Supportive Developmental Relationships in Communities of Practice

What the Science Says

Learning is an active, interactive, constructive, and iterative process. Authentic, professional learning communities create opportunities for the interaction of people, problems, ideas, and tools. As noted earlier in this report, human relationships catalyze healthy development and learning. The brain grows and changes throughout life in response to experiences and relationships. The nature of these experiences and relationships matters greatly for learning and development. Optimal brain development is shaped by warm, consistent relationships; empathetic back-and-forth communications; and modeling of productive behaviors. In addition, learning is social, emotional, and cognitive. These understandings of learning and development should shape the strategies and contexts within which teacher candidates learn.[64]

Learning communities provide opportunities for collaboration with others, which expands the range of experiences each person can encounter. Supportive developmental relationships in communities of practice can optimize teacher candidate learning. They create connections and support learning as colleagues offer greater assistance, allowing each member to gain competence and agency. Developing community practices that strengthen a sense of shared mission is critical. In collaborative communities, members feel personally connected to one another and committed to each other's growth and learning.

Overview

Teacher candidates can benefit from professional learning communities within their university classrooms, within their clinical placement schools, and within disciplinary and professional groups. These communities can be designed and nurtured to provide supportive environments that allow candidates to productively engage with real problems of practice as they promote active, interactive, constructive, and iterative learning. In such settings, the social aspects of learning come to the fore, as does the active, and shared, construction of knowledge and understanding. Preparation programs should draw in particular upon research describing learning in professional communities to consciously create, model, and help teacher candidates learn to engage productively in these communities and with experienced and expert leaders and colleagues so that they are surrounded with examples and supports for participation, problem-solving, and the work of teaching.[65]

To do this, programs need strong, reciprocal relationships with PreK–12 schools that hold a common vision for practice featuring sharing, cocreation, and continuous improvement, enabling clinical placements that are consonant with the candidates' learning and aligned with program commitments. Engagement in shared research and reflection about practice is another way that communities of practice can learn together. Inquiry and research as a means to analyze practice helps teacher candidates understand the applications of research as well as the tools for

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research. Lesson study has been identified as one such way for teachers to learn with each other through community designs and efforts to improve practices. Engaging in this type of inquiry *collaboratively* not only expands candidates' thinking but also normalizes the practice of using a broader community in the pursuit of developing and employing effective teaching practices that result in deep learning for all students.

It is important to note that a "community" should be expansive and inclusive, incorporating the many members of the school community—faculty and staff in all parts of the school, families, and community organizations that may work with the school—and candidates should have experiences with all these elements of the community, not just a single cooperating teacher in a single classroom. Authentic learning communities require an acknowledgment of and reliance on the expertise that PreK–12 faculty and staff bring in supporting the growth and learning of new teachers, as well as the knowledge that families and communities possess.

Teacher preparation programs that work closely with families and communities understand the expertise that lives within the broader context of students' lived experiences and tap into that expertise through reciprocal relationships with families and close ties to community-based organizations. This facilitates candidate understanding of the whole child within the contexts closest to the child. These types of relationships are vital because learning within professional communities provides opportunities to learn from others' perspectives and expertise; mutual support; and modeling for leading an equity-centered, collaborative classroom.

Programs organized in cohorts with clinical placements in teaching teams can create professional communities in which teachers observe one another, share practices, develop plans together, and solve problems collectively. The teacher residency model (fashioned after medical residencies) is another structure that allows for this type of deep collaborative learning, which can include interacting with students, other prospective teachers, expert teachers, and the tools of teaching (e.g., lesson plans, assessments, technology).

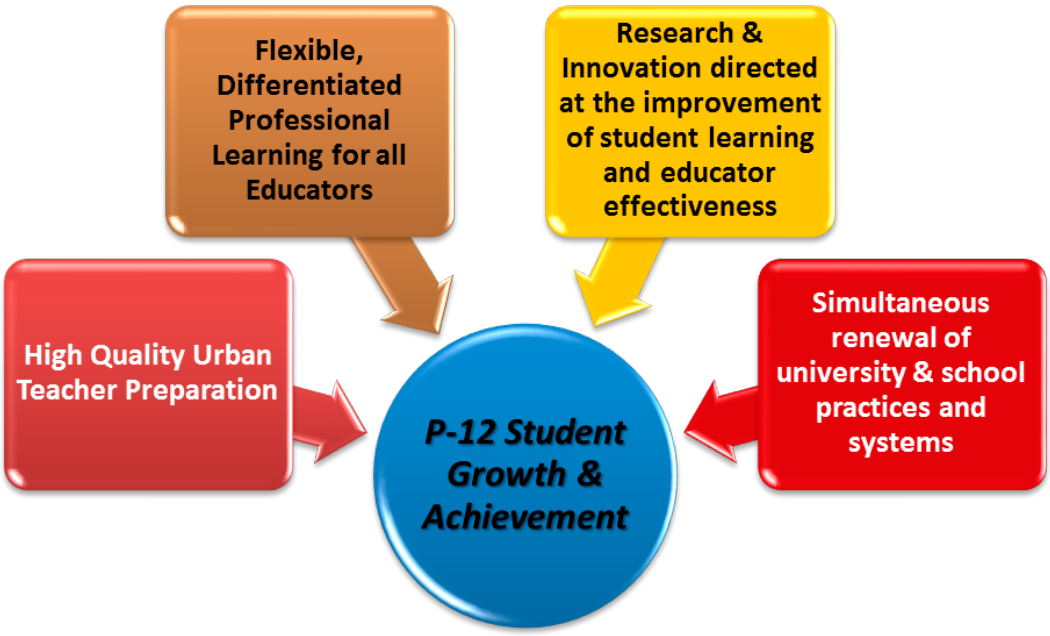
What Teachers and Teacher Educators Can Do

Learning is an active, interactive, constructive, and iterative process. It occurs through the interaction of people, problems, ideas, and tools as people get feedback based on their actions and about their ideas. Professional communities of practice empower developing teachers through mutual support, opportunities to learn from others' perspectives and expertise, and modeling for leading a collaborative classroom. These learning communities are strengthened when preparation programs have strong, reciprocal relationships with PreK–12 schools and their wider communities.

These close "whole school" partnerships create a broader professional learning community between the faculties of the educator preparation program (EPP) and the school that is focused on the collective development of teachers and teaching, as well as learning for adults and children alike. Ongoing consultation, collaboration, and feedback among faculty, mentors, and candidates support inquiry and growth for pre- and in-service teachers and teacher educators. Teacher preparation programs must create structures that give time and resources to develop these communities and employ practices that nurture relationships within collaborative learning spaces.

Such learning communities are more likely to be found as a part of professional development schools (PDS) partnerships, intended to create sites where best practices can be implemented, observed, and studied while providing opportunities for clinical learning for teacher candidates. The University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver) implements a contemporary version of this model of partnership, described in a program-generated resource shown in Figure 7. The CU Denver model is built on a vision of "simultaneous renewal," in which candidates, clinical teachers, site teams, and the broader school faculty engage in ongoing professional learning and jointly commit to improvement of practice in the school as well as the university.

Figure 7. University of Colorado Denver Partnership Framework



Source: Darling-Hammond, L., Oakes, J., Wojcikiewicz, S. K., Hyler, M. E., Guha, R., Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Cook-Harvey, C., Mercer, C., & Harrell, A. (2019). *Preparing teachers for deeper learning*. Harvard Education Press. p. 151.

When the PDS model is implemented in full, ongoing professional learning and improvement of practice, including collaborative inquiry and problem-solving, are part of the work of candidates, clinical teachers, university faculty, and school staff, providing opportunities for continuous improvement and renewal.

Strong school–university partnerships like this PDS model are critical to creating clinical placements that are consonant with the theoretical learning candidates are undertaking. They also help prevent disconnects between ideas about teaching and learning espoused in preparation programs and those practiced in PreK–12 classrooms. Within the context of these design principles, the PDS model, along with any similarly structured professional communities of practice that facilitate shared governance and mutually beneficial collaboration, functions to create the enabling conditions of SoLD-aligned educator preparation.[66]

Aligned commitments to an explicit vision of equity and social justice—combined with the developmental approach and with cycles of teaching, inquiry, and reflection—can enable teacher candidates to observe, practice, receive feedback, and continually grow toward that vision throughout the clinical experience. Sharing a vision requires multifaceted alignment between preparation programs, schools, and districts, including sharing, cocreation, and continuous improvement that flow in both directions between programs and their PreK–12 partners, allowing for alignment not only of structures but also of cultures.

All of these features can be seen in the example in the following text box about Hinkley High School, an urban professional development school partner with CU Denver that shares with the preparation program a commitment to deeper learning and equity.

A Professional Development School Partnership for Deeper Learning and Equity

At Hinkley High School, which serves a population of low-income students of color in a racially and economically isolated neighborhood in Denver, Principal Matthew Willis welcomes the opportunity to partner with the only local teacher preparation program he sees as sharing the school's vision of equity. He sees a double benefit to being a professional development school. He and his faculty get a "stream of people whom we get to train and expose" to Hinkley's approach to urban schooling; at the same time, he gets to "know and choose the best new teachers to stay at the school" from among the teacher candidates. The faculty see considerable benefit from having on-site support and professional development from their university partners, which serve to keep their values and concepts aligned and also contribute to the school's own improvement efforts.

Willis is also emphatic about deeper learning being collaborative and personalized to ensure cognitive engagement that leads to greater achievement and equity. University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver) faculty on-site and at the college campus support the whole-school approach his faculty have been developing. He notes:

> What you see will contrast with rows, teacher talking, students taking notes, sitting still. This school believes in rigor, relevance, relationships—with relationships being the key to the others. Relationships are what are worked on most, then how to leverage relationships to get depth of knowledge, rigor, and relevance. You will see norms of relational discourse, moving up cognitive levels, and using relationships to do that. Interactive, collaborative, independent work. Relationships is probably the number one value for instruction and classroom management. … All students are engaged, especially male students of color.

This expectation was visible on a spring afternoon when Maria Sanchez—a teaching candidate at CU Denver—was coteaching a diverse group of Hinkley High 10th-graders with her clinical teacher, Joan Simmons. During their 5-week unit on probability, Maria and Joan were helping students learn to "write and answer questions about the likelihood of an event" and "prove whether two events are independent, using the multiplication rule."

Eight boys and 11 girls sat in pre-assigned small groups of three and four, each with a data set and poster paper. As class began, students paired up and stood, swinging arms past each other to, in their teacher's words, "wake them up" after lunch. Then, as a preview of the small-group task they

would be doing, the teachers peppered the students with questions, using homey examples of two events that might or might not occur independently—such as being a girl and wearing sneakers—and having them generate ideas about how they could know whether two elements are independent of each other.

After a quick reminder about the roles they would play in their groups, the students went to work to make sense of the data in front of them and create at least five questions that could be asked and answered using that data set. Then, on their poster paper, they wrote at least two simple probabilities, two conditional probabilities, and a fifth probability of the group's choice. Each group also needed to prove whether the events in their given data sets were independent using the multiplication rule. The two teachers circulated, probing, answering questions with more questions, and giving hints—all of which scaffolded the groups' work.

As the students finished their posters, they moved casually into the wide and empty hallway outside the classroom and taped their posters to the wall, chattering about their own work and eagerly peering at what other groups had done. They did a "gallery walk," carrying calculators and graphic organizers to assist them as they wrote and answered questions on the posters and explained whether two events reported on the posters were independent. After the hallway activity, they returned to the classroom and engaged in a whole-group conversation about the experience—asking questions, reporting what they learned, and boasting about what they had accomplished.

Next, Maria and Joan debriefed the lesson, talking together as colleagues to explore whether their objectives had been achieved and, more specifically, whether the lesson engaged the students in deeper learning. Joan explained, "When students ask me a question, I try to go to the deepest level of understanding that I can. I avoid the easy answer—not wanting students to be told what to do and doing it—and move away from the procedural."

Maria observed with satisfaction that the lesson reflected their commitment to engaging students in thoughtful instructional conversations:

> We wanted to give students some private reasoning time (read this, make sense of it, see what you can do), then partner them up, give them time to talk, have them take on listener roles knowing what to listen for, switch and swap roles, then come together as a table to make sure that everyone's voice is heard. … [A] student who may not have generated such a response has access to mathematical reasoning of their peers. This doesn't happen very often in a math class.

In many ways, this math class defies commonly held stereotypes about instruction in urban schools like Hinkley High and the teaching and learning that go on inside them.

Conversational problem-posing and -solving were the dominant modes of instruction in this International Baccalaureate class, with question-asking, head-scratching, hypothesizing, and scribbling ideas on paper as the primary activities. Complex knowledge was constructed, and principles were applied. Students had multiple opportunities to display what they knew and were able to do. The atmosphere was friendly, noisy, and easy, but very much on task.

A letter that Hinkley sends to teacher candidates who are about to begin their clinical experiences at the school makes clear how seriously the school views its responsibility as a professional development school and just how much the Hinkley faculty see the CU Denver teacher candidates who are interning with them as full participants in a community of practice devoted to this quality of instruction and intensity of deliberation:

> We expect all interns to live "the life of a teacher" during internship days. As you take on more responsibility, it is expected that you arrive early or stay late enough to plan with your clinical teacher, make copies, and prepare the classroom for the lesson you are planning. All of our teachers at Hinkley work very closely in PLT [Professional Learning Team] groups with other teachers to plan and implement lessons. Our interns are expected to be an asset to the broader school community to support student success in as many ways as possible.
>
> At Hinkley and at other district schools, there is a strong emphasis on professional development and coaching for all teachers. Interns will fully participate in professional development opportunities (both in and out of the school building) … and parent–teacher conferences. We hope this experience prepares our candidates to see the teaching profession as a process of growth and learning, continuing long after the end of UCD enrollment.
>
> On a final and important note, in order to make growth during your internship, it is essential that you come to Hinkley with the attitude and initiative of an active learner. We are passionate about providing demanding and rigorous learning opportunities for our Hinkley High School students and protective of the Hinkley community.

Source: Darling-Hammond, L., Oakes, J., Wojcikiewicz, S. K., Hyler, M. E., Guha, R., Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Cook-Harvey, C., Mercer, C., & Harrell, A. (2019). *Preparing teachers for deeper learning*. Harvard Education Press. pp. 259–260.

Given the historical divisions between teacher preparation and practice and between institutions of higher education (IHEs) and PreK–12 education, the level of interconnectedness may require a reconsidering of long-familiar structures, practices, and roles to create authentic learning communities. This requires a shift in traditional hierarchies, in which higher education has been seen to hold "expertise" and PreK–12 partner districts are simply settings in which IHE-based teacher clinical preparation takes place. Instead, authentic, reciprocal learning communities require an acknowledgment and reliance on the expertise that PreK–12 faculty and staff bring in supporting the growth and learning of new teachers. PreK–12 partner districts and schools, along with their community partners, should be equal partners in conceptualizing, planning, and implementing preparation of new teachers.

Teacher residencies can also create these kinds of partnerships. Similar to medical residencies, teacher residency programs connect preparation programs with sites of practice that are meant to allow candidates to engage in state-of-the art practice, along with mutual improvement opportunities through research and development. The coursework and clinical curriculum are jointly developed and are interwoven to provide a powerful, coherent experience that connects mentor teachers and university faculty in a joint community of practice with the residents.

Residencies typically also provide aspiring teachers with the opportunity to earn a salary while they work alongside an expert educator for a year and take courses that lead to a teaching credential—and, often, a master's degree. With teacher residencies, in exchange for a salary or financial incentive, participants commit to teaching in the same district after their high-quality residency ends.

Because they are designed collaboratively with partner districts, teacher residencies are built from the ground up to address local needs and priorities. Locally tailored solutions include preparing teachers in specific shortage areas (such as math, science, or special education) and providing opportunities for residents to learn about and build relationships with the broader community. Residency programs often provide support into the first year or two of teachers' careers, bringing graduates together to build a community of practice across cohorts.[67] One example of such a residency, between Newark Public Schools and Montclair State University, is described in Authentic, Aligned Partnership.

Authentic, Aligned Partnership

One example of a well-developed teacher residency model is the partnership between Montclair State University and Newark Public Schools, which has had long-lasting impact on both the district and the university. In 2009, secondary education faculty working within the Urban Teacher Residency collaborated with the principal and leadership team at East Side High School in Newark, NJ, regarding becoming a site for math and science residents in the program. East Side's principal, Mario Santos, clearly articulated his vision that the school raise the standard of teacher quality across all content areas and advocated for a partnership with the school's math and science departments to begin the process. The goal of creating "models of teaching excellence" for the entire school was shared, and school and university faculty worked together to transform these departments.

University faculty became part of school-based committees, professional development, and events, while the administration, faculty, and staff of East Side High School became active participants in all aspects of the residency as well as other university-established entities, such as the Montclair State University Network for Educational Renewal. After more than 10 years, East Side High School and Montclair State University leaders and faculty continue to be involved in collaborative initiatives, including the university-led New Teacher Induction Program and Red Hawks Rising Teacher Academy/Dual Enrollment Project.

The school–university partnership between East Side High School and Montclair has focused on three areas: leadership development, mentor teacher development, and support to developing preservice teachers and novice teachers. East Side High School veteran teachers have become mentors for preservice teacher candidates; they also lead professional development sessions for the university's 3-year New Teacher Induction Program. Since 2010, East Side High School has hired Montclair State math and science graduates who have helped increase the numbers of students on the honor roll and inspired numerous graduates, especially young women, to enter STEM majors and fields. The inquiry approach to teaching that the preservice program promotes has influenced all teachers at East Side High School, and student achievement has substantially improved. The principal and the department chairs attribute that increase to the sustained presence of the preservice students, induction program, and university faculty in the schools and the impact of the practices and inquiries they bring with them.

Source: Lehren, M. J. (2020, Spring/Summer). A teacher like me. *Montclair* magazine.

Preservice programs organized in cohorts and clinical work within teaching teams create professional communities in which teachers can observe one another, share practices, develop plans together, and solve problems collectively. The cohort model can enable authentic professional collaboration for candidates and provide experience with building positive relationships and developing learning communities within their own classrooms. A cohort can act as a source of support for candidates learning to teach and developing adaptive expertise as they learn how to collaborate, communicate, integrate multiple perspectives, and give and receive feedback.

Cohort-based learning communities not only serve as an organizational structure to support the learning of teacher candidates but also, when expanded to include PreK–12 schools and educators, can enhance connections between preparation programs and district schools. As the experienced educators of preparation programs and partner schools interact with novice educators and teacher candidates, they provide guides and models of practice and also draw newer teachers, on the periphery of the profession, into more complex and embedded participation as educators.[68] Retreats for teacher candidates and mentor teachers prior to or as part of clinical placements can improve communication among teams. Interacting with students, other prospective teachers, and expert teachers and sharing the tools of teaching (e.g., lesson plans, assessments) allows novice teachers to access "experiences, practices, theories, and knowledge of the profession" that would otherwise be unattainable.[69] Furthermore, interaction within and among cohorts is important when candidates graduate. Continued engagement enhances novice teachers' development and contributes to new teacher retention when cohorts are able to evolve into professional networks.[70]

In communities of practice, teacher candidates access the opportunity to engage with real problems of practice they are facing in their clinical placements in a structured, supportive environment.[71] Deliberately constructed professional learning communities, including those that provide mentorship, can improve teacher practice and self-efficacy as well as school culture.[72] This collaborative problem-solving builds teachers' capacity to engage in productive struggle with one another and access different perspectives and contexts that will become a part of their permanent teaching repertoire and toolbox. These perspectives should include those of families and students, who are a part of the learning community that can reshape teachers' views of the world as well as their teaching practices, as this example from the San Francisco Teacher Residency (SFTR) Program illustrates (see Learning From Students About Their Realities).

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Learning From Students About Their Realities

It's 1 p.m. on a Friday afternoon in late April. San Francisco Teacher Residency (SFTR) Program candidates have come from schools all over the city for their weekly 3-hour practicum seminar, which is held at San Francisco's African American Art and Culture Complex in the heart of one of the city's historically black neighborhoods.

Today, the 32 residents are joined by 10 11th-grade students from June Jordan School for Equity (JJSE), a small high school in San Francisco Unified School District and an SFTR teaching academy. The topic is "Supporting Undocumented Students," and today the traditional roles are flipped: Rather than residents teaching the students, the students are teaching the residents.

The students are all enrolled in the Peer Resources class at JJSE, a class devoted to building youth leadership skills. All are students of color. Earlier in the spring, they delivered this same lesson to the staff at their school as part of the school's professional development for its faculty. Here to support the students are their Peer Resources teacher; the Peer Resources executive director; and the principal of JJSE.

Roni, one of the JJSE students, begins the lesson by leading the residents and the other students through a 5-minute meditation. The residents are encouraged to leave their worries from the first part of the school day behind and to clear their minds so they can be fully present for this seminar. The room has visibly relaxed, and those present are fully focused when Roni brings everyone's attention back to the group after 5 minutes.

Wendy, one of the JJSE students, then begins the lesson by projecting the JJSE mission statement on the wall. Engaging the "class" of residents in the lesson, she asks a resident to read the mission statement and give a brief summary. Wendy then shares why she believes the school is not living up to its mission statement—which is preparing students for college as well as to be leaders prepared to work for a more equitable world—and frames the importance of the lesson today:

> We don't even know all of our students who are undocumented. They don't even have Social Security numbers. How can we get them to college if we don't even know them? And by the time they're seniors and they're going through the application process, and we find out they're undocumented, it might be too late to fight for DACA and AB 540.

The JJSE students model active and engaging pedagogy for the residents. For example, Javier leads the residents through a "forced choice" activity in which the residents must stand up and walk to the "Yes" or "No" side of the room depending on their answers to a series of questions. After each question, Javier calls on residents to explain their answers and engages them in a discussion. The first question is "Do you think undocumented students are willing to share their stories?" About half of the residents move to the "Yes" side of the room, the other half to the "No" side. As the discussion unfolds, one resident who answered "yes" says, "It's our job as teachers to know our students' stories as we build a relationship with them." A resident who answered "No" disagrees: "My students don't really talk about that kind of thing—it's the parents who have approached me." As the discussion unfolds, it becomes clear that residents' experiences talking to their students about their immigration status vary depending on whether they are in an elementary or high school setting.

Next, Joselin shares data from an action research survey the Peer Resources class conducted at their school. The students found that about 10% of the JJSE student population is undocumented, a number that came as a complete surprise to many JJSE staff and surprises the SFTR residents today. After sharing their data, Joselin engages the residents in a discussion, asking, "Have you encountered undocumented students at your school, and if so, how have you responded?"

One resident shares his concerns that in his 3rd-grade classroom, a couple of students had shared their undocumented status as part of a classroom community circle. He worries that his students' willingness to share that information so publicly at such a young age could cause them problems later on. Eliza, a JJSE student, shares the importance of strong communication with parents, as high school students may not share their immigration status because their parents have told them not to. Maria, another JJSE student, asks the residents to explain what they will do differently as a result of this seminar today, providing an explicit link for residents between their coursework and their teaching practice. One resident in a middle school placement shares:

> I always sort of thought they had a right for that [immigration status] to be private if they want it to be. … But now, from the data and what you guys are saying, my thinking is shifting. Maybe there's some way I can show the class that I'm an ally so that students have all the information they need to come talk to me. Maybe I could put up posters that show my students that. Maybe I can tell the class as a whole, or some other way to make my door more open to my students to come talk to me.

Another elementary resident shares how this data make her want to reach out and understand resources to which she can direct her undocumented students and their families. The data also reinforce the importance for her of building community. She had two students who came to talk to her about their immigration status, and she wants to keep this communication open. Other residents note that they now want to talk to their administrators about the school's protocol for supporting undocumented students. A resident in a 1st-grade class explains, "I'm taking away the importance of safety in our community. I want the parents of my students to feel safe in the community of our classroom."

Another resident says, "I think it's important that we know we're coming from a place of privilege. I don't have to worry about getting pulled over. If I want to get on a plane and fly to Mexico, I can do that." At that, Wendy, the student who had opened the lesson and earlier shared her personal story as the child of two undocumented parents and an undocumented older brother, responds with tears flowing down her face:

> I'm the youngest. My parents tell me that once I go to college, they're going to leave the U.S. because they're undocumented and go back to their country. … That is really hard for me. Once I go to college, I'm not going to have my parents there. Talking about privilege, take that into consideration, because not everyone can have their family and be with them.

Many eyes in the room are wet, and the room erupts in snaps of support for Wendy. The students end their presentation with some facts about DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), President Obama's executive order on immigration reform that provides a work permit and protection

from deportation to eligible youth. Yasmine, another JJSE student, anchors this content in her personal story of how she missed the DACA qualification deadline because she arrived in the United States 3 months too late and what this means for her college opportunities.

The nearly 2-hour presentation ends with the JJSE students leading a closing circle and providing an opportunity for reflection. One resident shares that "this PD [professional development] was way more engaging and powerful than other PDs I go to." Another resident encourages the high school students to connect with undocumented college students at the University of San Francisco who are organizing around similar issues.

In this example, the high school students, the residents, and the course instructors were all engaged in deeper learning for equity. By the end of this practicum session, the residents walked away with a more complete understanding of the number of undocumented students served in San Francisco Unified School District, the needs of these students, and what they can do as educators to support this group of students. Perhaps more important, the residents learned this content from high school students directly, expanding their notion of their learning community.

The lesson modeled for the residents the leadership roles that young people can take on when they have appropriate support and the knowledge and skills that students can build when engaged in this type of project-based learning. For the JJSE students, the act of teaching this seminar to the residents was a form of assessment in and of itself—a performance-based one. This lesson exemplifies how the program supports inquiry and reflection with community-building.

Source: Darling-Hammond, L., Oakes, J., Wojcikiewicz, S. K., Hyler, M. E., Guha, R., Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Cook-Harvey, C., Mercer, C., & Harrell, A. (2019). *Preparing teachers for deeper learning*. Harvard Education Press. pp. 285–287.

To overcome any lingering mistrust between schools, communities, and IHE teacher educators, it is vital to build trust and rapport among educators across these groups. Using the term "collaborative community of practice" signals that the partnership being called for is different from those that have dominated the field in the past. IHE-based preparation programs must acknowledge that many of the ways in which schools and communities have participated in teacher education partnerships in the past have been problematic and call for a shift in the epistemology that is often embedded in teacher education partnerships. The National Network for Educational Renewal, which supports many school partnerships, including the ones described earlier at the University of Colorado Denver and Montclair State University, is founded on the principle to improve "simultaneously the quality of education for thoughtful participation in a democracy and the quality of the preparation of educators."[73] To describe the partnership in this way means each member of the partnership has the authority and permission to hold the other accountable. In this way, the relationship is more than merely mutually beneficial. Each institution is invested in and committed to the other's success, and they show it through their actions.

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