, Moll et al. (1992) have advocated for teachers to become engaged with the families of their students by conducting home visits with an ethnographic eye. Teachers who learn the community’s and families’ “funds of

knowledge” will be better able to connect to the daily lives of, and values held by, the children in their classrooms.

While university programs such as UTEC, that embrace community engagement, are not likely to require faculty members or students to visit children’s or community members’ homes, there are many ways to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of the community served. The process model laid out in this article proposes “community studies” as part of university students’ community engagement or service-learning courses. In community studies, students (and faculty members) visit neighborhoods to learn about school and community demographics, meet with directors of organizations, and interview parents and community members. In accordance with the three trust-building steps proposed in this article, this second step of learning about community does, by necessity, occur before community engagement activities are initiated. This avoids the sense of disconnect sometimes felt by community members. Moreover, it avoids the feelings held by some community members that universities come and go, and do not have a strong base within the community itself.

The Urban Teacher Education Center example.

UTEC students participate in a “community study” as a requirement during the first semester of their school-based teacher preparation program. The first stage of a “community study” involves students keeping a reflective journal about their perceptions of the school. They write an answer to the question “What did you notice when you first arrived at Broadway Circle School?” As the semester continues, and they become more integrated into the school and community, the question prompts deepen, asking students to reflect upon and describe their perceptions of the school and community. The UTEC coordinator arranges six possible interviews and neighborhood visits for students to complete. Each student selects and completes one from this list.

1. Housing complex #1: Students can visit and conduct interviews about the Head Start program on site, and the socio-economic requirements for people to qualify to live in the complex.
2. Housing complex #2: Students can visit and conduct interviews about the county social services offered on site.

3. Nearby city park: Students can visit and conduct interviews about the programs offered at the park, and the level of participation by families from Broadway Circle School.
4. City-run job training center: Students can visit and conduct interviews about the programs offered for job training, and employment assistance as well as financial counseling.
5. Center for the health of expectant mothers: Students can visit and conduct interviews about the Center's health care services for expectant mothers without insurance.
6. School and community leaders: Throughout the semester, various school and community leaders join the UTEC students for course sessions, sometimes guest speaking in the course, sometimes attending course sessions with the students. UTEC students are encouraged to interview any of these school staff members or community leaders.

While these options are preestablished by the UTEC coordinator, based on the relationships developed over 5 years, students are also encouraged to discover additional community organizations, community events, or schoolwide programs that impact the children and families of the school and community. For their final assignment for the first semester, students provide a narrative and a visual presentation of their community study. Two examples of student reflective narratives follow.

[After completing several neighborhood visits.] Having grown up in a completely different environment, the overall impression that I got of the area that surrounds Broadway Circle Elementary was that of a run-down community, with a "project"-like or ghetto feel about it. . . . The fences more often than not were topped by some form of barbed or razor wire. . . . What I found when I looked past the fences and the external facades of faded buildings was a community that teemed with life. There were personalized touches everywhere I looked. I was amazed at the sheer number of secret gardens tucked away on the back sides of single-storied apartment buildings. . . . I watched a variety of early morning

rituals take place: from tai chi on a front lawn, to elderly women scouring apartment grounds for recyclables, to young mothers and fathers patiently, diligently, and most of all, lovingly, watching their young children play on the grass in front of them (*student teacher Mr. I.*).

Ms. P knows almost every child's name and their individual story and this, as Ms. P said in her interview, is what makes her job so special and unique. "Living here and working here go hand in hand, I am fortunate to be able to see where these kids come from everyday." Ms. P loves the community at Public Housing Complex #1 and when asked what her favorite part of the community was, she was quick to respond with "tons of activities for the kids." She loves the tutoring opportunities, sports activities and general love that the neighbors have for the kids that live in the neighborhood. Ms. P also likes the different individuals that people use as resources when they need something. In Public Housing Complex #1 there are barbers, hair braiders, babysitters and a lot of volunteers that are always willing to help a neighbor in need (*student teacher Ms. D.*).

These Step 2 neighborhood visits and interviews by UTEC students have been made possible through Step 1, "being there" at the school, and gaining trust of school and community members. The insights they have gained during these community studies are acquired before they begin engaging in community engagement activities. Through the community studies, the students learn much about the community and the lives of those who live in it. They are then able to participate in community engagement activities that directly relate to the lives of the children and community members with whom they work. The end result is a much deeper learning environment for all involved.

Step 3. Become Involved in Community Engagement Activities

The Urban Teacher Education Center exemplifies a mature partnership based on the groundwork done in Steps 1 and 2. What follows is a description of the community engagement activities (Step 3) undertaken collaboratively by UTEC, Broadway Circle School, and the neighborhood-run tutoring/mentoring center. These school and community-based activities range from

establishing programs (e.g., the Family Resource Center; the Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement [MESA] program; an after-school arts program at the school) to working directly with children (e.g., in the school library, as lunch buddies, in the neighborhood-run tutoring/mentoring center) to organizing and leading events (e.g., a university field trip for the school's sixth-graders, a Family Literacy Night for the whole school) and to the UTEC coordinator serving as a "community liaison" between the school, university, and community. These examples are described in more detail below.

Establish programs: The Family Resource Center.

UTEC students, the UTEC coordinator, and Broadway Circle School's assistant principal were responsible for opening the Family Resource Center in Broadway Circle School. In spring 2006, UTEC students served coffee to parents, assisted with computer access, and operated the children's book giveaway and the parent book exchange. In spring 2007, UTEC students opened the Family Resource Center to meet with parents, and to help facilitate the principal's "Coffee and Conversation." The center now serves as a classroom for parent education, including a parenting workshop offered by the local university and a G.E.D. course offered by the school district.

Establish programs: The Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) program.

In spring 2007, UTEC students, with their professor and a second-grade teacher, initiated the MESA program at Broadway Circle Elementary School, which provides an opportunity for educationally disadvantaged students to explore careers in mathematics, engineering, and science, and to prepare for admission to college to study in these fields. Over 60 children participated in MESA, and UTEC student teachers taught the weekly activities. Three Broadway Circle School students won first place out of 500 students at the spring 2007 MESA competition. This competition drew K-6 students from throughout the Sacramento region, with a set of challenging mathematics, engineering, and science contests designed to measure students' knowledge, ability, and creativity. The MESA program continues today, with UTEC students helping regular classroom teachers to facilitate the weekly program.

Establish programs: After School Arts Program.

In 2008, UTEC students initiated the After School Arts Program, which involved 15 K–6 students in music, arts, and crafts. The result was the first After School Arts Showcase during Back-to-School Night. Although this program no longer exists due to turnover of teachers who served as the school sponsors for the program, UTEC students now serve as tutors and mentors for the neighborhood-run after school dance program.

Working with children: Broadway Circle School library.

Broadway Circle School did not have a librarian in 2005–2006, so the library could not be utilized by children. In spring 2006, UTEC students opened and operated the library during three lunch periods each week. Records indicate that 80 students took advantage of the opportunity to go to the library to read during their lunch period. Now that the school has a part-time librarian, UTEC students assist in the library, reshelving books and creating bulletin boards.

Working with children: Lunch buddies.

In spring and fall 2007, UTEC students served as lunch buddies, paired with children from Broadway Circle School. The lunch buddy pairs met during lunch one day per week. UTEC is no longer involved in this program today, but volunteers from local businesses and churches serve as lunch buddies for Broadway Circle students.

Working with children: Neighborhood-run tutoring/mentoring center.

This after-school tutoring/mentoring program within Public Housing Complex #1 was created and is operated by two men who grew up in the neighborhood, moved out to get their college degrees, and now give back to their former community by running the center. UTEC students assist as tutors/mentors for this program, which serves over 100 children per year.

Events: University field trip for sixth-graders.

Working with the UTEC coordinator, UTEC students partner with the Broadway Circle Elementary School's teachers to lead an annual field trip for the school's fifth- and sixth-graders.

The purpose of the field trip is to highlight the importance of attending college by touring the University of California, Sacramento campus.

Events: Family Literacy Night.

In 2007, UTEC students helped Broadway Circle School's reading coach and several classroom teachers plan, prepare, and facilitate a Family Literacy Night. Some 30 children and their families attended. A Family Literacy Night is held each semester, with UTEC students helping to plan and facilitate the event.

“Community liaison.”

In 2006, the UTEC coordinator took a sabbatical from the university to serve as an unofficial “community liaison” between the University of California, Sacramento and the Broadway Circle School and neighborhood community. She spent time building closer connections between Broadway Circle School and the neighboring Public Housing Complexes #1 and #2 as well as with the social service organizations serving these communities. She also initiated a Community Outreach Committee at the school to help further the community involvement efforts of the school and communities. Today, the UTEC coordinator continues as an unofficial liaison between the university, school, and neighborhood.

Summary.

By “being there” in a school and community, building trust over time, a university program can become an important part of the fabric of the school and community. The university can both initiate activities and participate in existing activities. These activities allow the schoolchildren, community members, and university students to learn from each other.

Measuring Impact

To date, the impact of the Urban Teacher Education Center's approach to community engagement on the elementary school, the school district, and the university has been measured by the fifth-year evaluation (described earlier), and through student surveys.

In the fifth-year evaluation, 95% of the respondents across all evaluation instrument types agreed that having UTEC at the school and community benefitted both the school's children and UTEC students. Further, 91% of the school personnel indicated that they themselves felt empowered through the UTEC program

by agreeing with the statement “I feel like I make a positive impact on how much UTEC students learned in their program.” One community leader in the focus group, who has now become a high school special education teacher, indicated that he “finally” felt he was able to have an impact on the children of the neighborhood through the full spectrum of their lives. He felt he could “give up” the tutoring/mentoring program he ran at the public housing site in order to run a similar program at the high school, because he knew his mother (the community’s matriarch) and collaborator UTEC could run the elementary school program on their own. Previously, he felt he had to work only with the elementary children, because his impact might end as the children entered middle school. Now he is confident that he, and his family, can have an impact with all ages of children.

The impact of UTEC’s community engagement on UTEC students has been measured through pre-post surveys of attitude and beliefs about future involvement in urban schools (Noel, 2006). UTEC student responses, when compared to those in traditional teacher-preparation programs, indicate a greater motivation to teach in urban schools (67% UTEC vs. 35% traditional), and a greater desire to teach in areas of poverty (65% UTEC vs. 33% traditional). One pre- and post-UTEC program survey indicated that students increased their desire to work with families and communities when they become teachers.

Sustainability

The Urban Teacher Education Center has gained sustainability at Broadway Circle School due to its emphasis on Steps 1 and 3 of the process model described in this article. Through UTEC’s “being there” (Step 1) at the school and community on a daily basis for 5 years, the school and community have come to trust this university program, and have in turn invited UTEC faculty and students to both join in existing efforts and create new initiatives in the school and community (Step 3). The UTEC program has continued even as the Broadway Circle

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School experienced rapid change, as evidenced by the school’s six

principals in 5 years. The key to sustaining the partnership during these years of rapid administrative turnover was the intentional emphasis on partnering with the neighborhood's community organization. When community members grow to trust and even expect a university program to be active in their school and community, that gives the university program the staying power needed to sustain its activities throughout the years.

Assessment: Next steps

As UTEC moves forward within the Broadway Circle community, two assessment systems will be established to determine the longer term impact of the program. Since the primary goal of the UTEC program is to prepare students for teaching positions in urban schools, a tracking system will be established to gather data about where UTEC graduates apply for and secure teaching positions. Another goal of the UTEC program is to help youth achieve academically. Therefore, working with the Broadway Circle community organization, the UTEC program will track the middle and high school completion rates of children tutored and mentored by UTEC students at the community-sponsored after-school program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has proposed a process model for university programs that desire to become more authentic partners in urban schools and communities. Several lessons have been learned along the way.

First, locate university-community programs in the community. Teach courses there. Participate in community events there. This builds trust, and provides university students with a more authentic understanding of the political, social, and economic lives of a neighborhood and its community members.

Second, expand the university-community partnership beyond the primary or initial partner. Identify other trusted organizations or individuals within the community (e.g., neighborhood organizations, churches, preschool programs, or the matriarch of a public housing complex). This practice strengthens partnering with such a community member or connections with the community.

And finally, approach the community partnership with a humbleness, with the recognition that community members know more about life in their community than do outsiders from a university. With the recognition of mutuality in learning, a university-community partnership can achieve its goals and transform lives.

Endnote

1. The Sacramento State Urban Teacher Education Center received the 2008 “Quality Education Partnership Award for Distinguished Service to Children and the Preparation of Teachers” from the California Council on Teacher Education.

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