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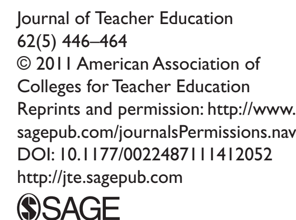

Student Teaching for a *Specialized* View of Professional Practice? Opportunities to Learn in and for Urban, High-Needs Schools

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Abstract

This article presents findings from a qualitative study of first-year elementary teachers who assessed the strengths and weaknesses of their preservice student teaching experiences vis-à-vis their inservice realities. Specifically, the study explores opportunities to learn across student teaching placements and analyzes the degree to which placements present participants with equitable opportunities to build a specialized view of professional practice—one that can support them to enact in urban, high-needs schools the kind of practices that research suggests are crucial to the academic success of historically underserved students. Findings highlight the importance of providing preservice teachers with examples of "what's possible" in the face of tightly regulated, accountability-driven policies. The authors conclude with suggestions for teacher educators concerning the reorganization of student teaching and the strategic mediation of preservice teachers' learning to ensure that all preservice teachers receive equitable opportunities to learn in and through their placements in the field.

Keywords

student teaching, urban teacher education, equity, field experiences, teacher learning

Several recent volumes synthesize the research on learning to teach, describe effective programs and methods, and lay out theoretical frameworks on which teacher education ought to be based (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Across this literature, student teaching—also referred to as clinical experience or teaching practicum—emerges as an almost universal component of university-based teacher education programs (TEPs). Indeed, student teaching is widely assumed to provide preservice teachers (PSTs) with meaningful opportunities to learn. Yet student teaching remains a "black box"; little is known about how student teaching enables (or constrains) PST learning, and even less is known about how TEPs use student teaching to cultivate a knowledge base that is specifically applicable to teaching in urban, high-needs schools, where the need for well-prepared teachers is arguably greatest.[1]

This manuscript reports on a study that aims to open up this "black box" and generate insights about student teaching's contributions to PST learning—insights that can hopefully assist teacher educators as they select placements, structure activities, and otherwise support PSTs' field-based learning. This research finds roots in authentic problems of practice, especially in our struggles to maximize PST learning despite prevailing conditions—for example, stringent instructional mandates (e.g., Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen, & Palma, 2004) and disproportionate numbers of new and/or uncertified teachers (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003)—in the schools where our PSTs student teach.

Such research takes on added meaning during an historical moment characterized by popular outcry about educational inequity; widespread belief in teacher quality as the core lever for improved student achievement; tenuous debate about how to define, ensure, and reward quality teaching; and a policy climate marked by sweeping curricular reform, unprecedented scrutiny of schools' technical core, and expanding market-based initiatives that seek to privatize public education and deregulate teacher preparation. Against this backdrop, university-based TEPs are being pushed to demonstrate their contribution to educational outcomes. Now more than ever, coming to greater clarity about the specific contributions of student teaching to preservice learning and inservice teaching represents an important line of inquiry.

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Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

Considerable research suggests that preparing teachers for urban, high-needs schools must involve coursework and field experiences that explicitly build PSTs' multicultural capacities and equity-oriented knowledge (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 1991a; Gay & Howard, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). A subset of this literature explores empirically the role of urban field placements in the development of such knowledge. Among those articles, most predominantly conceptualize PST learning as belief/attitude change, often viewing student teaching as an immersion experience through which PSTs can develop the self-efficacy (e.g., Knoblauch & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2008; Rushton, 2000, 2003), motivation and commitment (e.g., Wiggins & Follo, 1999; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007), and cultural competence (e.g., Fry & McKinney, 1997; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2006) deemed necessary to teach in urban, high-needs schools. Some also suggest that urban student teaching experiences can contribute to PSTs' opinions about or dispositions toward particular instructional approaches (e.g., Proctor, Rentz, & Jackson, 2001; Settlage, Southerland, Smith, & Ceglie, 2009). In turn, many attempt to capture—often comparing pre– and post–student teaching survey data—shifts in PSTs' beliefs/attitudes along these various dimensions (e.g., Fry & McKinney, 1997; Proctor et al., 2001; Wiggins & Follo, 1999; Wiggins et al., 2007).

Taken together, these studies suggest the generative potential of situating field placements in urban schools. Still, because they operate primarily on the assumption that PSTs learn by spending mostly unmediated—by teacher educators—time in urban schools and with the students therein (e.g., Fry & McKinney, 1997; Rushton, 2000, 2003; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2006; Weiner, 1990; Weisman & Hansen, 2008), these studies generally provide few insights about how specific placement opportunities contribute to changes in PSTs' beliefs/attitudes and how those beliefs/attitudes manifest in actual teaching practice.

A smaller group of related articles explore student teaching's contribution to identity development more broadly. Nearly 20 years ago, for example, Cochran-Smith (1991b) argued that student teaching in and for urban, high-needs schools ought to provide PSTs with opportunities to "teach against the grain"—to develop critical inquiry skills and reform-mindedness—under the mentorship of cooperating teachers (CTs) who struggle themselves to transform classrooms and schools. Since then, empirical investigations have attempted to connect PSTs' developing identities as antiracist and equity-minded educators to their experiences observing and interacting with CTs (e.g., LaBoskey & Richert, 2002), advocating for youth in K-12 placements (e.g., Lane, Parachini, & Isken, 2003) and/or reflecting critically on how issues of race, racism, and racial privilege manifest in their placements and practice teaching (e.g., Buehler, Gere, Dallivas, & Haviland, 2009). Such articles suggest student teaching's potential to shape how PSTs think about teaching and themselves; yet with few exceptions (e.g., Buehler et al., 2009), these articles, too, offer relatively limited evidence of the connections between *what* PSTs come to believe and *how* they practice teach when placed in urban, high-needs schools.

That said, some studies—limited in number relative to those examining belief/attitude change and identity development—do focus more concertedly on how teaching practice develops in and through student teaching in urban, high-needs settings (e.g., Brock, Moore, & Parks, 2007; Lloyd, 2007; Luft, Bragg, & Peters, 1999; Mason, 1999; Parks, 2008). These begin to illuminate the complex negotiations that ensue when PSTs attempt to put TEP-espoused theories and pedagogies into practice in K-12 schools where norms and mandates may present obstacles. Lloyd (2007), for example, captured the complexity of one PST's efforts to instantiate constructivist math instruction in the face of the prevailing skills-based instruction in her placement. Others document PSTs' difficulties in getting to know K-12 students *as learners* and leveraging that knowledge to facilitate learning (Brock et al., 2007; Luft et al., 1999) as well as PSTs' difficulties balancing pedagogical and management concerns while practice teaching in urban, high-needs placements (Mason, 1999). Although some studies implicitly reference the increased role of federal and state regulation in K-12 schools (e.g., Lloyd, 2007), few explicitly address how such policies shape PSTs' opportunities to learn (Anderson & Stillman, 2010, in press; Margolis, 2006). Thus, although extant literature offers some documentation of PSTs' student teaching experiences in contemporary urban, high-needs schools, we still know relatively little about how context shapes PSTs' opportunities to learn and even less about what PSTs actually learn, and how, from placements.

With these gaps in mind, the study detailed below explores opportunities to learn within and across student teaching placements, situates placements in the broader policy context, and analyzes the degree to which placement experiences present equitable opportunities for PSTs to build a *specialized* knowledge base (Anderson & Stillman, 2010)—one that can support them to enact in urban, high-needs schools the kind of responsive, learner-centered practices that research suggests are crucial to the academic success of historically underserved students. Given limited empirical investigations of this sort and our interest in exploring inductively the relationship between contextual factors and opportunities for PST learning, we anchor this exploratory qualitative study with the following research questions: What opportunities to learn do first-year teachers report having experienced as student teachers in urban, high-needs schools? How do opportunities vary across placements and with what implications for PST learning?

Method

At the time of the study, our 11 participants were completing the second year of a two-year specialized TEP in a large metropolitan area where public school "failure," particularly in high-poverty neighborhoods, is pervasive. In response, the TEP's curriculum aims to address structural inequities and equip PSTs with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that research suggests teachers need to effectively serve historically marginalized students and to advance educational equity (e.g., Au, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999).[2] During the first year of the TEP, PSTs complete courses, classroom observations, and student teaching, and, in so doing, earn preliminary teaching credentials. In accordance with program goals, faculty strive to situate all first-year field experiences, including student teaching, in urban, high-needs schools with CTs whose philosophies and practices cohere with those espoused by the TEP.[3] During the TEP's second year, PSTs participate in a weekly seminar and complete master's theses, while also serving as full-time teachers in local public schools and receiving classroom visits from a field supervisor roughly every third week.

This study enrolled participants as they were completing the TEP's second year *and* their first year of teaching; thus, participants were not only still involved in their TEP but also immersed in urban, high-needs schools as full-time teachers. Consequently, they straddled a generative boundary between preservice and inservice practice and—in our view—were uniquely poised (a) to reflect on the degree to which the prior year's student teaching placements had presented opportunities to develop knowledge that was applicable to the contexts within which they now taught and (b) to draw connections between their opportunities to learn as student teachers and their strengths and struggles as first-year teachers.

Following the tenets of grounded theory, our sampling approach privileged conceptual concerns over representativeness (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as we aimed to uncover the processes, activities, and events that characterized in participants' placements (Creswell, 2007). Although small and drawn from a specialized population, this study's sample enables exploration of the relationship between placement features and opportunities to learn from the point of view of participants who entered teacher education with commitments to teach in urban, high-needs schools. Indeed, and perhaps not surprising, given the TEP's explicit "equity-minded" mission and commitment, all participants reported having matriculated with an understanding that their preparation would focus on meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students and with an expectation that their field placements would occur exclusively in nearby urban, high-needs schools.

In addition, although entirely female, the sample reflects the kind of diversity for which scholars have clamored (Sleeter & Thao, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Participants include "typical" teacher candidates (i.e., young, White, from middle-class suburban backgrounds) like Elisa, Gretchen, and Raye, who all reported having attended "progressive" elementary schools and private undergraduate institutions, as well as teacher candidates who more closely reflect the demographic profile of local public school students and who, in some cases, entered the profession with the express intent to serve students from their own communities. Indeed, seven participants were bilingual or trilingual—most having been English learners (ELs) themselves as K-12 public school students. Some reported having come to the United States as K-12 students and being the first in their families to attend college (e.g., Karina), having grown up "in a very similar setting to my students" (e.g., Cristina), having learned from lived experience and undergraduate studies about "structural inequality" (e.g., Juliana), and/or having experienced early schooling in ways that fueled their commitments "to provide each child with the necessary tools to develop academic abilities and enact agency as a member of society" and "to empower ELs," specifically (e.g., Mireya). To this end, six earned bilingual credentials, the highest level of state certification for those serving ELs, during their first year in the TEP.

In keeping with the TEP's commitments and their own, each participant's two student teaching placements—usually one primary and one upper elementary—were situated in urban, high-needs schools serving high numbers of ELs, students of color, and low-income students.[4] Across the TEP and the sample, initial placements emphasized observation and participation, second placements incorporated significantly more practice teaching, and all placements included visits from a university field supervisor every second or third week. Of participants' 22 total placements, all took place in schools labeled "low performing" due to standardized test scores and therefore eligible for or already subject to state intervention.[5] Additional aspects of contextual variation, evident in Table 1, also impacted participants' opportunities to learn. For example, the six participants earning bilingual credentials were placed in at least one bilingual or sheltered English instruction (SEI) classroom; others completed placements in gifted and talented (GATE) and/or traditional English-only (EO) classrooms.[6] Concerning first-year teaching assignments, all secured employment in urban, high-needs elementary schools, many in close proximity to their student teaching placement sites.

The study commenced with the creation of participant profiles, which were developed in consultation with participants' culminating master's projects as well as notes taken during classroom observations of participants as first-year teachers. Profiles offered details concerning participants' backgrounds and first-year experiences—grades they taught, challenges they faced, and issues of interest and concern to them. Profiles were intended primarily to provide some shared understanding about who participants were, given

Table 1. Demographics and Placements

Name	Race/ethnicity	Placement 1	Placement 2	First-year teaching
Cristina	Latina	Second grade	Kindergarten, bilingual	Second grade
Elisa	White	Third grade, GATE	First grade	Second grade
Faith	Asian	Second grade, bilingual	Third grade, SEI	First grade, bilingual
Gretchen	White	Second grade	Fourth grade	Fifth grade
Juliana	Latina	Fourth grade, bilingual	First grade, bilingual	Second grade
Karina	Latina	Fourth grade, bilingual	Second grade, SEI	First grade
Mireya	Latina	First grade, bilingual	Fourth grade	First grade
Pilar	Latina	Third grade	Second grade, bilingual	Second grade
Raye	White	Fourth grade	First grade	Second grade
Suzi	Asian	Fifth grade, bilingual	Second grade, SEI	Fourth grade
Talia	Middle Eastern	Second grade	Fourth grade	Second grade

Note: GATE = gifted and talented; SEI = sheltered English instruction.

that only one author worked with them prior to the study.[7] Semistructured, audiotaped, 60- to 120-min interviews were then conducted as participants were completing their first year as teachers and their second (final) year in the TEP. Interviews asked participants to provide examples of what and how they had learned from student teaching the prior year and pressed them to emphasize opportunities (or constraints) that they thought contributed to (or detracted from) their preparation to teach in high-needs schools.

Analysis was "joint" and "interpretive" (Wasser & Bresler, 1996). First, we engaged in open coding, during which we analyzed data inductively, noted core themes, and honed in on accounts of what participants experienced in and learned from their respective placements (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We then grouped and condensed open codes into axial codes focused on "conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). These included emergent codes and some codes more accurately termed a priori, as we had applied them in prior analyses and verified through open and axial coding their utility here.[8] While coding, we wrote analytic memos and conducted member checks to solicit participant feedback. Throughout, we sought to explore systematically how participants made sense of their own student teaching experiences as well as what their comments suggested about the nature and content of their learning.

Although the analysis below primarily focuses on and presents themes and counts drawn from interview data, we incorporate references to other sources when applicable and/or necessary to substantiate claims. For example, we drew across all possible sources when situating student teaching placements in relation to one another according to various characteristics (e.g., grade level, language program, CT philosophy, etc.). Specifically, we focused first on interview data and then looked to the aforementioned profiles and their contributing documents (i.e., master's theses and observation notes) as well as publicly available data sources, to triangulate and extend interview content. For example, both Suzi and Karina recounted in interviews having experienced placements with CTs who practiced in ways that reflected TEP-espoused philosophies and pedagogies; reflections embedded in their master's theses and comments captured in observation notes corroborated these claims and also offered additional detail (e.g., new examples of CT practice and CT commentary) that served to further distinguish these placements from others and from one another. We also looked to publicly available data sources to explore with more accuracy the relationship between interview data and placements' demographic profiles and performance histories. Ultimately, this process led to the identification of two intersecting axes of influence that appeared to structure participants' opportunities to learn in consequential ways. The distribution of placements along these axes features prominently in subsequent sections.

Although participants and their respective placements offer conceptual richness, our research design presents several limitations. As with much small-scale, qualitative inquiry, ours holds the potential to generalize to theory; however, our decision to take a grounded approach, enroll a small sample, and explore the experiences of those attending a specialized TEP otherwise limit the generalizability of findings. For example, although sample demographics represent a mix of "typical" (i.e., monolingual White females from middle-class backgrounds) and more diverse PSTs (i.e., bilingual Latina and Asian females from working class and/or first- and second-generation immigrant families), the sample nevertheless fails to include, for example, male and/or Black participants and is otherwise limited by small size. In addition, our emphasis on retrospective and mainly self-reported data limits our capacity to make claims about participants' actual learning. Likewise, focusing exclusively on first-year teachers represents not only an opportunity (explained above) but also a limitation, given participants' likely location along the learning-to-teach continuum (Feiman-Nemser, 2001); indeed, it is entirely possible that participants will come to view student teaching—and what they learned from

it—differently over time. Finally, and as referenced in greater detail below, we find it notable that participants rarely mentioned university-based field supervisors; yet, we also realize that this may be, in part, an artifact of our open-ended protocol, which did not explicitly ask participants to talk about field supervisors (or other support providers). It remains unknown what participants might have shared had they been asked such questions directly. Thus, we consider this study exploratory and note the importance of investigating, with multiple methods and varied emphases, student teaching's contribution during and beyond participants' first year in the classroom. Still, as our analysis and discussion argue, we stand to learn much even from this small, specialized sample.

Findings

At the most basic level of analysis, we found that all participants repeatedly praised student teaching for nurturing emerging professional identities and conferring new self-confidence when it came to "being the teacher in the room" (e.g., "I learned how to be comfortable in the space of a classroom . . . in front of the children in this role as a teacher"). They also credited student teaching with approximating what employment would be like in an urban, high-needs school, whether that approximation served as "an eye-opener" (Raye) for those who entered teacher education with limited experience concerning "what [my] TEP was trying to solve and address" or whether that approximation confirmed prior experiences for those who attended and/or worked previously in urban schools and for whom conditions were therefore "not a shocker" (Juliana).

Ensuing sections move beyond surface satisfactions to address research questions sequentially. Structuring analysis this way not only privileges clarity and brevity but also potentially oversimplifies findings' interconnectedness. Indeed, what participants learned from student teaching depended on the varied opportunities presented by their placements. Keeping this in mind, we use the question-by-question reporting approach to build a nuanced discussion.

Opportunities to Learn

In this section, we present findings in relation to our first question: What opportunities to learn do first-year teachers report having experienced as student teachers in urban, high-needs schools? Specifically we address three core strands of opportunity reportedly experienced by participants. These include opportunities to learn about curriculum and content; opportunities to see and participate in, but usually not plan for, "what's possible"; and opportunities to struggle with and for youth. Although we treat themes as mostly distinct, we acknowledge here and throughout that they are often intertwined in practice.

Opportunities to learn about content and curriculum. Although all participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to student teach in urban, high-needs contexts, their comments suggest that most placement experiences focused almost exclusively on math and literacy and that CTs tended to teach those content areas in isolation from one another. Only four placements reportedly offered opportunities to see some preparation for and/or instruction in science and social studies. Otherwise, participants' descriptions and examples of placement practice—whether observed or enacted by participants themselves—referenced only math and literacy. In a few cases, these tendencies appeared to contribute to participants' tendencies to emphasize mandated and tested content and to view—even define—content *areas* in relation to parameters set by mandated *programs*, rather than the broader domains of knowledge that those programs hypothetically sought to address. This was especially so for Talia and Faith, both of whom described placements with highly scripted instruction and both of whom tended to answer questions about content area teaching in ways that privileged the perspectives of mandated programs. For example, when asked to describe students in her placements, Faith explained, "They were able to read, not perfectly, but they were all decoding and blending . . . that's the basic foundation to reading"—a comment echoing the phonics-driven definition of reading advanced by the programs mandated in her placements more than the definition of reading, grounded in socio-constructivism and critical pedagogy, advanced by the TEP.

Participants' comments also suggest that, in the face of policy constraints, CTs tended to either implement mandated curricula with fidelity (nine placements) or ignore mandated curricula altogether (four placements). Participants argued that, although observing CTs engage in the former approach familiarized them with curricula that they later encountered in their own classrooms and exposed them to the disengagement that often accompanied scripted teaching, observations alone did not help them understand how they could strategically adapt mandated curricula to meet students' needs authentically, responsively, and engagingly. Regarding the latter approach, participants commented that they valued observing and practicing alternative teaching practices but wished CTs had familiarized them more thoroughly with mandated curricula (which they eventually had to teach) and explicitly articulated how and why the content and instruction they offered instead better met their students' needs.

Alternatively, in seven placements, CTs neither ignored nor implemented mandated curricula with fidelity. Instead, they described more "creative" uses of curriculum that ranged from selecting components of mandated programs and incorporating them into an otherwise teacher-generated curriculum (e.g., Pilar: "He would take bits and pieces and he would just teach his own curriculum"), to eliminating components deemed ineffective (e.g., Karina: "She said [that mandated component] is the most boring thing and most dreadful thing that you can put your kids through, so

she wouldn't do it . . . because it's so teacher centered"), to supplementing with additional content and pedagogies to offset perceived shortcomings of mandated curricula. Mireya, for example, recounted how one CT used Writer's Workshop to "support students . . . to develop their own expository text in a first grade classroom," something that Mireya contrasted with what was offered:

> Within the mandated curriculum . . . you never get a chance to write books. You never get a chance to really have students understand what an expository text is, what elements it has, and why is it different than a narrative?

Although participants in these placements praised them for offering opportunities to see and sometimes practice more "creative"—what we might call adaptive—uses of curriculum, no participant could elaborate with great detail concerning the thinking *and* planning behind CTs' approaches nor the learning goals that CTs hoped their creativity would facilitate. For example, Pilar voiced appreciation for her CT's "creativity" but nevertheless lamented having emerged from student teaching, still confused about *how* to be creative within constraints. She explained,

> I had ideas about what I wanted to do. I wanted to do a lot of writing . . . [and] different stories. But I wasn't sure when I could bring it in . . . [or] if the literacy coach was going to come and was not going to be ok with it . . . So I had a challenging time supplementing the [mandated] program or implementing things that I wanted to implement in addition.

In part, she attributed this to the fact that she "never really understood" how her CT came to develop "his own curriculum" nor how he determined which "bits and pieces" of the mandated program to include. Eight others made similar claims and, like Pilar, implicitly or explicitly faulted student teaching for failing to provide the "supplementing" skills (Pilar) and "political savvy" (Gretchen) they saw as essential to their work as first-year teachers.

Interestingly, the very language embedded in participants' critiques reflects some problematic learnings that student teaching conferred or confirmed. For example, comments repeated across interviews suggest that placements encouraged eight participants to view curricular adaptation through the lens of "supplementing" rather than, for example, integrating or transforming. These participants repeatedly framed adaptations as supplementary (e.g., conducting a "related read-aloud," "adding stories," or inserting opportunities for students to "think-pair-share," "do it in small groups," or "do role-plays") in ways that revealed limited understanding of more comprehensive approaches to curriculum modification; they also discussed the function of these supplements as enhancing engagement and cultural relevance in predominantly superficial ways (e.g., "little things that you do to bring in their cultures"). Supplements were never discussed in relation to academic content and rigor, only in relation to affective aspects of schooling (e.g., "making it fun, making it engaging," "drawing in their interests," "getting them hooked," "making that quick connection to their lives or whatever," doing "the script . . . with your own intonation, with your own pizzazz," etc.). This was true even among participants who felt they had experienced some latitude to practice teach in TEP-coherent ways.

Cristina, for example, could describe times when she had "successfully" put into practice things she had learned in her TEP. In one placement, she engaged second graders in constructing a mural that was linked by its content—the role of camouflage in diverse ecosystems—to the mandated literacy unit being taught by her CT; in another, she engaged kindergarteners, who were learning about addition and subtraction, in a role-play where they counted together as they stepped on and off an imaginary bus. Yet data indicate that no one in either placement pressed Cristina to connect these activities to broader instructional goals, recognize them as potential starting points for extended interactions around thematic content, or identify where and how they reflected theoretical propositions and suppositions. Cristina reported that although both CTs applauded her efforts, "we talked about it minutely" in one placement and "to sit down and plan" was "tough" in the other. Although Cristina felt proud of her "successes," neither she nor most other participants appeared to have been supported during student teaching to understand how discrete activities like these might be embedded within rigorous integrated units or how they might connect to broader learning goals (e.g., Faith: "My CT gave a lot of space for me to grow, but he didn't really give me explicit feedback").

Opportunities to see and participate in, but usually not plan for "what's possible." Whatever the limitations, without exception, the nine participants who student taught with at least one CT, who reportedly expressed and enacted TEP-coherent philosophies and pedagogies, reported learning more from student teaching and applying more of what they learned in their work as first-year teachers. In particular, participants claimed that these placements provided images of "what's possible," which in turn anchored them when they faced first-year struggles. Suzi, for example, explained how she clung to memories of CTs and drew on those memories throughout her first year as proof of "the possibilities"—in this case, maintaining that if second graders could achieve a high level of independence in her former CT's classroom, then it was her responsibility to make that possible for her fourth graders as well, rather than allowing herself to lower her expectations or view students' "failures" as their own. As she put it, "Because it was so positive . . . I could hold onto the happy thoughts of student teaching to get me through . . . I *can* get there. I just have to get through this first." Raye, too, noted that whenever she "lost that confidence" during her first year, she remembered "that it was possible. I kept

thinking back to [my CT's] class." And yet, like three others, both reported that even when they were able to draw on images of "what's possible," they often felt uninformed about how to actualize possibilities in their classrooms: "Not realizing how to develop it because it was already there when I walked in" (Raye) and "it was hard for me to understand what they did to get there because . . . already it was a very well-oiled machine" (Suzi).

Indeed, all participants—whether in more or less TEP-coherent placements—reported not having had much opportunity to see CTs plan or plan with them. In fact, three even seemed to emerge having learned that experienced teachers tend not to plan (e.g., Raye: "I never planned with either CT, which is something I also wish I could have done. But it's like the experienced teachers don't really plan it seems like or a lot of them"). Despite the TEP's position to the contrary, one participant, in particular, came to view this tendency as mostly unproblematic and a matter of "style" (e.g., "That's not my teaching style. I need to have a backup plan . . . Whereas he would come in and [say] 'we're going to do this . . .' It was spontaneous for him and it worked but that's not the type of person that I am"). Related to this, four participants who recounted having "planned" with CTs who implemented mandated and paced curriculum with fidelity seemed to emerge with the impression that following a script was the same as, or sufficient replacement for, comprehensive unit and lesson planning (e.g., Faith: "She gave me a copy of her teacher book and we'd just go through and see what lessons I could do that week . . . everything that was on the pacing plan . . . whatever was in the book, we had to do").

Even the nine participants who reported having had some opportunities to practice teach in TEP-coherent ways were not necessarily supported to connect discrete successes to broader norms around professionalism in teaching, conscientious planning, or formative assessment. Juliana, for example, explained that even when she was able to witness her CT's TEP-coherent practices, "I didn't really get a chance to talk to her that much . . . I felt like I was imposing on her at times." Thus, Juliana felt she had a good sense of what sound pedagogical practice and corollary student engagement and achievement looked like but little sense of how to plan for and enact such practice herself. In her words, she left student teaching "not knowing what it meant to *do* social justice or not knowing what it meant to *do* group activities . . . I know that's the best thing to do . . . How do I do it?"

Still, even though they did not have access to CTs who pulled back the curtain on their backstage labor, participants who described TEP-coherent placements expressed appreciation for the opportunities to see CTs' TEP-coherent frontstage work, even if they were left to puzzle about how to enact similar practices. As Raye put it, "Without the model, you don't even know where you want to go. At least with the model you know where you want to go. You just have to figure out for yourself how to get there." In this sense, memories of TEP-coherent models—even those who never revealed their backstage labor—seemed to help participants maintain hope and high expectations for themselves and their students, despite the distance participants recognized between what they wanted to see in their teaching and what they were able to instantiate as first-year teachers.

Opportunities to struggle with and for youth. In six instances, participants described placements with CTs who communicated a particularly high degree of urgency and "ideological clarity" (Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000) about their work as educators of historically underserved students, and who advocated on behalf of students and challenged deficit assumptions about their capacities to learn. Alternatively, in two cases, participants recounted placements with CTs who seemed to lack the commitment or skill to respectfully meet even students' most basic needs. To varying degrees, both appeared to present meaningful opportunities for PSTs to practice struggling on behalf of youth.

The former classrooms were places where CTs reportedly made evident their work with families and their efforts to construct responsive learning experiences for students. From these six CTs, participants reported learning about the relationship between equity-minded professional identity and redressing structural inequity. Karina, for example, talked about "that passion" she saw in her two placements, where CTs "really worked on having students work together, participating and presenting . . . would talk to the parents . . . brought in extra materials . . . really wanted to connect everything to the students." In their examples, Karina saw how one's sense of ideological clarity could inform one's pedagogy:

> Having the kids not just learn how to read and write but developing them as social beings who should be prepared to face what's coming . . . because you know how it is, the system . . . they *have* to know how to speak up and say whenever they're not being offered what they're supposed to be offered.

Mireya, too, described one of her CTs as "a teacher who really understands who her students can become and the potential that every student has if they are supported to use the tools they have." These placements—especially Mireya's first and Karina's second—were also the only ones wherein participants reported witnessing TEP-coherent practice in the face of tightly regulated policies *and* consistently gaining access to the backstage labor undergirding that practice.

For Mireya, this first placement held special value. It exposed her not only to a humanizing classroom context, where children were respected as cultural beings, but also to a broader professional community—a group of mostly bilingual teachers with whom Mireya's CT constructed instructional units and planned opportunities for authentic written and oral language development. Mireya contrasted that experience with her second placement with a CT whom she described as someone "who was paycheck to paycheck, who did not care about her students," who regularly commented

disrespectfully about kids and families (e.g., "If she thought they, you know, smelled bad, she called the students, the *children*, 'stinky.' It was just so degrading."), and who was frequently absent and often negligent when present in the room. For example, Mireya recalled trying to use students' time productively when, during the first week of student teaching, her CT received a realtor's call and, without a word, left the classroom to talk on her cell phone for 15 min. She summarized, "It was awful, just awful to see a teacher like that. I mean you know they exist, but you don't really *know* they exist until you see something like that." In a classroom plagued by alienation, Mireya "tried hard to make the kids understand that I really cared" and made it "my priority . . . for them to feel like they can do something with themselves, that they had that ability to succeed." Fortunately her first placement offered fodder for her second, and in just eight, end-of-the-year weeks, Mireya "was able to connect with" students and families, some who had just arrived in the United States and remained in contact with Mireya over subsequent years.

Although such denigrating placements were rare, Mireya was not the only participant to experience one. Elisa also described her second CT as someone who "didn't plan," engaged in "abusive" and "dehumanizing" practices (e.g., snapping fingers and clapping in first-grade ELs' faces when they appeared confused or answered incorrectly), and reflected—according to Elisa—the "personification of bad practice, of everything we want to avoid." In related research, others have argued that student teachers can—through example and explicit teaching—positively influence CTs' practices, thereby expanding students' opportunities to learn (Lane et al., 2003). Elisa made this very argument when she explained how she "took over" and made it her "mission" to improve her CT's practice: "It wasn't really about my student teaching any more. It was about how to get her to maybe do some of the things that I was doing with the students." We, too, acknowledge the potential for student teaching, especially if well structured and well supported, to serve as a forum for CT development and even school renewal, but we still question—as we discuss in depth below—the value of Mireya's and Elisa's experiences as opportunities to learn about facilitating student learning. That said, we recognize that these placements proved deeply meaningful as opportunities to engage as advocates, and we thus acknowledge that, whether struggling *with* or *against* CTs, opportunities to practice struggling on behalf of youth offered learning potential, however problematic.

We also recognize that Mireya and Elisa worked in different ways to disrupt the damage they saw being done to students. Elisa focused primarily on influencing her CT's practice. Mireya did the same but also worked to establish relationships with students and families—an approach perhaps not unrelated to her identity as a Spanish speaker and her background as an EL, who had entered U.S. schools, hearing only "English, a language to which I had never been exposed" and who remembered wondering, "How would I survive in this new, strange environment where I did not belong?" As we did not collect extensive background information from participants, we cannot examine with depth how they brought their cultural and experiential resources to bear on their placement experiences; nevertheless, research suggests that such resources hold powerful sway over the kind of teachers PSTs become (e.g., Bullough, 1992; Olsen, 2008). Empirical accounts—alongside tenets of sociocultural learning theory—likewise suggest that being more knowledgeable about the resources PSTs bring into teacher education would enable teacher educators to support PSTs more effectively as learners in and beyond their student teaching placements.

Variation in Opportunities to Learn

In this section, we address our second research question: How do opportunities vary across placements and with what implications for PST learning? Specifically, we find that they varied along two core dimensions. One dimension pertained primarily to placements' locations within the broader policy context—specifically the degree to which they were subject/host to "tight–tight" ecological conditions (i.e., tight reforms, tightly monitored; Gutiérrez, 2006). The other dimension hinged on CTs' pedagogical and professional practices, and the degree to which those cohered with the vision of teaching espoused by participants' TEP. Because these dimensions are not entirely unrelated, they are represented as intersecting axes in Figure 1. Moving from left to right along Figure 1's horizontal axis, imagine a range of CT philosophies, pedagogies, and professional practices that grow in their degree of alignment with those espoused by participants' TEP (e.g., culturally and community-responsive pedagogies; student-centered, constructivist curricula; authentic formative and summative assessment; etc.). As an example, imagine placements at the far left reflecting more phonics-driven, functionalist views of reading and teacher-centered, skill-based instructional strategies, and placements at the far right reflecting more socioconstructivist, critical and balanced literacy approaches focused on having students make meaning of and with text, broadly defined.

Moving from the bottom up along Figure 1's vertical axis, imagine a spectrum of conditions that increase in scriptedness, pressure, and policing (i.e., "tight" reforms, more or less tightly regulated). Although "tight" curricular, instructional, and assessment-related reforms characterize the overall post–No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability climate in public education, "low-performing," high-needs schools—like those wherein participants student taught and secured employment—tend to experience the tightest reform-related constraints, including increased surveillance and regulation, and thus "the most restrictive educational environments" (Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 230). Yet despite the fact that all placements were situated in "low-performing" schools, PSTs

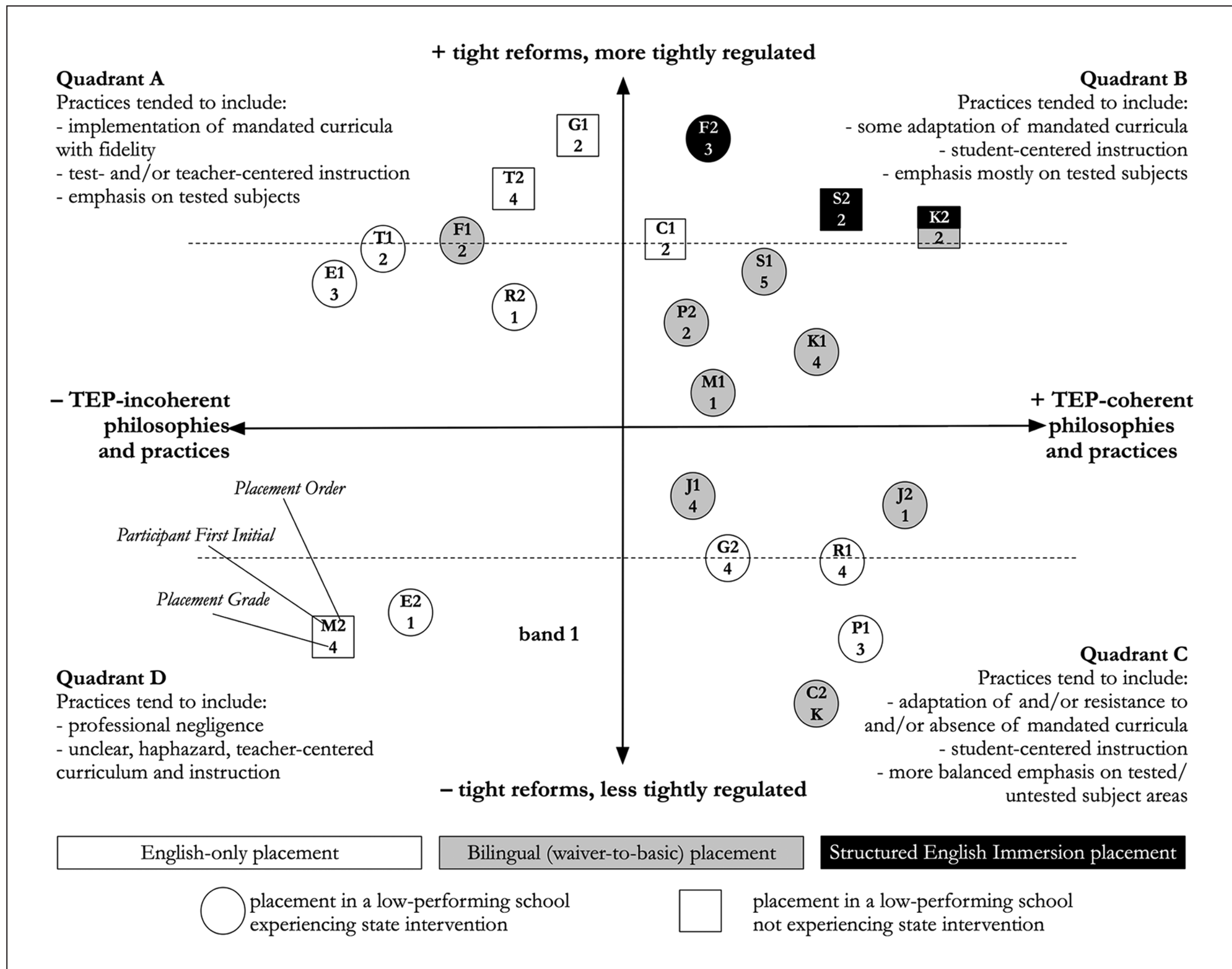

Figure 1. Intersecting axes
Note: TEP = teacher education program.

experienced tight–tight ecological conditions to varying degrees, contingent on various placement factors. For example, the least tightly regulated placement occurred in a kindergarten classroom, which was subject to the tight reform climate (i.e., the specific threat of state intervention and the general press for academic rigor in the early grades) but not subject to stringent regulation given the absence of standardized testing. Because contextual factors like these had implications for classroom climate and CTs' use of instructional time, they also had implications for PST learning, as we show below. Thus, placements' location along the vertical axis aims to depict some of this salient variation.

To situate participants' 22 placements, we first categorized placements based on where along each axis they appeared to fall; this resulted in a relatively even distribution of placements in and around Quadrants A, B, and C and occasionally in Quadrant D.[9] We then determined where placements appeared to fall in relation to one another and attempted to represent relative degree of difference within quadrants and along axes—however imperfectly—using horizontal and vertical spacing.

The resulting visual portrait illustrates some basic trends. For example, just over half of all placements emerged as more TEP-coherent than not; most were also subject to relatively tight regulation. In addition, placements tended to cluster in patterned ways contingent on grade-level, program designation (i.e., EO, bilingual, SEI, and GATE) and performance status. Moving forward, we explore these and other trends, looking more concertedly at how placement features appeared to structure participants' opportunities to learn.

Looking at distribution of placements in Figure 1, Quadrant A (more tight, less coherent) encompasses a cluster of six predominantly EO placements that tended to privilege faithful implementation of mandated programs, emphasize tested subjects, and reflect test-centered and/or teacher-centered instruction. Faith's first placement (F1-2), for example,

occurred in a school where "a couple of weeks before the actual [state] assessment . . . even second graders had to do practice tests and it was very strict, like the timing and everybody had their own dividers" and where "the principal would come by to make sure that we're doing it right." It also took place in the classroom of a CT who met Faith's request to engage students in group work by reportedly answering, "No, I'm sorry but we have to do what the book says; you have to follow it exactly like it tells you to do."

Of course, within that quadrant (or any other), such trends held true to varying degrees—hence, placements' location in relation to one another. For example, Quadrant A includes Talia's first placement (T1-2), which reflected a high degree of standardization at the school level (e.g., "everyone stayed on the same track in terms of [the scripted reading program]") and classroom level (e.g., "mostly whole group" and "really routine," where "[the CT] had really trained the kids on how to use [the mandated reading program]"). It also includes Talia's slightly more TEP-coherent second placement (T2-4), where she reported similar adherence to the mandated reading program but increased opportunities to observe math instruction that "aligned with the sociocultural approach of TEP" (e.g., "she gave children a lot of time to do group activities in math . . . to come up with a solution as a group and then present").

Some of this variation appeared related not only to CT practice but also to specific classrooms' status as likely targets for scrutiny. For example, the two least regulated placements in Quadrant A—those lowest along the vertical axis—were Raye's first-grade placement (R2-1) and Elisa's placement in a school's one-and-only GATE class (E1-3). Though situated in schools facing tight reforms and regulation, both classrooms appeared to receive a degree of curricular and instructional freedom on account of either being an untested primary grade or boasting test scores guaranteed to be the school's highest (an artifact of GATE admissions criteria). Though we would not argue these placements manifested tight–loose ecological conditions (Gutiérrez, 2006), they nevertheless represent contexts within which one might expect less stringent regulation vis-à-vis other classrooms in the same "low-performing" schools.

Whether more or less rooted in CT practice or in the degree of scrutiny facing particular classrooms, participants who completed Quadrant A placements reported experiencing few, if any, opportunities to teach in student-centered ways and being encouraged instead to use scripted materials to teach tested subjects in alignment with mandated pacing plans. Indeed, these participants were among the few whose comments—referenced earlier—suggested they emerged from student teaching having learned that (a) "experienced teachers don't really plan" (e.g., Raye) and/or (b) following a script is the same as, or sufficient replacement for, comprehensive planning (e.g., Faith and Talia).

Less frequent, but even more troubling, were Quadrant D (less tight, less coherent) placements described as "degrading" and "abusive . . . the personification of bad practice." Like those in Quadrant A, these also lacked, and extremely so, philosophical and pedagogical coherence with participants' TEP. Importantly, however, in both placements, it was CTs' unprofessionalism that seemed to account for looseness concerning accountability demands. Indeed, both Mireya and Elisa reported experiencing in these placements a degree of freedom, not because host schools were operating under tight–loose ethics but because CTs mostly ignored policy-related pressures—reportedly a product of professional negligence, rather than "principled resistance" (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). That being said, Quadrant D placements need not be sites of unprofessionalism nor abusive treatment; indeed, we can imagine conditions wherein CTs might experience minimal scrutiny (e.g., in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, GATE programs, or more affluent schools) yet might use their relative autonomy to employ more traditional, teacher-centered approaches that reflect principled and professional action even if those approaches stand largely in opposition to approaches espoused by participants' TEP.

As Figure 1 also indicates, most placements—14 of 22—emerged as more TEP-coherent than not. Without exception, participants who experienced such placements—in Quadrants B (more tight, more coherent) and/or Quadrant C (less tight, more coherent)—reported learning more from student teaching and applying more of what they learned as first-year teachers. Notably, 11 of these 14 placements took place with CTs who currently or formerly taught in bilingual programs. This trend is worth considering in light of statewide anti-immigrant sentiment and resulting "backlash pedagogies" that have often served to malign bilingual education and marginalize bilingual teachers (Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2001); it is also worth considering in light of research documenting the "critical professional practice" of teachers prepared specially to serve ELs (e.g., Stillman, 2011) and the specific role of bilingual CTs in supporting PST development (e.g., Athanases & de Oliveira, 2008). Indeed, participants who felt they *learned* the most during student teaching invariably did so in the classrooms of CTs who held credentials and expertise tailored to the populations they served and who seemed both inclined and enabled to implement curricula in less scripted, more adaptive ways.

Importantly, this did not mean that these CTs approached their work with less urgency; as mentioned previously, these CTs were among those most often cited as having communicated a high degree of ideological clarity concerning their need to provide ELs with rigorous, relevant, and responsive learning experiences. What Figure 1 helps to illuminate is the apparent connection between this explicit form of ideological clarity and the precariousness of bilingual education in the state policy climate. Juliana, for example, explained,

> With my first placement [in a bilingual classroom], [my CT] said, you know, "If you're going to teach in Spanish, you're going to do a damn good job." . . . She

> really made that explicit statement to me. She said, "Knowing that people really don't want this program around, if you're going to be a bilingual teacher, you better be like a really, really good bilingual teacher. You better know your shit."

Juliana's is but one of eight recounted examples of CTs emphasizing the urgent need for aspiring bilingual teachers to demonstrate excellence or risk jeopardizing their employment and further undermining the pedagogical integrity and survival of bilingual programming. Such examples appeared not only to make plain (and model) commitments to primary language instruction but also to socialize PSTs into notions of professionalism that were grounded in their awareness of the broader sociopolitical context.

Looking at the distribution of mostly bilingual placements to the right of the vertical axis offers additional insights about how placement features interacted to structure opportunities to learn. Starting at the base of Quadrant C (less tight, more coherent), we first see Cristina's second placement (C2-K), where she reported few constraints and numerous opportunities to practice TEP-coherent teaching; though grade level was not used in situating placements, that the least tightly regulated placement occurred in kindergarten makes intuitive sense. Moving up the axis, we then see three EO placements, all nested in schools where principals made every effort to buffer teachers from external demands that would script instruction or otherwise diminish teachers' capacity to respond authentically to students' needs.

Moving up to the middle third of the vertical axis—in the area between the dotted lines—we see a cluster of bilingual placements that were subject to tight policy conditions (i.e., antibilingual education policies, state and federal accountability mandates) but slightly less scripted, less paced, and less scrutinized curricula and instruction. Because these classrooms were part of bilingual programs that were themselves smaller subsets of schools and because their curricula were not aligned to schoolwide curricula nor to English standardized tests, they appeared to experience pressure and yet retain more curricular and instructional autonomy. This may explain why participants who experienced these placements reported witnessing and practicing more student-centered pedagogies (e.g., supporting students to make connections between academic and everyday knowledge) and strategies (e.g., pictorial input charts). Interestingly and fittingly from a conceptual perspective, we realized only after situating all placements that many bilingual placements fell along the vertical axis at a height similar to Elisa's Quadrant A placement in her "low-performing" school's one-and-only GATE class—another somewhat less regulated and more autonomous subunit.

Moving up to the top third of the vertical axis and looking across Quadrant A (more tight, less coherent) and Quadrant B (more tight, more coherent), we see a mix of EO and SEI classrooms, all of which were required to use the same mandated literacy curriculum, to which pacing plans and standardized tests were aligned. Interestingly, data indicate that these SEI placements and the single EO placement within Quadrant B were staffed by CTs who transitioned into them as bilingual programs were eliminated. Karina's second placement (K2-2), for example, shifted to SEI midyear. That her CT and other SEI teachers appeared to enact the most TEP-coherent practices under some of the most tightly regulated reform conditions is notable, particularly in relation to the majority of bilingual placements that also fell to the right of center in terms of TEP-coherent philosophy and pedagogy.

It is also notable that placements described as most tightly regulated included all but one—Mireya's Quadrant D outlier—of the placements situated in schools *not* currently targeted for state intervention. Although beyond the scope of this study, it is nevertheless worth considering what that distribution might suggest about the relationship between tight regulation, classroom instruction, and PSTs' opportunities to learn. Whatever the relationships are between, say, the scriptedness of Quadrant A, the adaptiveness of Quadrant B, and scores that exempt schools from targeted intervention, they no doubt have implications for student teacher learning and, therefore, teacher educator practice.

What this study can and does suggest is that the combination of CTs' practice and classrooms' "fit" within the broader school ecology and policy context may in part account for particularly educative conditions in some placements vis-à-vis others. Of course, this is not to suggest, for example, that all bilingual placements would reflect the tendencies outlined above. To the contrary, Faith's Quadrant A placement was quite test-centered and philosophically dissonant. Yet even with this placement in plain view, overall trends merit consideration, particularly among those who practice and study the preparation of teachers for urban, high-needs schools. These trends emerge as especially crucial given that, regardless of where their placements fell, participants' struggles as first-year teachers tended to coalesce around adapting scripted curricula—subject to critique within their TEP and central to daily practice in the tightly regulated contexts where most secured teaching positions. Indeed, their often admittedly problematic first-year attempts at "strategic compromise" (Lloyd, 2007)—what Gretchen referred to as teaching according to your philosophy "in a context that doesn't support it, with a curriculum that doesn't support it"—appeared to occur mostly in spite of, not because of, their opportunities to learn as student teachers.

The Accumulation of Opportunity

Although our analysis purposefully focused on opportunities to learn within placements, and although findings suggest that different placements offered different—and potentially inequitable—opportunities, we were also drawn to the way that opportunities appeared to accumulate differentially for participants as they moved across placements.

Table 2. Accumulation of Opportunity Across Multiple Placements

	Quadrant: Placement 1	Quadrant: Placement 2	No. of coherent placements	No. of tightly regulated placements	Opportunities mostly
Cristina	B: Second grade	C: Kindergarten bilingual	2	1	Divergent
Elisa	A: Third-grade GATE	D: First grade	0	1	Redundant
Faith	A: Second-grade bilingual	B: Third-grade SEI	1	2	Divergent
Gretchen	A: Second grade	C: Fourth grade	1	1	Divergent
Juliana	C: Fourth-grade bilingual	C: First-grade bilingual	2	0	Redundant
Karina	B: Fourth-grade bilingual	B: Second-grade SEI	2	2	Redundant
Mireya	B: First-grade bilingual	D: Fourth grade	1	1	Divergent
Pilar	C: Third grade	B: Second-grade bilingual	2	1	Divergent
Raye	C: Fourth grade	A: First grade	1	1	Divergent
Suzi	B: Fifth-grade bilingual	B: Second-grade SEI	2	2	Redundant
Talia	A: Second grade	A: Fourth grade	0	2	Redundant

Note: GATE = gifted and talented; SEI = sheltered English instruction.

As Table 2 demonstrates, for five participants, placements offered mostly redundant opportunities to learn. As described earlier, the CTs in Talia's two Quadrant A placements both tended to implement mandated curricula with fidelity. Thus, even though her placements differed in some ways, Talia's student teaching involved mostly watching and practicing the implementation of preplanned, prepaced lessons. Juliana, meanwhile, experienced two Quadrant C placements, where she saw and practiced instruction that departed in principled ways from already less scripted curricula under conditions of less stringent scrutiny (at least at the classroom level). Conversely, Suzi and Karina both experienced two Quadrant B placements and therefore saw two different CTs actively wrestling with and adapting mandated curricula under relatively tightly regulated conditions. Although their redundancy might seem ideal, Suzi noted—unsolicited—the potential for learning in/through a dissonant combination that included at least one less coherent placement. As she put it, "In a different kind of placement . . . one might be pressed to consider in a 'constructive' way, 'ok what is it that she's doing that makes it so antisocial justice? And what can I do differently?'"

Though not located in the same quadrant, Elisa's placements also represent mostly redundant opportunities, given their failure to provide examples of TEP-coherent practice—something that she herself lamented. When asked "When you think about your student teaching experience overall, what do you feel you learned from it?" she responded, "Well unfortunately I learned what not to do. But I really already knew that just instinctually, so it was just more reinforcing . . . I just never felt like I saw really awesome practice."

The remaining six participants experienced more divergent placements and yet most, regardless of their combinations, still felt insufficiently prepared to enact student-centered teaching as first-year teachers in tightly regulated contexts. Pilar, for example, voiced appreciation for her first placement in a progressive school where faculty enjoyed a high degree of curricular freedom. There she reportedly saw and practiced TEP-coherent teaching but worried that the experience was not equipping her to respond to issues that she would likely encounter in a "regular" public school. These worries only deepened during her second placement, where her CT espoused a TEP-coherent philosophy and openly rejected the mandated literacy curriculum but failed to explain or demonstrate how the instruction he offered in its place ensured robust learning. As a result, Pilar summarized, "Leaving student teaching as far as the [mandated] curriculum I felt unprepared" and attributed lingering trepidation concerning curriculum adaptation to the (mostly redundant) shortcomings of her student teaching placements.

Gretchen's placement combination differed from Pilar's, albeit with some similar implications. She deemed her first (Quadrant C) placement philosophically TEP-coherent but "not very helpful as a new teacher" because her CT, a TEP alumnus, "all but ignored the [mandated program's] book" which Gretchen had to use the next year. And although her second (Quadrant A) placement reportedly exposed her to "real" pressures (e.g., "four suits coming to watch [my CT] teach [the mandated curriculum]"), she claimed it offered few opportunities to learn about curriculum adaptation because her CT mostly responded by teaching the mandated program with fidelity. Thus, Gretchen reported never having seen a CT contend with pressure, rather than merely ignore it (her first placement) or resign to it (her second placement). Consequently, she too claimed to leave student teaching with few insights about how to enact TEP-coherent instruction "in a context that doesn't support it, with a curriculum that doesn't support it."

Mireya's combination offers purchase in making one final point concerning not only how opportunities accumulate across placements but also how placement sequence may factor in accumulation (see also, LaBoskey & Richert, 2002). When faced with an unprofessional, even dehumanizing CT in her second placement, Mireya was able to draw

on experiential and cultural resources to "connect with" and provide humanizing experiences for students. However, because of placement sequencing, she was also able to draw from her first student teaching experience, where she worked alongside a CT who participated in a principled professional community and saw—according to Mireya—"the potential that every student has." Had her second placement been her first, perhaps Mireya would have struggled more and learned less—a question worth considering in relation to other participants' placements, as well.

Discussion

Our findings suggest that the most opportunity-rich placements clustered in or around Quadrant B; yet as Figure 1 indicates, when we draw across data sources to situate placements, we find that they fell as much or more often in Quadrants A and C and occasionally in Quadrant D. Admittedly, we were relatively unsurprised by the degree to which participants mostly deemed Quadrant A placements overly constraint laden and insufficiently educative; these placements seemed to reflect few of the student-centered, culturally responsive leanings held by participants' TEP and instead manifested the most routinized instruction and the least latitude for experimentation. Conversely, we were surprised by the degree to which participants critiqued Quadrant C placements as insufficiently educative; although these placements offered powerful images of "what's possible," they seemed—to participants—too decoupled from the demands of policy context, which they, as untenured first-year teachers, felt in no position to flout.

Concerning Quadrant D, we can imagine moral arguments, however problematic, for Elisa's and Mireya's placements, given their likely benefits—academic and socioemotional—for students therein. Indeed, such placements might be viewed as presenting opportunities for PSTs to engage as advocates, interrupt inequities by way of "damage control" (Anderson & Stillman, 2010), and positively influence CT practice (Lane et al., 2003). Still, we recognize that Elisa and Mireya learned little, if anything, about exemplary practice from these placements, both of which offered—as Elisa put it—more insight about "what *not* to do" than what to do. Given the short duration of most TEPs, the personal investment represented by PSTs' matriculation, and the enormous responsibilities of teaching, we do not believe these placements did right by Mireya and Elisa, nor the students with whose learning they are now entrusted.

We say this even though some of these experiences appeared not to "wash out" (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) but instead to anchor participants' development moving forward. As a first-year teacher, Mireya repeatedly referred to student teaching as she pushed herself toward professional and pedagogical excellence—often trying things that failed but always trying new things. Threads from student teaching were woven through her master's project, which focused on language development through inquiry-based science and supported her EL first graders to make connections to their "funds of knowledge" and to see themselves as scientists, capable of constructing knowledge and changing the world (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Still it was Quadrant B placements that ultimately emerged—for participants and for us—as particularly opportunity rich in terms of their capacity to enable PSTs' learning about the kind of TEP-coherent teaching to which they aspired. Although our own leanings place us in solidarity with those who advocate for high-quality bilingual programs, we find in this study evidence of yet another reason to value such programs—namely, their capacity to provide rich and rigorous contexts for PST learning and in particular, the development of pedagogical integrity grounded in ideological clarity. Of course, this is not to suggest that such experiences would or should happen exclusively in bilingual placements nor with bilingual teachers, just that such placements appeared particularly educative for participants in this study.

Indeed, in those placements more than others, participants often gained access to the awesome front-stage labor—and sometimes the awesome backstage labor, as well—involved when equity-minded educators navigate tensions between their visions of ideal practice and the realities they encounter working in urban, high-needs schools. That difficult work requires educators braid together technical, political, and moral concerns (Oakes, 1992)—technical because of the complex technical labor required when reconciling student-centered practices with curricular standardization and test-oriented tasks, political because of the call to meet the demands of many masters (i.e., one's self, supervisors, state policy framework, and so on), and moral because *both* abandoning student centeredness in the name of compliance *and* disengaging from the institutional landscape in the name of responsive teaching pose potential threats to students' development and mainstream academic success. The fine balance that educators must strike is one to which scholars have long alluded or explicitly spoken (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2005; Stillman, 2009). In many ways then, this analysis aims to unpack whether and how student teaching placements prepared participants to enact this fine balance; findings, in turn, call us to consider how we ensure maximally educative placement experiences for all PSTs.

Findings also suggest the importance of looking beyond individual placements to consider how opportunities accrue across placements. If we believe, for example, that Quadrant B placements and/or those with former or current bilingual teachers present special promise, Suzi and Karina's combinations appear relatively opportunity rich. However, if we believe that PSTs benefit from experiencing both TEP-coherent and dissonant placements, then the combinations of Faith, Gretchen, Raye, and Mireya stand out. Likewise, if we take seriously the criticisms of those who experienced dissonant Quadrants A and C placements, then Faith and

Mireya—whose dissonant placements included one in Quadrant B—emerge as particularly fortunate. And if merely seeing “what’s possible” matters most, then Juliana, Pilar, and Cristina seem to have experienced crucial learning opportunities—Pilar and Cristina especially because their placements included one in Quadrant B.

Fortunately, we argue that potential for learning resides across all combinations *if* teacher educators recognize it and support PSTs to tap it for learning. Of course, not all combinations hold equal potential; for example, we cannot imagine that Elisa and Talia—neither having experienced a TEP-coherent placement—benefited as they deserved from student teaching. Likewise, not all placements with potential maximize that potential, as was the case in Quadrant B placements that offered exemplars but not apprenticeships into the front-stage and backstage labor involved in accomplished teaching. Nor are all combinations, given their sequencing, necessarily maximally generative of intended learning. Thus, what emerges as most crucial is the need for teacher educators to understand the opportunities placements present because such knowledge can be used to inform selection and sequencing and to support CTs and PSTs so that placements work together to maximize intended learning.

However, our analysis also suggests that it is not just placement selection and sequencing that matter but also how all those charged with supporting PSTs mediate their field-based learning—and by *all* we mean not only CTs. For example, though not our focus, we note the relative silence on the role of university-based teacher educators—including field supervisors, who were hardly, if ever, mentioned in participants’ reflections concerning what and how they learned from student teaching. Ultimately, we are left to wonder whether and how participants’ responses might have differed had they experienced mediation more evidently tailored to their needs as individual learners and tailored to the opportunities presented by particular placements and placement combinations.

Implications

Alongside previous theoretical and empirical investigations (Anderson & Stillman, 2011, in press), this study deepens our belief that student teaching—as the component wherein PSTs are challenged most explicitly to put their TEP’s theories into practice—plays a significant role in PST learning and that its role tends to be problematic in practice and oversimplified in research. Despite inherent challenges, we want to believe that our PSTs *can* and *should* build knowledge from placements situated in urban, high-needs schools like those within which they aspire to teach. But, as findings suggest, merely placing them in such contexts does not guarantee opportunity-rich experiences nor intended learning. What then does this study suggest we need to consider as we work to ensure that student teaching is maximally educative—conferring a *specialized*, rather than *compromised* knowledge base?

Developing and Supporting Exemplary CTs

Overall, findings index the challenges of providing mentors who can model “what’s possible” in the face of tightly regulated reforms *and* grant PSTs access to the backstage labor that undergirds excellent teaching. And yet both emerge as essential, in participants’ views and our own. In turn, we find ourselves focusing on the relationship between PSTs’ opportunities to learn and the opportunities to learn afforded to their CTs (and likely to their field supervisors as well). At minimum, this research suggests a need to provide CTs with opportunities to develop understanding about TEP guiding philosophies, the expected roles and responsibilities of those involved in student teaching, and the learning that TEPs hope PSTs will take away from placements in urban, high-needs schools. In many ways, these opportunities represent the ground floor in terms of supporting CTs to strategically scaffold PST learning. That said, if CTs are to do this work well, it also seems necessary to commit more deeply to making the rhetoric real insofar as CTs are concerned—specifically positioning CTs as teacher educators in their own right and supporting them to develop in their craft (e.g., Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987; Zeichner, 2002).

Of course, if we recognize student teaching as critical and charge CTs as teacher educators with some responsibility for mediating PSTs’ learning in the field, we must then consider how to compensate them appropriately for their critical contributions. Indeed, if CTs are expected to model both the front-stage and backstage labor involved in excellent teaching, then more substantial and creative compensation—for example, time and resources for documenting and sharing backstage practice—may be in order. Finally, it seems necessary as well to consider how university-based teacher educators might help ensure the educability and survival of TEP-coherent classrooms in a policy climate that often privileges teacher-centered, standardized instruction rather than the student-centered, culturally and community-responsive instruction advanced by TEPs like the one attended by study participants. Such efforts might include partnering with principals, documenting and publicizing accomplished CTs’ pedagogy and its connection to students’ and PSTs’ learning, mentoring and coteaching with CTs, and/or writing testimonials of appreciation for CTs and sharing those with administrators and policy makers.

Providing Models Amid Realistic Policy Conditions

Still, even with this in mind, it may not be possible for TEPs—especially larger ones, given the number of teacher candidates they prepare—to provide and support in the short term enough exemplary one-to-one placements. Thus, teacher educators might need to consider adjustments that maximize—logistically and pedagogically—partnerships with exemplary, equity-minded CTs. Given findings shared above,

such adjustments might involve assigning new roles and responsibilities to university-based field supervisors, who could—for example—work more deliberately to make aspects of CTs' backstage labor transparent to PSTs and support CTs to do the same. Likewise, extant research indicates, for example, the learning-rich potential of paired student teaching placements, which—theoretically at least—provide opportunities for PSTs to mediate one another's learning in structured and informal ways,[10] for university-based support providers to visit fewer placements with more frequency and for longer periods of time, and for TEPs to direct more concentrated development opportunities and substantive compensation to a smaller cadre of CTs (e.g., Baker & Milner, 2006; Bullough et al., 2002).

Other adjustments might involve using technologies to respond to program-specific placement challenges—for example, leveraging existing multimedia representations of practice (see Grossman, 2005; Hatch & Grossman, 2009; Hatch, Sun, Grossman, Neira, & Chang, 2009; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010) as well as designating and drawing on model classrooms for additional documentation, including video footage of classroom teaching (e.g., van Es & Sherin, 2008), artifacts of practice (e.g., curriculum units, instructional materials, student work; McGinty & Larenas, 2004), and stimulated recall interviews (e.g., Stanulis, 1995) wherein CTs share the thinking and decision making that enables them to enact TEP-coherent practice within constraints. All can serve as tools for eliciting critical reflection and action among PSTs even when one-to-one placements with model CTs are not possible and/or when access to backstage labor remains limited.

Moving Beyond Models to Mediation

At the same time, we want to distinguish between merely *providing* models and *leveraging* models as tools for learning. Participants' comments serve as reminders that seeing something done—even if, as Juliana put it, "I know that's the best thing to do"—is often a far cry from learning, "How do I do it?" Intended learning does not necessarily occur through mere immersion, even in coherent placements; ensuring intended learning requires that university- and school-based teacher educators strategically mediate—and re-mediate—field experiences such that PSTs come away from placements having begun to build requisite specialized knowledge. Without mediation aimed at generating learning *from* varied opportunities to learn, teacher educators put PSTs at risk for developing a knowledge base that is compromised in any number of ways.

We therefore consider it crucial for teacher educators to draw on and create opportunities and mediating tools that press PSTs not only to *watch* others grapple but also to *grapple* themselves with the tensions between student-centered teaching and a policy context that increasingly standardizes instruction and assessment in urban, high-needs schools. With this in mind, teacher educators might craft projects that require PSTs to bring field-based manifestations of the policy context into conversation with course content, to critique and adapt mandated curricula, and even transform scripted programs into thematic units using learning theory and examples of TEP-coherent practice to substantiate decisions (e.g., Anderson & Stillman, in press; Frykholm, 2005; Sleeter & Stillman, 2007).

Indeed, interviews, observations, and culminating master's projects indicate that some participants attempted to engage in strategic compromise (Lloyd, 2007) and/or principled resistance (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006) when they were pressed as first-year teachers to prepare students for standardized tests and to implement scripted curricula. In most cases, they did this despite not having been apprenticed into these approaches during student teaching. Although some made impressive first strides—toward modifying scripted curricula, for example—they might have experienced more success had they been deliberately exposed to and practiced such strategies during PST education.

Anchoring Teacher Education Practice in the Pursuit of Equitable Opportunities to Learn

Although all PSTs would likely benefit from opportunities to, for example, create and adapt curricula during student teaching, findings indicate that such mediation may need to take different forms depending on PSTs' respective placements: perhaps supporting a student teacher in Quadrant A to adapt mandated, scripted curricula toward more authentic, thematic units; perhaps supporting a student teacher in Quadrant C to consider how TEP-coherent practices might be adapted to meet terms of employment in a more tightly regulated context; and perhaps supporting a student teacher like Mireya—who found herself amid an inhumane classroom culture—to make ethical use of that space for students' learning and her own.

As alluded to earlier, findings also suggest the need to conceive of student teaching as a continuum of experiences that work together to expand PSTs' learning rather than merely compound strengths for some and weaknesses for others. Such a shift requires that teacher educator mediation—what we believe holds the most potential for increasing student teaching's overall educativeness by generating learning *out of* opportunities to learn—takes into account not only the needs of PSTs as learners and the contours of individual placements but also the contours and interactions across placement combinations. Just as teacher educators might need to mediate PSTs' learning in a Quadrant A placement differently than in a Quadrant B placement, teacher educators might also need to mediate learning differently in any placement based on an understanding of that placement as it relates to a PSTs' prior knowledge and experiences, past and/or future placements, and the learning that has occurred or will potentially occur therein.

In closing, we acknowledge that student teaching cannot reasonably shoulder all the burdens of PST learning; indeed much of the mediation that PSTs need will have to occur across TEP components. Still, this study underscores the importance of understanding the distribution of opportunities across placements, such that TEPs might better structure student teaching experiences as opportunities to learn and support student teachers as learners.

Conclusion

As equity-minded educators navigate the "new institutional architecture" of urban, high-needs schools (Gutiérrez, 2006), they must often strike a difficult balance between their visions of ideal practice and, for example, the time constraints, curricular mandates, and high-stakes testing pressures that often accompany schools' "low-performing" labels. Striking this balance not only requires integrating knowledge of learners, curriculum and subject area, and teaching but also integrating that knowledge with an understanding of the policy context as it affects teaching and learning as well as with an understanding of when and how to adapt and resist in the interest of equity-minded teaching and robust student learning.

If we expect our PSTs to set forth and do this powerful work, we must continue to reexamine and reorganize student teaching so that it does as much as it possibly can to equip them with a specialized knowledge base that will enable them to respond in equity-minded ways to the particularities of teaching in urban, high-needs schools. At the same time, we must heed the limitations of this research and continue exploring the contributions of student teaching—and other TEP components—over time, so that we can adjust in relation to the immediate challenges that PSTs face as new teachers in urban, high-needs schools, while also ensuring that PST education contributes meaningfully to teacher development in the longer view. Keeping those dual goals in mind will help in preparing teachers who are equipped to deal with first-year challenges and to thrive and stay in the schools and classrooms where they are needed most.

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Notes

1. Although numerous teacher education programs (TEPs)—including our own—name preparing "urban" teachers as a central objective, we are reluctant to describe teachers as "urban" or schools as merely urban because of the term's varying connotations (many overgeneralized and deficit laden). Thus, we use "urban" and "high needs" to specify schools' location within the densely populated core of large metropolitan areas and to specify a set of circumstances that transcend urbanicity and include, among others, being underresourced, staffing high concentrations of underqualified teachers, labeled "low performing," and predominately attended by historically underserved students (i.e., students of color, English learners [ELs], and low-income students).
2. Courses emphasize sociocultural perspectives on learning and explore issues related to cultural and linguistic diversity, language acquisition, multiculturalism, and critical pedagogy. Courses also emphasize teachers' role as "equity-minded" change agents, who strive for excellence in and beyond the classroom, who work to transform educational inequities, and who actively seek to expand students' access to resources and opportunities.
3. Such placements—those with cooperating teachers (CTs) who espouse TEP-coherent philosophies and engage in TEP-coherent practice—are not always easy, nor possible, to provide; that said, faculty work hard to find the best placements possible for preservice teachers (PSTs) and remain committed to improving their selection of and support for coherent placements.
4. Placement schools–served populations comprised of 99% "minority" (i.e., non-White) students, 80% or more Latino students, 50% to 85% EL students, and an average of 92% students qualifying for free/reduced lunch.
5. At the time of participants' student teaching, schools performing in the bottom half of the state on standardized measures were subject to "low-performing" labels and eligible for a series of targeted interventions. Of participants' 22 placements, two occurred in schools in the fourth-lowest decile, two in the third-lowest decile, five in the second-lowest decile, and 13 in the lowest decile.
6. Following from state legislation passed in recent decades, districts where participant students taught and worked as first-year teachers offered three options concerning the language of instruction: classes taught in English only (i.e., "English-only" classes); Structured English Immersion classes taught primarily in English, but with varying degrees of primary language support (e.g., clarification) and instruction tailored to EL populations; and bilingual classes offering English and primary language instruction, only to students whose parents/guardians made formal requests.
7. Although both authors at some point worked as field support providers in the focal TEP, only one served as a support provider for participants and only when they were first-year teachers. In that capacity, she visited classrooms, provided oral and written feedback on teaching and, in some cases, advised on culminating master's projects during the year following student teaching. Neither author was involved in selecting CTs, assigning participants to placements, or providing support during participants' student teaching.
8. A priori axial codes included, for example, knowledge domains theorized by Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005). Emergent

axial codes developed through open coding, during which we noted repeated references to, for example, manifestations of the policy context (e.g., pacing plans, scripted curricula, and test prep) and then constructed a coding scheme to capture discrete manifestations and aggregate them within an axial code (e.g., policy context).

9. We use "in and around" here to underscore that axes should not be viewed as fixed nor impermeable. When situating placements, we focused on where each fell along axes, rather than within quadrants, which we label and refer to primarily for organizational and communicative purposes.
10. In making these suggestions, we want to be clear that although PSTs' mediation of one another's learning can play an important role, we believe relying on it to replace mediation by expert others (i.e., CTs and university-based teacher educators) would be developmentally inappropriate.

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