

21st Century Teachers: Re-Defining Pre-Service Field Work for Novices Through a Teacher Apprenticeship Program

Dr. Julie A. Henderson, Asst. Professor, Department of Education, Holy Names University, USA

ABSTRACT

As California’s current teacher shortage foreshadows a national phenomenon in the not-too-distant future and federal agencies together with policy makers challenge traditional pre-service programs to be more accountable for the quality of their graduates, alternative teacher preparation programs grow in popularity among prospective teacher candidates and employers alike. Urban residencies (i.e., prolonged student teaching placements) provide a viable alternative to the accelerated programs that place credential candidates as ‘teachers-of-record’ in high-need schools and classrooms. This single case study briefly describes one such program in its early years of development and implementation as it seeks to recruit, train and retain quality teachers from under-represented populations for its hard-to-staff urban school partners.

INTRODUCTION

California is one of the only states that prohibit undergraduate majors in education, thereby requiring post-Baccalaureate preparation for preliminary licensure of its teachers. Since the 1960s, teacher candidates have had to spend an average of an additional 18 months after receiving their Bachelor’s degrees to complete the average of 36 semester units required of the typical pre-service program. The additional coursework leading to a credential without a Master’s degree presents just one of the many obstacles that discourage members of underrepresented communities from pursuing careers in teaching, especially those that are first-generation college graduates. Other obstacles surface in the nature of the traditional pathway to the preliminary credential.

In an effort to improve novice teacher effectiveness the California legislature passed Senate Bill 2042 in 1998, directing the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) to overhaul subject-matter preparation for professional teacher preparation and induction programs so that they were aligned with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP). To receive a preliminary teaching credential which is valid for five years, candidates must earn a Bachelor’s degree; pass the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) or another approved basic skills test; demonstrate proficiency in their discipline if they are pursuing secondary (single subject) credentials – or – demonstrate proficiency in the core areas of English language arts and literacy, math, social studies and science for elementary candidates as evidenced by passing scores on the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET); and participate in a state-approved, 12-months to two-year teacher-preparation program which includes a varied length of time shadowing a veteran teacher in the field as a ‘student teacher’.

Preliminary-credentialed novice teachers then have five years to earn a “clear” teaching credential, which requires them to complete a two-year beginning teacher induction program. Clear credentials must be renewed every five years. A schematic flow of California’s traditional teacher production system follows in Figure 1:
Internships provide an attractive alternative to the traditional pathway by enabling candidates with demonstrated pre-requisite competencies to earn a teacher’s salary and health benefits as the Teacher of Record (TOR) while concurrently completing courses and field work as intern teachers. Unfortunately the intense nature of teacher internships frequently prevents candidates from taking full advantage of the pre-service courses they are required to complete while teaching. Compounding an already difficult situation of being a new teacher is the fact that most interns are placed in the worst performing, highest-poverty schools. Of equal concern, the quality of instruction in an intern’s classroom is questionable, at best, since most have had little more than the 120 clock hours of pre-service preparation as required by California’s CTC, excluding subject matter competencies as demonstrated by passing the CSET. It is no wonder that many interns leave the profession before they are fully credentialled. Ironically, some intern programs contribute to the ongoing challenge of teacher shortages in the State because they require such brief commitments from their interns. For example, the alternative pathway provider Teach for America requires only 2 years’ service of its interns and is reported to have an attrition rate of 10% for those interns who are still in their initial, low-income placement schools after the crucial 5th year benchmark (Donaldson and Johnson, 2010).

Research routinely suggests that interns, like all novice teachers, struggle in meeting the varied and multiple requirements of their jobs (Huberman, 1993). Teaching is complex (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Rowan, 1994), wrought with uncertainties (Lortie, 1975) and learning to teach is difficult (Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2007). Consequently, a 50% attrition rate over 5 years has become commonplace and expected. Unfortunately, the high levels of turnover have catastrophic consequences for K-12 students. More teachers are needed just to offset the shortages emanating from such high turnover in the profession. Given that 34.5% of California’s current teaching force is over the age of 50, this shortage is certain to grow almost exponentially as the baby-boomers retire within the next 10 years.

The economically demanding and outdated practice of requiring candidates to ‘volunteer’ their time as student teachers for a minimum of 12 weeks per year in student teaching field placements frequently results in the exclusion of the most-needed (and most-frequently ignored and marginalized) prospects from reputable and rigorous pre-service programs. Traditionally underrepresented groups are unlikely to pursue teaching as a career as evidenced in the demographic profile of California’s 287,000 teachers. According to the state’s Department of Education, 67% of California’s teachers are White, 17% are Latino, 4% are African American and 5% are Asian American with 7% listed as ‘other’. Conversely,
student demographics are more diverse with 53.3% Latino/a, 25% White, 8.7% Asian, 6.2% African American, 2.4% Filipino and 2.7% Bi-racial. In short, more than 75% of the state’s students come from ‘minority’ communities while only 26% of their teachers come from those same communities. It is no wonder that cultural dissonance and subsequent student underachievement have become the norm, especially in high-needs schools. Research indicates that minority students are more likely to be placed in special education classes, have higher absentee rates and are less likely to be involved in school activities when there are no teachers of color on their school’s faculty (Tyler, 2011).

Several obstacles for minority candidates are intrinsic to the credentialing process. Many minority students are the first in their families to attend college and plan to help support their families upon graduation. The additional costs of a fifth, perhaps sixth year of study without the benefit of a Master’s degree is more than most are willing or able to absorb. Additionally and as reported by the Educational Testing Service, minority candidates tend to experience lower passing rates on their subject matter licensure exams (Tyler, 2011). In short and in spite of good intentions on the part of California legislators, preliminary credential requirements aggressively discourage minority candidates, thereby leading to the demographic inconsistencies described above.

This article will examine the components of a program designed to address this pronounced shortage of well-prepared novice teachers from traditionally marginalized and under-represented populations through the Teacher Apprenticeship Program (TAP), an alternative teacher credentialing program at a small private university in Northern California. It will examine TAP’s recruitment and preparation activities to date, the early impact of these endeavors and the implications for expanding TAP on a wider scale.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

The Teacher Apprenticeship Program (TAP) is an undergraduate-graduate residency (apprenticeship) and internship program based on both national and state professional teaching standards and informed by research of effective practice. Novice teachers are supported from the beginning of their coursework through their third-year of induction. The program aims to recruit and train culturally and linguistically diverse recent college graduates (within 3 years) and career-changers in an effort to increase the numbers of traditionally underrepresented groups teaching in high-need schools. Consequently, TAP engages undergraduate juniors and seniors in either graduate coursework with accompanying field component, or through a summer laboratory school (Summer Bridge) as paid Instructional Assistants (IAs) who must participate in reading seminars that support their daily IA duties and experiences.

TAP provides a coherent learning experience that strongly links theory to practice through well-crafted experiential adult learning opportunities (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1993) with emphases on culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The program purposefully employs a transformative multicultural education approach (Banks, 1996; Vavrus, 2002) to build participants’ knowledge and skills in the teaching of challenging academic content to diverse learners, including English Language Learners. And it incorporates recruitment practices aimed at increasing the numbers of teachers who reflect the communities in which they will teach (Futrell, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

Consistent with Yin’s (2003) summary of exploratory and descriptive case methods, data for this study include program documents (e.g., course syllabi and evaluations), participant surveys, excerpts
from student-candidate assignments (e.g., field experience reflections), and observation notes from Master Teachers and University supervisors. These data were analyzed to identify trends and patterns throughout the TAP program, to describe how the program evolved and adapted to environmental conditions and challenges, and to examine potential implications for improving teacher residencies and apprenticeships as an alternative to traditional pre-service preparation programs.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

According to the program’s proposal to the U.S. Department of Education’s Transition to Teaching program, TAP’s design is based on former AERA president, Lee Shulman’s vision of the ideal teacher preparation curriculum:

“[Students need] a cognitive apprenticeship for the learning of facts, concepts, principles and strategies; a practical apprenticeship for the learning of skills, techniques, practices, and protocols; and a moral apprenticeship for the learning of values and norms, and for the development of a proper professional identity”. Lee Shulman, 1985, American Educational Research Association

As such, TAP relies heavily on “Master Teachers” (i.e., veteran teachers with a minimum of 5 years’ experience from local schools currently teaching in public K-12 classrooms) to serve as co-instructors, co-creators of fieldwork curricula, mentors to apprentices, and allies with university faculty and supervisors in crafting the apprenticeship experience for aspiring teacher candidates.

Building the Infrastructure: Master Teachers as University Partners

TAP administrators queried local principals, teachers, university faculty and supervisors, school district administrators, and parents of local schoolchildren in search of potential candidates to serve as Master Teachers. Identified candidates underwent site visits for the purpose of conducting formal and informal observations of their teaching. Additionally, interviews and student surveys assessed not only candidates’ pedagogical philosophies, but also their students’ impressions of how effective they were in teaching urban students.

Successful candidates were invited to participate (with financial compensation) in two intensive professional development summer institutes and several weekend and evening workshops throughout the academic years of 2012-2013, and 2013-2014. These were designed to engage them in examining current teacher preparation requirements, professional standards, final assessments for preliminary licensure via the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) and examples of outstanding practice. In addition to university-based workshops, Master Teachers attended several professional conferences and participated in a special study tour of exemplary alternative high schools whose curricula are based on performance assessments and inter-disciplinary projects. This last experience (the study tour) factored heavily in the creation and refinement of TAP’s Summer Bridge, a laboratory enrichment school launched in the summer of 2013 designed to provide incoming apprentices with opportunities to experience the profession in ideal circumstances (to be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section).

TAP from the Apprentice’s Perspective – Recruitment and Engagement

Soon-to-graduate juniors and seniors initially constituted the recruitment pipeline for program participants. In addition to the traditional Information Sessions held monthly on campus, TAP hosted several unique events aimed primarily at university undergraduates, but open and widely publicized to the general public. This included a ‘recruitment cruise’ on board a floating museum in which prospective candidates had to interview Master Teachers about their careers and the paths that brought them there, as well as book talks
and signings featuring a well-known *New York Times* bestselling author. While both of these endeavors were successful in recruiting candidates, program goals and local staffing needs emphasized the need for persistence and ingenuity in order to expand the candidate pool. Consequently, one of the introductory graduate education courses was re-worked to accommodate undergraduates as a “community service learning” course. As such, students would be placed with a Master Teacher for a minimum of 110 hours for the semester while meeting to discuss their experiences and assigned readings as part of this graduate reading seminar. The course would count towards both their Bachelor’s degree and their teaching credential. This “2 for 1” combination appealed to several students as increased enrollment for this course over the next couple of semesters indicated. It then seemed reasonable to delineate explicitly how undergraduates could begin some of the requirements for their teaching credential while concurrently completing their undergraduate requirements as shown in the following illustration.

**Figure 2: TAP’s Apprenticeship Pathway**

[Diagram of Apprenticeship Pathway]

This redesigned alternative ensured that cognitive, practical and moral apprenticeships are interwoven throughout all courses and field experiences with ample opportunities for candidates to reflect on their experiences and their emergent practice.

**COGNITIVE APPRENTICESHIP**

The learning of facts, concepts, principles and strategies can begin with coursework in the candidate’s junior year and is threaded in coursework and clinical experiences throughout the program. Professional standards as delineated in the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP) are incorporated in every course and program assessment. Core courses were designed to develop a professional knowledge base across interrelated and co-dependent strands. The courses cover a variety of topics including but not limited to Curriculum, Instruction and Pedagogical Strategies, Social, Cultural, Psychological and Developmental Foundations, Language and Literacy, and Clinical/Field Experiences with Practicum Coursework.
A new course, Urban Sociolinguistics: The Power of Language and the Language of Power, addresses language and literacy as well as cultural, social and developmental foundations and was introduced in spring, 2013. Using the work of notable sociolinguists (e.g., John Baugh, John Rickford, Geneva Smitherman and H. Samy Alim, to name a few), combined with research conducted on effective bilingual programs (Thomas and Collier, 2013), apprentices experienced culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994) along with tenets of Banks’ transformative multiculturalism (1996) in practical application through their field experiences. Their observation notes and journal reflections indicated their understanding of these concepts as they relate to urban students, both English dominant and English Learners, in authentic contexts. While still too early to know the full impact of this experiential course, initial indications via student lesson plans and demonstration lessons suggest that they grasp the overall meaning and application of culturally relevant teaching, as well as the transferability of effective practice in bilingual education to emergent use of bidialectal education in urban classrooms.

Practical Apprenticeship

The practical apprenticeship for the learning of skills, techniques, practices, and protocols was introduced in the Summer Bridge laboratory school in 2013. This pre-apprenticeship enrichment program for up to 60 high school students on a small university’s campus in 2013 has since grown to serve over 270 middle and senior high school students over a 3-week period, thereby providing 20 aspiring new teachers (paid Instructional Assistants) with the opportunity to plan and teach mini-lessons under the guidance of selected Master Teachers each year. Project-based curricula aligned with the common core standards are co-constructed and later supported throughout the summer with field experiences for both high school students and these emergent pre-apprentice Instructional Assistants.

During the Summer Bridge program, Apprentices and Pre-apprentices undergo daily de-briefings to discuss the days’ lessons, student achievement/growth, and plans for the subsequent day’s lessons. While the summer school experience does not replace the year-long apprenticeship, it does provide an abbreviated ‘student teacher/resident apprenticeship’ experience prior to the candidate’s placement as an intern/Teacher of Record. Each candidate is then interviewed and assessed at the end of the Summer Bridge program to ensure readiness for intern responsibilities. Whether they are placed as interns or apprentices during the academic year, all of these candidates have the coaching and mentoring support of a TAP Master-Mentor Teacher.

During the academic year apprenticeship, candidates work under the close guidance of an experienced master/mentor teacher four days a week, devoting two evenings every other week to rigorous coursework and seminars in the credential program, as well as two to three afternoons weekly on coursework in their major or minor undergraduate subject area. This combination helps Apprentices to link classroom experience with the latest in education theory and research, all within the contexts of local community and State standards for their discipline and grade level.

While they are completing coursework in their undergraduate majors, Apprentices are concurrently enrolled in support practicum courses with university faculty and supervisors so that links between theory and practice are reflectively dissected and analyzed. As coursework helps to inform and frame their clinical experiences, they move slowly through their residency from student-observer who co-plans and occasionally co-teaches with the master/mentor to a position of graduated responsibility in which they solo teach a unit of their own design. This apprenticeship placement concurrently provides initial insights on student-Apprentices’ early understandings and teaching skills for university faculty and supervisors so that the candidates’ Internship field placement and coursework can be strategically constructed for maximum effectiveness.
TAP’s unique blend of theory and practice, combined with an emphasis on collaborative learning and peer support, gives TAP Apprentices a field-tested foundation for success in the urban classroom. By the time TAP graduates become teachers of record – even as interns – they already have experience in schools, an understanding of the challenges that lie ahead and an ever-expanding support network of fellow educators.

Moral Apprenticeship

The moral apprenticeship for the learning of values and norms, and for the development of a proper professional identity is reflected in the credential program’s commitment to social justice in working with diverse learners so that candidates complete their K-12 schooling equally prepared for employment and postsecondary study. This means that graduating teachers are expected to know their students and subject matter well enough to place their students’ learning needs above mandates to “get through the book”, a key understanding and cornerstone to moral growth in an increasingly challenging profession that values discreet test scores over authentic demonstrations of knowledge and skill.

This fundamental moral understanding is modeled the Apprenticeship experience. As stated earlier, many of the targeted student populations are the first in their families to attend college, come from a variety of culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and rely significantly on financial aid to support their academic efforts. Faculty members within the program often discuss the under-preparedness of these students for university-level scholarship, and yet habitually seek to address this lack of preparation with scaffolding supports by providing course assignments that are intrinsically constructivist in nature (Vygotsky, 1972; Bruner, 1974). Education faculty model the same types of supports by encouraging candidates to submit work early for extensive feedback and then giving the candidates opportunities to revise their work based on their newfound and deeper understandings.

TAP maintains a culture of high expectations for student achievement rooted in the belief that all students can and will achieve to high levels – if they are given ample and patient opportunities for incremental growth and revision of their work for redemption. Just as the larger educational community expects K-12 teachers to teach their students in ways that facilitate multiple years of growth within a short time when those students are performing below grade level, the TAP community holds itself accountable for ensuring that every TAP graduate has a sound liberal arts education regardless of the skills and knowledge with which s/he began undergraduate study. These moral tenets comprise the totality of the Teaching Apprenticeship Program.

REFERENCES


