

Lessons Learned from the “It Takes a Valley” Program: Recruiting and Retaining Future Teachers To Serve in High-Needs Schools

By Amy Strage, Susan Meyers, & Janet Norris

Like the rest of the nation, California is faced with a severe shortage of teachers. Current projections estimate that we will need as many as 250,000 new teachers by the end of the decade, as the number of school age children increases dramatically and as teachers retire at a faster pace than we can replace them (*The Need for Teachers in California*, PACE report, 1996). In our part of the state (the Silicon Valley), the challenge of recruiting quality teachers is even more extreme, given the draw of high-paying opportunities in high-tech industry, and the exorbitant and ever-climbing cost of living. Furthermore, the affluence enjoyed by some of our neighborhoods sits in stark contrast to the economic conditions in communities just a few short miles away, where families on the wrong side of the digital divide must contend every day with the challenges and correlates of low socio-economic status. Not surprisingly, the schools in these communities struggle as well, as the economic imparities take their toll on the morale of faculty and staff.

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Compounding the challenge of preparing enough new teachers is the challenge of retaining them. Jensen, Meyers, and Mortoff (1994) found that roughly half of all new teachers in California leave the profession after less than a year. They reported that one of the reasons most frequently cited by new teachers for leaving the profession was the difference between their expectations about life and work in the classroom and the realities they encountered. Schools lacked the material resources the teachers expected to be able to draw upon, and they did not know where to turn to make up the difference. In addition, assumptions they made about the kinds of support parents might provide for their children’s education proved incorrect. It became clear to them that their students were often unable to work and learn up to their potential because of stresses and pressures inherent in their home lives. They realized, with great sadness, that they did not know where to turn or how to help.

The “It Takes a Valley” program is designed to address this problem by giving future teachers extensive early field experience and opportunities to develop strategies for success in just such teaching environments. It takes its name, albeit loosely, from the old African proverb—“it takes a village to raise a child.” It is built on the concept that preparing and retaining successful teachers for *our* village (California’s Silicon Valley) requires the substantive contributions of many stakeholders—not just the formal teacher preparation programs and the schools where the teachers will serve, but the businesses and resources that make up our broad community as well.

To this end, each semester, a cohort of 12-to-16 undergraduate students begin their participation in the program when they are four semesters away from receiving their BA/BS degree. In order to prepare them for the real conditions they will encounter when they begin to teach in a high-needs school, and to acquaint them with the resources that they will be able to draw upon, program participants take part in a carefully articulated sequence of semester-long service-learning practica. During each practicum, students learn as they serve and assimilate and integrate their experiences through a series of structured reflections. In addition to completing these practica, “Valley” students meet in seminar format, keep structured journals and engage in other forms of collaborative reflection with their peers as well as their mentors. Upon graduation, they advance, together, to the Teacher Education Multiple Subjects CLAD Intern Credential program, where they teach as intern teachers in high-needs schools for two years as they complete their formal teacher preparation coursework.

Theoretical Grounding for Our Approach to the Problem

The “It Takes a Valley” program is grounded in four complementary principles that emerge consistently as tenets of good professional preparation for teachers. *First*, it is clear that *early and extensive, high-quality field-experience* is a crucial

part of pre-service preparation. The literature cautions us to be wary of reforms and innovations that foreshorten or compromise pre-service teachers' preparation, or that fail to provide them with adequate supervised and mentored experiences in the classroom (Ball & Cohen, 1999, Darling-Hammond, 2001). Teacher preparation and expertise accounts for the greatest proportion of variance in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2000, 2001).

Second, it is also clear that pre-service teachers benefit from professional preparation programs that enable them to move through as a cohort. In its most recent report, the Holmes Group urged the adoption of cohort models of teacher education, with "members of each cohort journeying together along a common path of professional learning and socialization that leads to lifelong personal and professional growth and development... Each student would be a part of a group in which fellow students take an interest in each others' attainments. . . . [M]embers of a cohort will form a mutually supporting network that endures for many of them throughout their professional careers" (1995, p. 50). The sense of community and the close, personal relationships that develop within cohorts of pre-service teachers appears to extend beyond the formal teacher preparation program itself, and help ease the transition into the classroom (Bullough, 1997; Bullough, Clark, Wentworth, & Hansen, 2001).

Third, in a related vein, *collaboration and reflective practice* are essential ingredients for teachers' continued professional growth and development. Teachers learn and teach most successfully in contexts where they can work together rather than in isolation (Heller, 1989; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Tye & Tye, 1984; Yopp & Guillaume, 1999). They flourish in contexts where they can engage in collaborative reflection, and "frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practices" (Little, 1982, p.331).

And *fourth*, a growing body of research confirms that *service-learning* is a particularly effective pedagogy. Rooted in the Deweyan tradition of experiential learning (1928), this instructional method rests on the integration of three components: (a) the provision of authentic and high quality service, (b) the opportunity for high quality learning (Service Learning 2000, 1999), and (c) the presence of reflective and integrative assignments, through which the service and learning components of the experience enrich each other (Furco, 1996; Kendall, 1990; Troppe, 1995; Weigert, 1998). For example, college students enrolled in a Child Development course might serve as classroom assistants in an elementary school classroom, and be required to complete written assignments applying course constructs to their work in the classroom, or identifying examples of constructs from the course in their every-day interactions with the children with whom they work. Service-learning increases student engagement and commitment to school (Sax & Astin, 1997) and it enhances the achievement of the curricular goals of the courses in which it is embedded (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Gray et al, 1996; Strage, 2000). It has a powerful impact on students' social and emotional development (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kendrick, 1996; Ostrow, 1995; Rhoads, 1997) and it prepares them to

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be contributing citizens in their broader communities (Giles & Eyer, 1994; Eyer & Giles, 1996; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Kendrick, 1996). And, perhaps of greatest salience to teacher educators, infusing service-learning into the curricula of pre-teaching majors fosters students’ appreciation of the realities of contemporary schools as it affords them the opportunity to observe and begin to develop classroom management and instructional strategies (Enix, 2001; Gangi, 2001; Hamm, Dowell, & Houck, 1999; Root, 1994). Given the significance of the difference between what most pre-service teachers expect to encounter as a teacher and the realities of classrooms in contemporary high needs schools, it seemed that service-learning, with its inherent opportunities for hands-on experience and reflection, might be a particularly effective vehicle for preparing our pre-service students to meet the challenges they will encounter in the high needs schools in our community.

Furthermore, as leadership from various statehouses call for children to engage in meaningful service to their communities as part of their K-12 curriculum, it is becoming critical that teacher preparation programs afford teacher candidates opportunities to experience and learn to implement this new pedagogy themselves. The final report by a task force convened by California Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin (*Service-Learning, Linking Classrooms and Communities*, 1999) recommended integrating service-learning experiences and the teaching of service learning pedagogy into teacher preparation programs. At present, service-learning curriculum standards have been articulated for California public schools for grades K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. Teacher preparation programs and policy-making bodies have taken up the challenge.

Key Elements of the “It Takes a Valley” Program

In this section, we provide a brief description of the practica completed by program participants, as well as of some of the underpinnings of the program, including development of the practicum experiences themselves, recruitment of teachers, and funding for the program.

Description of the “It Takes a Valley” Program Practica

◆ During the first semester of the program, students complete *a service-learning practicum in a high needs school*. In this setting, they work closely with a mentor teacher, chosen by program staff on the basis of their proven success in high needs-schools. Our students also witness, first-hand, the advantages of working and learning in a professional context marked by continuous inquiry and reflection and mutual support. Working from a detailed evaluation instrument the teachers will use to assess their “Valley” students’ performance, together they plan instructional and professional development objectives for the student for the semester. They also devise a plan for regular communication and feedback (e.g., pre-briefings and debriefings on either side of the students’ classroom participation). “Valley” students

spend a minimum of four hours each week in the classroom. In addition, they also complete a series of “Beyond the classroom” activities at the school site (e.g., attending a school board meeting, a parent night, a faculty meeting and a parent conference, shadowing the principal, and observing and interviewing main office personnel). The goal of this practicum is to afford students the opportunity to *learn*, first-hand, about the culture of the school, about the issues that confront the faculty, staff, students and family members that comprise the school community, and about teaching strategies that are particularly effective in classrooms of high needs schools. The students, meanwhile, are also providing a valuable *service* in and beyond the classroom, to their mentor teacher and to the children in their classroom.

◆ During the second semester, *students are placed with a social service agency*. Many teachers in high-needs schools are discouraged by the apparent lack of family support for their students’ education, and they are concerned about the multitude of distracting and debilitating stresses in their students’ lives. Yet they are unclear about when and how to call on other professionals to help them address the problems. The purpose of this second practicum is three-fold. First, it is designed to give participants a variety of rich experiences through which they can come to understand, first hand, the realities of the lives of families whose children make up the classrooms in high-needs schools. Second, it is designed to help participants recognize the consequences of some of these stresses in students’ behavior at school. And third, this practicum is designed to give the participants a clearer picture of the community resources available to them and to the families of their future students, to illustrate the way these resources work best in concert, and to help participants develop the rapport necessary for promoting parent-professional partnerships so essential for successful schools. Students *learn* about the home-world of the children they are likely to encounter in their own classrooms, as they *serve* as members of various social-service teams. They co-lead primary and secondary prevention groups for elementary school age children and their families, they “ride-along” to crises in the field, they participate in strength-based assessment teams, and they shadow social-service professionals.

◆ During the third semester, *students participate in a variety of experiences in business, industry and technology settings*. The businesses and industries throughout our “Valley” have virtually limitless resources that teachers can draw upon, to enhance the educational experiences of their children (e.g., materials that can be used for instructional activities, opportunities for field-trips and internships, out-reach programs by local children’s museums, and various kinds of specialized training and professional growth and renewal). But many of these resources go untapped, as teachers don’t know (how) to access and adapt them. The purpose of this practicum, then, is two-fold: First, it is designed to acquaint participants with this rich landscape of support. And second, it is designed to give “Valley” students a clearer sense of the array of work-world opportunities open to their future students, and of the skills their

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students will need to be successful there. During this practicum, "Valley" students *learn* as they visit corporate headquarters, shadow employees, and reflect about instructional strategies and activities they might use in their own classrooms to prepare their future students for the vast array of jobs and careers open to them. They ground their efforts in the findings of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills [SCANS] report (1991), which delineates 18 categories of competencies that business leaders have identified as necessary to ensure the success of employees in their collective work environments (e.g., information processing and computer usage skills, oral and written communication skills, problem solving skills, work habits, and leadership and teamwork skills). They *learn* to develop technology-based instructional activities and implement them into the low-tech, high-needs classroom. They *serve* by developing and sharing lesson plans or more elaborate curriculum units, based on the information and materials gathered throughout the practicum. The students then implement their curriculum pieces when they return to the classroom for their fourth practicum. For example, one "Valley" student designed a 5th grade math and science unit about water and its treatment. He based the content of the unit on information he gleaned from his day shadowing and talking with employees at a local water district plant. He developed demonstration activities to illustrate movement patterns of water using materials collected during his visit to the teachers' resource site, and he built a web-page to support and extend his curriculum unit by using the skills he had learned during the two-day technology training workshop at the beginning of the practicum.

◆ During the fourth semester, *students return to the high-needs school* for a second, more intense experience. Once again, they *learn* and they *serve* as they assume more responsibilities in the classroom, including developing and implementing their own service-learning-based lessons. They complete a second series of "Beyond the classroom" activities, to explore the neighborhood beyond the actual school walls, as well as a range of "brick and mortar" and "virtual" resources and professional development opportunities available to them (an environmental inventory of the school neighborhood, a visit to a local children's bookstore, an exploration of the State and County Offices of Education web-pages, etc.).

Underpinnings of the Practicum Experiences

Service-learning experiences should, by definition, be experiences that provide authentic service to the community as well as valuable learning opportunities for the student. One of the major criticisms of many internship and service-learning efforts made available to undergraduate students is that they are designed without adequate input from all of the relevant stake-holders (Cruz, 1999). University faculty planning the experiences often, albeit unwittingly, fail to ascertain that the services they instruct their students to provide are actually meeting a real community need. And when the advance planning and subsequent communications

between the academic staff and internship or service site staff are insufficient, the work students do in the field, while valuable in its own right, may become difficult to connect to the learning objectives at hand.

To avoid this potential limitation, *each of the service-learning practica was designed collaboratively with representatives from the school and community sites*. Teachers played an integral role in designing the both the classroom and the “Beyond the classroom” experiences for the first and fourth semesters; the staff at the various social service sites worked together with program staff to develop the menu of experiences and reflection activities for the second practicum; and groups of professionals from the various corporations and sites where students complete their business and industry practicum worked closely with project staff to develop and tailor experiences for the third practicum. These partners were guided by the following questions: What resources from their respective realms should teachers know about? How can knowledge about and experience in their respective realms enable teachers to be more effective in the classroom, with their students and their families?

A second consideration in constructing the *practica* was that they *build on one another*, and that students be able to apply what they learned in one to their work in the next as they progressed relatively seamlessly into the Intern Credential program. To ensure maximum continuity, teachers and community partners take into consideration both the overall program goals and the more specific kinds of experiences inherent in each of the *practica* as they work with their “Valley” students. The director of the Intern Credential program also serves as practicum director for the “Valley” students’ second semester in the classroom. She has been able to help the students anticipate and prepare for the exigencies of their first year as intern teachers.

A third consideration undergirding the *practica* was to *recruit mentor teachers who understood the nature of the responsibilities they were accepting, and who brought to the table the requisite skills and experience, commitment, and time*. Toward this end, program staff solicited recommendations from the field, had extensive conversations with prospective partner teachers, observed them at work, and shared with them the documents describing students’ activities and reflective journal assignments as well as the evaluation instrument developed to assess students’ performance in the classroom. The teachers we have worked with are quite diverse in background, in teaching style, and in experience. While some are seasoned educators, others are relatively new to the profession. While some are experienced mentors, others are new to this role. And while some of the teachers also assume other professional-development leadership roles at their schools and in their districts, others do not. Approximately half of the teachers have been with the program since its inception; a few new teachers join each term as others elect not to return; and a few have returned after a brief hiatus. What the teachers have in common is a passion for their craft, a commitment to their children, and a desire to help bring along the next generation as best as they can.

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The "It Takes a Valley" program is funded by the United State Department of Education Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement Initiative, with matching funds from various school district and university programs. This support enables us to provide students with a \$2000 forgivable loan for each practicum, plus fees associated with taking the CBEST and fingerprinting. The loan is forgiven once they serve as the instructor of record for two years in a high-needs school, a condition which is satisfied by their tenure as intern teachers as they earn their teaching credential.

In order to institutionalize this level of support and experience for future teachers, the components of the "It Takes a Valley" program have been infused into the newly-developed, undergraduate, blended, multiple-subjects credential program. In this program students who are four semesters from their BA/BS enroll in an established upper division general education course, where they learn through service in a social service agency; the next semester they take a social foundations of education/social science methods course and serve in a school setting; the semester after that, they enroll in a science and technology /learning in schools and the community course; and in their final semester, they complete their reading methods course while serving, once again, in school settings. Students also receive counseling about sources of financial support especially designated for future teachers (for example, the APLE teacher loan forgiveness program and the San Jose City Scholars future teacher forgivable loan program). During two post-baccalaureate semesters, students enter the intern credential program and complete course requirements for the teaching credential.

Initial Program Evaluation and Lessons Learned Thus Far

In this section, we provide an analysis of the experiences of the individuals who have participated in the program to date, and of what of we have learned so far about the effectiveness of our model.

The impact of the program is measured using three sources of information. The primary means of evaluating the effects of the program is a content analysis of students' journals from each of the four practica, where, each week, they respond to questions that are intended to guide their reflections about their program-related activities and experiences. We also assess the impact of the program through a relatively lengthy formal evaluation completed by the mentor teachers at the close of the classroom practica. These instruments ask teachers to provide detailed information about the sorts of instructional activities their "Valley" students have participated in, and about the quality of their contribution to the classroom community. Finally, additional insights into the nature of program participants' experiences are gleaned from conversations in seminar and elsewhere. Thus we are able to compile a detailed picture of how participating in the program is contributing to the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the pre-service teachers. This evaluation process also sheds light on the benefits accrued by the children in the

classrooms where our students are placed as well as the staff and clients at the various community service-learning sites.

Our first cohort of students has just completed their fourth practicum, and they have moved on into the Multiple Subjects CLAD Intern Credential program. Our second group of students has completed their first practicum in the schools as well as their social-service practicum. Our third cohort has just completed their first practicum in the schools. In the remainder of this section, we share what we have learned from their experiences. We begin with a brief report on outcomes for the mentor teachers, the classroom students and social services agency staff, and then proceed to a more extensive discussion of the experiences of the "Valley" students themselves.

Benefits for the Mentor Teachers and the Children in Their Classrooms

The teachers reported enjoying mentoring such enthusiastic and committed future teachers. They also reported having enjoyed the opportunity to reexamine their own teaching, as they discussed issues of pedagogy with their mentees, as they thought through the rationale for the particular instructional activities and strategies they modeled. The teachers indicated that they appreciated the presence of the "Valley" students in their classroom, as it has enabled them to implement activities they might not otherwise be able to try. And not surprisingly, they also reported significant academic benefits to their own students, as a result of the extra individual attention and fresh approaches the "Valley" students provided.

Benefits for the Social Service Partners

The social service staff were very enthusiastic about the presence of the "Valley" students. They took the task of mentoring and shepherding the "Valley" students as an opportunity for their own professional growth and renewal. They enjoyed reflecting, with the students, on the classroom applications and implications of their clinical work with the children and their families. They reported that their clients benefited greatly from the perspectives and insights the "Valley" students brought to their practicum work.

Benefits for the "Valley" Students

The students' journals reveal how powerful and formative the hands-on experiences have been, and, also, how valuable this opportunity for reflection has been. Students in the "It Takes a Valley" program have been truly transfixed and transformed by the youngsters and the adults they have worked with. They report feeling their eyes have been opened to a stark set of realities, but at the same time, they feel very supported and feel they have learned an enormous amount from their mentor teachers about how to be successful in such challenging contexts. They have come to a much more textured understanding of the challenges and the resources inherent in their schools and, indeed, in their "Valley." They have gone well beyond the public rhetoric, the platitudes and the textbook jargon. They have truly seen,

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and felt, and engaged many of the issues of social justice and equity that pervade life in and around urban schools. Students in our first cohort readily saw connections and applied the information they gleaned from the business and industry and clinical placements as they took on more responsibility in planning instructional activities in their classroom-practicum.

Here, we describe the *six recurrent themes* that emerged from our content analysis of their writings, and provide a few quotes from their journals, so as to illustrate some of the ways they have grown from their “Valley” experiences. The *first theme* relates to the pedagogy of service-learning itself and to the students’ appreciation of its value—that is, the integration of formal academic and hands-on experiences:

◆ *New insights and integration of what the students learn through formal academic experiences and through hands-on experiences with children.* In seminar and in their journals, they drew connections between what they had learned in formal settings and problems they needed to solve in real life. For example, one student noted the challenges related to motivating children who are neither engaged in nor successful in learning academic subjects.

... I can’t forget the children who are behind. It is these children who need the most help. I have found that our classroom has about three children that are stuck in level one or two in reading ability. A majority of the class is at about the 10th reading level. I am trying to use techniques from my CD 169 class to motivate lower readers to want to read better. At first I was thinking a rewards system might benefit these children, but now I am not so sure. Reading is the foundation to education, and I hate to see children who are behind and don’t have any motivation to catch up. I really want to explore this area more, but I feel as though I need some guidance as to what might work. (Ana Maria)

The *next two themes* relate to the “Valley” students’ appreciation of the landscape they are preparing for, to their reflections about the challenges inherent in the worlds their students inhabit and to their growing recognition of the strengths these young children bring to the fore:

◆ *New understandings about the strengths and resiliency and vulnerability of young children, in the face of extreme challenge.* The students came to realize how indomitable some of the children were in the face of challenges that they themselves could not imagine overcoming. At the same time, they also realized the magnitude of the toll life circumstances were taking on many of the children.

I had the opportunity to observe Danni [a social service agency staff member] as she screened a [crisis] call, prepared the paperwork for a meeting with a mother and child, and observed the meeting. This situation for me was very informative and sad at the same time. It was informative because I learned a lot from this child’s suffering that may help me understand children that come to school with so much burden on their shoulders. It was sad because it is hard for me to believe that a nine year old can be

suffering so much at this young age. . . . Observing [this crisis] I came to the realization that when children suffer, they express their suffering by actions that one can take as misbehaviors. These children are not capable of expressing with words what is going on in their lives, and they use other resources such as hurting themselves, inventing, seeing things, not listening to their parents, or other inappropriate behavior. With this understanding, I only hope to be a better teacher, one that can make a difference in these children's lives and to help them find the resources they need to overcome their suffering. (Patti)

This week we found out some very upsetting news. Maria, one of our students, has frequently missed class. She speaks very little English and would benefit so much by coming to class more often. After being gone for a week and a half straight, her father finally came in and explained they were homeless. They had been living out of their car for over a week, I can't even imagine what it must be like for a child to have so much inconsistency in his or her life. . . . My first instinct is to somehow "fix" their life and make it better. However, there has to be a line drawn somewhere as to how much we teachers can do. It really is a struggle sometimes understanding why parents make the decisions that they do. I care so much about all of these children and would do anything in my power to help them become a successful member of our society. I just want them to achieve all that they are capable of. It is hard enough for a child to learn the basics, but when they have all these other issues to deal with on top of it, I have no clue how they function. (Bernadette)

◆ *New understandings of issues of diversity and equity.* The "Valley" students have come to realize how significantly language and cultural heritage can create barriers in the classroom, and how devastating and unfair and difficult to surmount these obstacles can be.

Ms. F. taught a unit on weather. The first thing she did was show a short segment from *The Wizard of Oz*. Then she talked about tornadoes and hurricanes. She told the students that they have tornadoes in some areas of the US. Then she asked if anyone knew what we had here in California that most other states did not. The answer she was looking for was earthquakes. I felt it was a hard question for a third grade class. Most of them had no idea what an earthquake was. I was watching one little boy that was sitting there listening to the guesses then he worked up the nerve to raise his hand. Finally when he was called on he hesitated and said "tierra mota." Ms. F. said "No, we do not have them here in California." The little boy sat there with a confused look on his face. Then finally, Ms. F. said we have earthquakes, and the boy almost began to cry. I realized that he had used the Spanish word for earthquake rather than the English. Later, I sat down with him and told him he was right, and that Ms. F. just did not hear him correctly. He said he just could not remember the English word. The challenge in this class is when I would help the students because they know so little English it was difficult for them to convey to me what they needed and what I was telling them. One little girl was becoming so frustrated because we could not understand each other. I really got the feeling for how lost non-English speakers must feel when the tables are turned. I see how easy it would be for people not to want to put themselves in that situation if possible. This is one of the causes of not

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understanding other cultures. We expect the other to be the one that knows both languages, why should I learn anything other than English or Spanish? We both need to make the effort to meet the other half way. (John)

We have a child in the class named T., who doesn't celebrate Halloween because of his culture. He has no understanding of why he is not allowed to participate. Having him in the class has really helped me to have an awareness of other cultures. His mother reprimanded Mrs. O. because one of the other children brought in some Lumpia for the class and T. ate some. Mrs. O. insisted that there was not any pork in it, but T's mother said that he could have nothing that the other children were allowed to have. What is strange is that even though cultural awareness is talked about a lot for child development majors, it is a completely different thing having to work which children and families to make sure that everyone is happy and in a comfortable learning environment. (Bernadette)

The *remaining three themes* reflect the self-examination the “Valley” students are engaged in, and their resultant insights about what *they* can bring to the fore.

◆ *New understandings about their erroneous preconceptions and stereotypes.* At the outset, each and every student participating in the “Valley” program saw themselves as compassionate and open-minded. They thought that through a combination of life experience and formal education, they had managed to avoid or transcend many of the prejudices and misconceptions that might cloud the vision of the less enlightened. To a person, however, their journals reflect how they were humbled as they came to see that they too were making unwarranted assumptions and jumping to conclusions.

I have learned not to make assumptions. I noticed that I began to try to figure out each child, but there is a danger in doing this. I can sell someone short. A good example is Daisy. I pegged her for a beginning ESL student, because she does not talk much, but although she is an ESL student, she is shyer than anything. I will stay really aware of my prejudices. (Aaron)

One thing . . . is the order in which I remembered the students' names in the classroom. First, I remembered all the students who had been disciplined in some way (even gentle verbal reminders). Then I remembered the students who had their hands up to answer questions or would come right up to me for conversation. What I am noticing here is that it is the quieter, average student, who does not cause any ripples in the system, that seem to get the least of my notice. This experience tells me that I may be susceptible to various preferences when dealing with children that I may not be consciously aware of. I think that I want to practice looking at all children equally during the day, regardless of the reasons that they may come to my attention. (Linda)

◆ *New understandings about their role as the teacher, an engaged and committed educator and advocate for the children.* They have come to a deeper understanding of themselves, and of what their commitment to education entails. While we were not surprised that this was one of the major outcomes for them from the classroom practica, we were surprised to see how readily they began to apply

revelations they were having during their social service practicum to their visions of themselves as teachers in their own classrooms. This connection reaffirmed, for us, the importance of enabling teachers to reflect upon the nature and importance of the broader family and community contexts that surround and define the daily lives and expectations of their students.

Overall. . . I have gotten a pretty good mental representation of most of the children... I hope that this experience will not fool me into a false sense of arrogance when it comes to reading children. I don't want to mislabel a child and miss something important due to my arrogance or self-assuredness. . . . [S]ince the training this semester, . . . I have found that I am less likely to excuse the excessively needy child as a pest and instead look at his motivation. Why is this child so in need of my attention? What is not happening at home that causes him to seek out attention elsewhere? I am reminded of my statistics class and its Type 1 and Type 2 errors. If I remember correctly, and it has been a few years, Type 1 was a failure to accept something as true when in fact it was true, and Type 2 was accepting something as true when it actually was false. I worry that I might be looking for problems that don't exist. Perhaps this child is just incredibly vocal and abrasive because both his parents are and modeled such behavior for him. I wonder which is worse, missing a problem or seeing one that isn't there.

I know, I know, I know, that I must proceed with caution. It worries me, though, that I might let one slip by without the help or attention she needs, and that is the worst feeling in the world. No, let me amend that, the worst feeling is recognizing that there are such problems and that people are foul enough to propagate them. This again leads us back to my ever-revisited question: Whom do you blame? True, as teachers, it is not our place to judge, but as human beings we tend to seek out the causes of things. How can I not be angry with someone who has done such a disservice to a child? (Mark)

High-needs schools may be short on the resources and support, but by no means are they short on [talented] young minds. An out-dated library, poor physical education facilities, few computers, and no surplus income are minor obstacles in my mind. They only mean that I will have to work a little harder to fill those gaps. I can't wait for this to be my problem; I can't wait to have my own class. (Aaron)

I have learned so much this semester. Education is the only chance that a lot of these kids have to better their situation. I really realized the responsibility that teachers have in high needs schools, much more so than in other schools, to make sure that each child's needs are met according to their socio-economic circumstances, their ethnicity, their culture, and their gender. The only way to help these children learn is to make sure that their basic needs are being met. A child who is having problems outside of school has little chance of succeeding in school. It is the job of teachers in high needs schools not only to help teach the children the curriculum, but to be their support and someone they can count on in times of great stress. (Bernadette)

◆ *New insights into themselves and what they bring to the table.* The students came to discover dimensions to themselves that they did not realize they had. They came to identify and appreciate talents and strengths that they could draw on, as they pushed themselves to be the very best teacher they could be.

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The children have come to recognize me as a regular teacher. In the beginning of the semester, students rarely came to me with questions about their work. . . . Today I realized that my group was being disrupted every minute by students who had questions on how to go about completing their work. I have to say that it felt great to know that the children trusted me and to know that I was indeed approachable. I think the whole experience was a great way for me to realize that I could multitask when it came to the students' needs. (Ana Maria)

I learned a lot about myself in these three days, especially about the importance of dealing with my own issues before I attempt to help someone else with theirs. Many times during this training, I found myself surprised by the rumblings of emotion that were just under the surface of my skin. (Linda)

◆ *Each group of students has come to be a true cohort.* Each cohort meets as a group for their bi-weekly "Valley" seminars, and for many of their program-related trainings and activities. In any given semester, several "Valley" students are placed at the same school, and most mentor teachers take on two students to work with at the same time. But, while most of the students in the program are either Liberal Studies or Child Development majors (the two largest subject-matter preparation majors on our campus), for the most part, their schedules do not permit them to enroll in classes together. Thus, they do not move through their academic requirements as a block. Nevertheless, they feel a strong bond with one another, and regularly call upon one another for advice, feedback and support. They visit one another at their practicum sites, and discuss strategies and techniques they have found effective in those settings. Our hope is that this sense of connectedness will help them weather the challenges of their first years of teaching in their own classrooms.

Challenges and Growing Pains

On balance, given the complexity of the program, things have gone remarkably smoothly. We would, however, like to briefly address some of the challenges we encountered, and speak to how meeting them has extended our understanding of the complex process of preparing beginning teachers.

◆ *Recruitment and retention.* We were somewhat surprised by the small size of our student applicant pool, despite significant efforts to publicize the program and to recruit from venues frequented by future teachers (e.g., math classes required of undergraduate future-teachers and future-teacher student clubs). Many of the students we spoke to did not envision themselves teaching in high needs schools. Others were attracted to more accelerated teacher preparation tracks. And still others did not think they could find the time for the various service-learning practicum activities.

Nearly all of the students in the program report that it entails more work and more time than they expected. The forgivable loans were intended to reduce the number of hours students might need to work at other jobs, freeing up more time for practicum activities. Nonetheless, for some, juggling work, school and practicum

schedules has proven to be difficult. Students who live far away or who do not have reliable transportation have had the greatest trouble. In no cases, however, did students find the work too much to handle. In fact, we have been surprised by the persistence of the students who joined the program. Of the 16 students in our initial cohort, all but two have completed the program, and have now been hired as intern teachers. One of the two who left is revisiting his commitment to teaching, and the second decided she did not want to teach in a high-needs school. Of the 26 students in the second and third cohorts, all but three are still in the pipeline: two have chosen to enter the ministry, and one decided to pursue a more accelerated track to her teaching credential.

Our experience recruiting students for the “It Takes a Valley” program underscores the importance of recognizing the various niches in the universe of teacher preparation. The population of prospective teachers is quite heterogeneous indeed, and their needs—at least as they perceive them—are equally diverse.

◆ *Chemistry and compatibility issues.* In two cases, it became clear within the first weeks of the first classroom practicum that style and personality differences between the mentor teacher and the “Valley” student were compromising the quality of the learning experience for the student (interestingly, the mentor teachers in question seemed unaware of any difficulty). The students in question worried that they were not learning enough from their mentor teachers about how to manage a classroom environment, or about how to create and implement curriculum. They felt time pressure, as their internship assignment loomed closer. They wanted a mentor teacher who would challenge them with opportunities to test their wings and provide them with constructive feedback about their forays. The problems were relatively easily resolved by pairing the students with different teachers, but they nonetheless illustrate the importance of interpersonal dynamics in this sort of close apprenticeship and reinforce the importance of making sure that mentor teachers are willing and able to play such a critical role in their mentees’ early field experience.

◆ *Expectation issues.* During the first semester of the program, although we took care to meet with the students and teachers as a group before they embarked on their practicum to clarify program participants’ roles and responsibilities, in several instances some confusion remained. Two students indicated they felt underutilized while two other students indicated they feared their teachers expected more of them than they were ready for. This concern was addressed by providing students and teachers with a copy of the semester-final evaluation instrument at the initial meeting, and suggesting that the pairs work from that document to set goals and expectations for the semester. Such issues no longer arose in subsequent semesters, but they nonetheless point to the need to provide a clear process that teachers and students can use to plan and scaffold their work together.

◆ *Communication issues.* One of the challenges for the social service practicum

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was communication. As "Valley" students completed their menu of activities, they needed to coordinate with many different agency players, some of whom were more familiar with and invested in the project than others. Several logistical issues pertaining to the efficient and reliable sharing of information and realistic expectations about flexibility in scheduling needed to be worked out after some frustrations for the first cohort of students. Although commitment to the program on the part of supervisory staff was not an issue in the school settings, communication issues did arise to a modest degree during the classroom practica as well, as students and teachers needed to work around the differing school schedules and vacation dates, the extensive academic and work commitments of the students, and the generally limited opportunities for in-person conversations. In general, this reinforced how much "the devil is in the details" of such multi-faceted, complex teacher preparation efforts, and how important solutions for such seemingly ancillary problems can be.

Implications for Teacher Preparation

In the concluding remarks of the Editor's Introduction to the 25th Anniversary Issue of this journal, Alan H. Jones (1998) posed the question: "What can and should we in teacher education do to best fulfill our role of preparing the highest quality teachers possible for our community's and our nation's public schools?" (p.15). Clearly, at this stage, we can only draw preliminary conclusions from the "It Takes a Valley" program, and we must be careful not to over-interpret our data. As of yet, only one cohort of students has completed all four practica, and while they are all still very passionate and enthused about their careers, we cannot speak to the ultimate effectiveness of this program at enhancing retention rates for new teachers in high needs schools. With this caveat in mind, however, we suggest four implications of our findings for teacher preparation, and in closing, we offer them as a modest components of what will undoubtedly ultimately be a very complex and multi-faceted answer to Jones's question.

First, it is clear that our "Valley" students' preparation for teaching in high-needs schools has been *greatly enhanced by the broader than usual array of hands-on pre-professional experiences* they have had. They readily made connection between what they had learned in both the social service settings and the business and industry settings, and what they experienced in the classroom. In their second and third semester journals, they reflected back on how, in hindsight, they might have tried to teach something differently, or how they might have interpreted a particular student's behavior differently. And in their preparation for their work in the classroom during their second school-based practicum, they drew extensively on the knowledge they had gained during their three previous semesters in the program.

As state curricular standards and frameworks begin to call for more and closer partnerships with students' families, it is imperative that teachers have opportuni-

ties to compile a complete picture of the families and communities in which children live. The reflections our students have shared with us and the insights they have brought to their work in their classroom after participating in the family social services practicum suggest that the "Valley" model (of service-learning-based early field experience in a broad array of contexts) is an effective way to start this process. *Second*, our experience lends additional support for the *value of cohorts*, and cohort-based models of teacher preparation. By the time they begin teaching their own class as intern teachers, our students have spent two years working closely together, helping each other through the rigors of a very personally, academically and professionally demanding series of practica. They have talked each other through difficult spells. They have learned to trust one another, and willingly seek out constructive criticism from one another. They are an unwavering support structure for one another. They are even on one another's speed-dials. Given the unusually low attrition rate from the program, it would appear that in numbers, and in highly connected numbers, there is strength and perseverance.

Our *third* point relates to the issue of successfully moving from one stage of professional preparation to another. One of the greatest challenges faced by the numerous teacher recruitment initiatives across the nation is how not to lose prospective teachers through leaks in the pipelines, as follow through from one educational context or level to another is often insufficient or missing entirely. We attribute much of the richness and smoothness of our students' journeys to the continuity across the four practica and between the practica and the Intern Credential program itself.

And *finally*, the early returns from this program underscore the *enormous importance of the quality early field experience*. In those few instances where we were not sufficiently careful about the teachers we selected and the student-teacher matches we made, or where we were unclear about our expectations about how students and mentors would work together, the resulting experience was less than ideal. What made the experiences so rich and powerful for the students was the sincere commitment of the parties concerned, the articulation of clear goals for each practicum activity, the continuous formative assessment of students' progress toward those achieving those goals, and the constant reflection about and integration of experiences that students performed. Absent this degree of engagement, the field experiences would likely not have yielded the benefits they did for any of the program participants.

It will take a valiant effort on the part of the inhabitants of the many "valleys" throughout our state to provide the next generation of new teachers with the variety and quality of experiences that will enable them to do justice to our children. As our nation's attention is diverted to other important and pressing priorities, we will need to be creative about ways to ensure that we make these opportunities available to the passionate and talented individuals who want to make a difference.

Our own research focus now broadens slightly, as we follow up our "Valley"

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students as they assume the responsibilities of teaching classroom of their own, and as we monitor the effectiveness of the "Valley" experiences as they are assimilated into our blended undergraduate program.

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