Refining
Social Justice Commitments
through Collaborative Inquiry:
Key Rewards and Challenges
for Teacher Educators

By Camille Wilson Cooper

Collaborative inquiry in education allows scholars and educators to abandon hierarchical approaches to research that often disenfranchise research participants; instead, it enables both researchers and the researched to share power, voice and privilege (Oakes, Hare, & Sirotnik, 1986; Rovegno & Brandhauer, 1998; Wasley, King & Louth, 1995; Ulichny & Schoener, 1996). Through collaboration, scholars and practitioners strive to form democratic research communities in which they serve as participant-observers and co-construct the entire research process. This work involves building relationships and trust, negotiating roles and boundaries, learning from colleagues, and striving to contribute to the education field (Clark & Moss, 1996; LePage, Boudreau, Maier, Robinson & Cox, 2001; Ulichny & Schoener, 1996). As a form of action research, collaborative inquiry involves "people who have traditionally been called subjects as active participants" in an interpretive and naturalistic research process (Stringer, 1999, p. xviii.) Collaborative inquiry can lead to the professional growth of both researchers and educators while also enhancing their

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abilities to be reflective practitioners. Further, its ultimate aim is to compel participants to make data-informed decisions that improve practice (Clift et al., 1990; Cochran-Smith, 1997; Merseth, 1991; Ulichny & Schoener, 1996).

Since Fall 2001, the faculty and leaders of the Teacher Education Program (TEP) at the University of California, Los Angeles have participated in a collaborative inquiry project. This five-year research endeavor provides opportunities for teacher educators, assisted by university researchers, to study their own practice. Specifically, faculty members develop instructional cases to be used as curriculum tools. The cases capture the challenges they encounter preparing and mentoring K-12 urban educators who are committed to social justice. The cases further explore dilemmas that play central roles in the faculty's effort to improve the quality of TEP and urban teacher education overall. Faculty members then write instructional case narratives to share their inquiry and insights with peers and external audiences.[1]

This paper discusses the key rewards and challenges of the first two years of TEP's case development project. Findings show that collaborative inquiry prompted the teacher education faculty to better define their social justice commitments, enhance the coherence of their program, and strengthen their community of practice. Faculty members also faced significant challenges as part of their inquiry efforts. This paper will overview the TEP faculty's collaborative inquiry experience and then pinpoint implications for other teacher educators. Findings indicate that, while not easy, engaging in collaborative inquiry characterized by critical reflection, critical dialogue, and community building can position teacher educators to be thoughtful and influential change agents within universities and K-12 schools.

The Learning Value of Collaborative Inquiry

The learning value of collaborative inquiry stems from it being an interpretive process through which group members co-construct knowledge. Wasser and Bresler (1996) explain that those involved in collaborative inquiry operate in an "interpretive zone" where "researchers bring together different types of knowledge, experience, and beliefs to forge new meanings" and engage in a dynamic, conceptual process that involves "exchange, transition, transformation, and intensity (p. 13)." Critical reflection, critical dialogue, and other activities geared towards building a community are essential to making collaborative inquiry a meaningful process.

Teacher educators of various philosophical orientations have long recognized the value of being a reflective practitioner, and they commonly link engaging in reflection with being a purposeful, creative, and effective educator (Fendler, 2003; Levin & Rock, 2003). It is important, however, that those who espouse social justice philosophies be *critical* in their reflection and thereby critique their practice. This requires that faculty members consider how they are promoting educational equity and preparing their students to combat injustice. Moreover, critical reflection is an important part of collaborative inquiry because it helps researchers discover

personal and institutional weaknesses and recognize the need for educational reform (Cochran-Smith, 1997; Wasley, King, & Louth, 1995).

Critical reflection often goes hand-in-hand with participating in critical dialogue, a process that, if thoroughly done as a group, can be difficult and uncomfortable because it exposes group members' sensitivities, judgments and multiple perspectives (Cooper & Gause, forthcoming). Indeed, Cochran-Smith and her faculty colleagues (1999), who conducted a collaborative study of their social justice philosophies and practices, suggest that participating in critical public discourse can create tension, invite conflict, and expose one's vulnerabilities. Cochran-Smith et al. (1999) explain that "the considerable tension between a commitment to collaboration, on the one hand, and genuine critique of others' ideas and positions, on the other, is a tension that is always operating in this kind of inquiry" (p. 245).

Still, others stress that critical dialogue can lead to increased knowledge and community building. LePage et al. (2001) contend that once researchers and practitioners struggle through process and engage in honest dialogue and negotiation they can develop a "transformative relationship" that is meaningful and mutually benefiting (p. 196). Furthermore, critical dialogue infuses multiple voices and perspectives into a group's inquiry process, allowing group members to share ideas, learn from each other, and negotiate collective meanings (Clark & Moss, 1996; Clift et al., 1990; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Rovegno & Brandhauer, 1998; Ulichny & Schoener, 1996). This often results in a group developing or strengthening their "community of practice" (p. 98)—a community in which members not only work together to perform meaningful tasks and share expertise, as colleagues in many settings do, but also a community where members develop shared norms, ideologies and identities as they influence each other's learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Indeed, the notion of communities of practice stems from a sociocultural perspective that views learning as socially situated, culturally relevant and collaborative (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Oakes & Lipton, 2002).[2]

The Organizational Challenge of Collaborative Inquiry

Collaborative inquiry shifts away from traditional research approaches whereby a university researcher designs and implements studies in solitude or in conjunction with students she or he supervises. In contrast, collaborative inquiry involves a group of people who all serve as participant-researchers and who work together to co-construct each research phase. Collaborative inquiry methods further involve sharing the power among all participants and equally valuing all participant's expertise and contribution, thereby ensuring that the research process is mutually beneficial (Clark & Moss, 1996; Clift et al., 1990; Cochran-Smith, 1997; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Merseth, 1991; Oakes, Hare & Sirotnik, 1986; Rovegno & Brandhauer, 1998; Ulichny & Schoener, 1996; Wasley, King & Louth, 1995).

Negotiation is a key part of making the collaborative inquiry process mutually

beneficial. Collaborative inquiry should be anchored in democratic processes instead of hierarchical structures (LePage et al., 2001; Oakes, Hare & Sirotnik, 1986; Ulichny & Schoener, 1996). It is usually challenging to do this in a university setting where autonomy and individual achievement is most rewarded, and thus, a competitive culture can reign. As Wasley, King & Louth (1995) state, "The culture of autonomy is much stronger than the culture of collaboration and the incentives are not necessarily in place which would move people to change. . ." (p.215).

Moreover, collaborative inquiry in education that is conducted in university settings often involve university researchers and educational practitioners who vary in professional status and/or research experience. University researchers usually take on a leadership role and assume what Oakes, Hare, and Sirotnik (1986) call a "chief worrier" position because they feel accountable for the overall inquiry process and the production of a final product (p. 550). The presence of such dynamics require that inquiry participants (both university staff and practitioners) work even harder at ensuring that everyone is valued and privileged by developing relationships based on trust, flexibility and constant dialogue and negotiation (LePage et al. 2001; Oakes, Hare, & Sirotnik, 1986; Ulichny & Schoener, 1996; Wasley, King, & Louth, 1995). Rovegno and Brandhauer (1998) specifically caution university researchers about "overpowering" (p. 360) the collaborative inquiry process.

The three modes of collaboration that can shape joint research endeavors include a "cooperative" approach based on a traditional, hierarchical research paradigm, a "symbiotic" approach that emphasizes researcher-practitioner unity and reciprocity, and an "organic" approach where all research parties assume joint ownership in the entire inquiry process (Clift et al., 1990, p. 53). Achieving the organic approach is ideal: it embodies the type of cooperative and democratic processes that all collaborative inquiry scholars recommend but none suggest is easy. Like other forms of action research, collaborative inquiry can be a political act that threatens bureaucratic and hierarchical organizational norms by fostering a more egalitarian work culture (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001).

UCLA's Commitment to Social Justice Education

UCLA's Teacher Education Program is a two-year, joint credential and masters program that is part of UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies' Center X. A program director and 20 full- and part-time faculty members govern TEP. During the 2002-03 school year, when data collection was completed for this paper, 357 students were enrolled in the program. TEP has doubled the size of its student population since 2001, which reflects both the program's increasing popularity and its efforts to comply with California State leaders' call for the expansion of University of California teacher education programs. This call resulted from the dire teacher shortage California faces—a shortage shared by many others states in the country (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Hardy 2001).

The mission of TEP is rooted in social justice ideals. Faculty and the Center X leadership aim to offer students a high-quality pre-service education that contributes to improving urban schooling for California's racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse children. This work encourages elementary and secondary teacher candidates to integrate theory with practice, and it prepares them to meet strict academic and professional standards.[3] Like other teacher education programs, UCLA's TEP is also charged with preparing teachers who can meet state and federal accountability requirements, and the faculty work to balance policy compliance with their social justice pursuits.

California's state budget crisis has resulted in deep cuts to TEP's budget over the past few years, yet, at the same time, the state has expected the program to train twice as many teachers as it did in 2000. In the fall of 2001, Center X's TEP received generous funding from a non-profit organization called the Stuart Foundation, to, in part, develop instructional cases about its efforts to sustain its quality program while scaling up its size and reach. The cases are meant to be learning tools that can be integrated into the curriculum of other teacher education programs (and TEP). The case development project was designed to be a five-year collaborative, self-inquiry process that offers the TEP faculty an opportunity to explore some of the successes and challenges of their work and to share their findings with other teacher educators through publishing the cases. TEP faculty members also began their collaborative inquiry process believing it would foster their professional development and strengthen the overall program.[4]

The Teacher Education Program includes approximately 20 clinical faculty members who specialize in practitioner-based education rather than educational research. Faculty members are diverse along racial, cultural, gender, linguistic and sexual orientation lines. They are non-tenure track faculty members whose primary responsibility is to teach and mentor rather than conduct research and publish. Prior to the TEP case development project, faculty members' normal duties did not include ongoing research opportunities. Faculty members, in fact, range in their prior research training and experience. Thus, as data later indicate, the TEP faculty's involvement in a collaborative inquiry project altered the nature of their work and workload in important ways.

Methods: Instructional Case Development

The initiation of TEP's case development project followed a 2001 leadership decision to flatten the program's hierarchy by developing four committees to address key programmatic and policy areas. Each faculty member joined one of the committees, which include Student Development, Curriculum, Faculty Development, and Community. Rather than forming additional groups to work on the instructional case project, TEP leadership and faculty decided that each of new committees would use collaborative inquiry methods to develop cases that address their programmatic

issues and concerns. Thus, in the fall of 2001, each committee began integrating the case process into their committee work with the goals of developing a case every academic year. The faculty completed its first set of cases in winter 2002.

Collaborative Inquiry Work

Since the inception of the case development project, a full-time university researcher has coordinated TEP's collaborative inquiry work. A part-time graduate student and postdoctoral researcher have also helped facilitate the inquiry process. The teacher education faculty offered this coordinating team full access to its community. During the first two years of the case development work, members of the coordinating team joined TEP committees and served as participant-observers along with faculty members. They also documented and analyzed the collaborative inquiry process as a whole. In addition, the coordinating team handled administrative aspects of the inquiry process such as data management and retreat planning. Consequently, two levels of data collection have been part of TEP's collaborative inquiry.

First, collaborative inquiry methods for TEP committees (consisting mainly of faculty members) included naturalistic modes of data collection that allowed the faculty to learn from their everyday work. Student work, faculty meeting notes, student orientation plans, journal entries, and student evaluations are examples of the data that informed the faculty's cases. The case work also inspired the faculty to interview students, K-12 educators in their partner schools and each other. Ethical and organizational principles of collaborative inquiry, along with conventional action research methods guided the case development work (Clark & Moss, 1996; Coughlan & Brannick, 2001; Rovegno & Brandhauer, 1998; Stringer, 1999; Ulichny & Schoener, 1996).

Second, the collaborative inquiry coordinating team (university researchers) employed ethnographic research methods, thereby observing and collecting data from TEP events and case development activities.[5] The team also interviewed faculty members and conducted focus groups.[6] All together, the team used interpretive research methods to explore how social structures, relationships and individual contexts influenced TEP's collaborative inquiry process (Becker, 1998; Maxwell, 1998; Merriam, 2001).

This paper, authored by the former full-time coordinator of TEP's case development project, draws upon a small sample of a vast data pool to discuss the rewards and challenges that the teacher education faculty faced during the first two years of their collaborative inquiry process, from 2001-2003.[7] Data sources include transcripts from TEP inquiry meetings and case development retreat activities; ethnographic fieldnotes written during TEP committee meetings and retreats; text from the TEP committees' 2002 cases; and transcripts from a faculty focus group. Focus group data, which captures the teacher educators' explicit perceptions about their collaborative inquiry process is the most informative data since the faculty spoke directly about the effects, benefits and complexities of the case project.

An iterative analytical approach guided data analysis. Reoccurring themes were identified by repeatedly reviewing focus group transcripts and then cross-checking those themes against the secondary data mentioned above (Becker, 1998; Maxwell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The author's subjectivity and the reflexive nature of the collaborative inquiry process was considered throughout data analysis and writing (Bloom, 1998; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Moreover, preliminary analyses and early drafts of this paper were shared with all collaborative inquiry participants as a form of member checking. Faculty and staff input influenced final data analysis (Maxwell, 1998; Merriam, 2001).

Focus of Instructional Cases

As stated earlier, four committees, comprised mainly of Center X teacher education faculty members, used collaborative inquiry to develop instructional cases. For their first-year case, the Student Development Committee investigated how TEP faculty and staff can help students become critical and committed social justice educators, given students' varying upbringings, levels of social and political awareness, and cultural identities. The case traced faculty members' effort to interrogate their definitions of and philosophies about social justice to make TEP's goals more coherent and explicit to students. Along the way, committee members developed a theory regarding the "multiple pathways" one can take to become a social justice educator.

The Curriculum Committee documented their process of revamping TEP's Community Project, a required assignment for all students. Committee members collected evaluative data from faculty and students. They also worked to align the project with California's teacher education standards regarding school-family relations. The project was further revised to emphasize the importance of students rejecting cultural deficit notions about poor children of color, and instead, recognize and appreciate children's assets.

TEP's Faculty Development Committee developed a case that describes the entire faculty's involvement in professional development activities geared towards learning how to better facilitate difficult conversations about race, class and equity-oriented issues in classrooms. The case draws upon meeting transcripts and fieldnotes that capture the tensions that arose when these teacher educators discussed their personal ideologies and sources of oppression and privilege. It further addresses how these tensions prompted them to reexamine and strengthen their anti-racist pedagogies in order to prepare their students to do the same.

Last, the Community Committee members explored TEP's efforts to increase the capacity of local, urban K-12 schools to engage in equity-oriented reform. Committee members researched the history of TEP's relationship with one long-time partner school district. The committee found that partnership success is greatly linked to the program's ability to place faculty members in a district where they can nurture long-term relationships, connect with practicing teachers who are TEP alumni, and tap into pre-existing professional networks.

Findings

Data suggest that, for the first two years, the TEP faculty's effort to develop instructional cases via a collaborative inquiry process was "very rewarding and beneficial." The case development project yielded individual, program and community effects. Inquiry led faculty members to implicitly revisit the questions of: What do we stand for? Is it ok for us to share the same values, yet, be and teach so different?, and, How can our commitments translate into action?

Some of the findings described below pertain to how the faculty's inquiry process advanced their program. Other findings address how the inquiry process impacted faculty members' work and relationships. It is evident that both dimensions of change influenced the other. No neat lines segmented TEP's collaborative inquiry process into disparate pieces: rather, the process was iterative and interdependent. Data reveal that the complexity of collaborating also caused some stress and strain. Furthermore, as intended, it uncovered parts of the program (and inquiry process) that need to be improved through concerted action.

Refining Social Justice Goals

Since the TEP's collaborative inquiry process began at the same time faculty members had to focus on scaling up their program size, the faculty concerned themselves with protecting the program's integrity. Doing this required the teacher educators to reflect upon the program's core social justice mission, which carried over to their inquiry efforts. In fact, each of the faculty committee's cases addressed the content, quality, consistency, and coherence of TEP's social justice mission in some way. Data from faculty members, as a result, show that they refined their individual social justice philosophies, which in turn, helped them strengthen the program. A member of the Faculty Development Committee stated that the case development project "deepened my understandings of what we were doing and what social justice was. I felt I got a much better handle on all the different ramifications of it."

Data suggest that as faculty members gained clarity about TEP's social justice goals, they also felt more affirmed and confident about their individual practice. A Community Committee member explained the collaborative inquiry process gave her a "renewed sense of confidence that what I was trying to do was valued."

The Student Development Committee's work further illustrate that faculty members gathered insight about social justice individually and collectively. The committee's inquiry process helped them move beyond critical reflection to build theory regarding the identity development of social justice educators and the "multiple pathways" that educators can travel. Doing so prompted them to refine TEP's official goals in order to clarify the destination to which they are leading students. As a result, the committee articulated three guiding program commitments:

> We presume our program is committed to helping students (1) understand and examine social inequalities, (2) become reflective educators knowledgeable in

theories and practice of learning and teaching, and (3) take action—individually and collectively—to remediate inequalities inside and outside the classroom. (Student Development Committee, 2001, TEP Casebook, p. 32)

The faculty as a whole eventually adopted these commitments, which are now included in program literature.

Sharing Commitments and Accepting Differences

While the collaborative inquiry process helped TEP faculty members identify and agree upon a common core of social justice commitments, doing so led them to them to question how they could each translate their philosophies into practice. They wrestled with finding a balance between sharing ideological commitments and accepting different beliefs and approaches to achieving those commitments. Faculty Development Committee members engaged in a dialogue about this matter during a retreat. One person commented:

I just wanted to ask a question of the Committee…As I think about what we're trying to do: Are we trying to get everybody to be like-minded [about social justice]? Are we trying to get people to agree about a particular premise, and [if so], what is the litmus test so to speak? And, [are we doing this] because we believe that [it] will make this organization more effective, that [it] will prepare our teachers . . . ?

Another faculty member replied:

When I hear 'like-minded', my initial answer would be no! I mean, we're not all going to be the same, but like-minded actually doesn't even mean that . . . . To me, it's about having this common core set of principles that guide our work and [knowing] that how I approach it is going to be very different than the way [another faculty member does] . . . but [there is] this common belief about teaching and learning. So, I guess in one way, the answer is yes, we do have that [like-mindedness] and that's what we want to instill in our students as well.

Such dialogue led many TEP faculty members to agree that while they do (and should) possess distinct teaching styles and different ways of interacting with school partners, they must dedicate themselves to working for social justice as the program defines it. This is their way of reconciling tensions that arise when trying to increase faculty and student diversity, while also striving to achieve consensus and program coherence.

This process of refining social justice commitments further sparked critical dialogue among the teacher educators that was emotional, revealing, and, at times, contentious. Such discussions often occurred during case development retreats, and they involved faculty members sharing their life histories and expounding upon their race, class, gender, and sexual orientation identities. On a few occasions tensions were felt along racial lines—several faculty members of color wanted their White colleagues to embrace a more critical view of social justice and marginalization, while several White faculty members wanted their colleagues of color to validate their dedication and accept them as equals in their work to combat inequity.

In all, several faculty members across the board said they valued these conversations for better acquainting them with their colleagues; others said that such sensitive dialogue was difficult because it made them feel vulnerable and fearful of being misjudged. For instance, one person (a White faculty member) explained:

> The judging of what is a social justice educator and what is not is problematic. You can't judge [who] is more socially just than another, but I think it's a common issue that both committees [Faculty Development and Student Development] have. Once you become judged, it becomes an issue of how you're being judged and by whom. . . . When is [acknowledging positionality and privilege] enough so that someone will recognize you as a social justice educator? How do you develop the trust and the lack of feeling judged?

Despite the difficult nature of TEP's critical reflection and dialogue around social justice education, the data suggest that these processes have been integral to effecting change on many levels. Most importantly, faculty members said they felt the work has also helped them empathize with the challenges their students face in confronting social justice issues and working through their insecurities, frustration or confusion to be more effective and courageous teachers.

The dialogue that resulted from faculty members' tense confrontations eventually led them to focus on reaffirming their shared beliefs in sociocultural and constructivist ways of learning—reminding them that they too are learners of social justice not just teachers. This finding became particularly apparent in data from the Faculty Development and Student Development Committees—the two committees who explicitly explored race and identity development. For instance, a Faculty Development Committee member reflected and said:

> I think there were times that I wanted to be particularly hard [on others] and the committee taught me that it is important to really understand where different people are in the process, you know, that not everyone is going to be at the same place in that process and that especially in this work, there's a need to be real committed to the work but understand that other people also have personal stake in where they're at.

Translating Goals into Program-wide Action

Data show that faculty members have gained a new appreciation for using collaborative processes to develop a TEP culture rooted in collaboration and critique, thereby accomplishing a key objective of action research (Sagor, 2000; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). Indeed, the findings overviewed in the remaining sections represent benefits that teacher educators in programs with various missions and program commitments can enjoy by participating in a collaborative inquiry process.

The action-oriented nature of collaborative inquiry helped TEP faculty members focus on systematically practicing what they teach. The case project compelled these teacher educators to better align TEP courses, teaching, mentoring, and school partnership efforts with their mission and goals. This involved revising pre-existing parts of the program and developing new program features. Faculty members further

engaged in discussions—at times debates—about how to reform TEP's admission policies, student orientation, curriculum, and testing requirements. They also revisited their teacher placement policies, thereby reexamining how they can best prepare their students for urban school teaching and reconsidering where social justice education is most needed. One faculty member remarked:

> I think our [student] orientation was better this year because it was more tied to our goals and I think the community study was better last year because the Curriculum Committee did this research which they wouldn't ordinarily have done. I mean, we used to just sort of revise things and not say, "Well, what does this revision mean and why should we change it, and is it based on this and that?" And so I think that it's [collaborative inquiry] maybe made all our work more authentic because it is all thought through more clearly in committee. And, if we believe in sociocultural theory, then you know, learning and all that is in a group, we're doing it! It's kind of—it's exciting.

Many faculty members, like the one quoted above, suggested that they feel gratified to engage in a collaborative inquiry process that allows them to model many aspects of sociocultural learning theory. As a result, these teacher educators view their inquiry as giving "a certain level of authenticity to the work that we were doing in the students' eyes." Indeed, several faculty members referred to how collaborative inquiry benefits their students. One person referred to the program's adoption of a new course on social justice identity development, which faculty from all four committees helped devise and teach during the second year of the case development project. She said:

> We were talking about in our group how the identity course grew out of different committee work, and I think that there are tremendous benefits for the students from the work that we've done. I mean, even insofar as we feel more confident talking about issues of race and class and gender and [sexual] orientation. I mean, that's major. I mean it really does go to the heart of the program.

Other faculty members emphasized that collaborative inquiry, particularly writing the cases, has allowed them to "share" their reform process with their colleagues and students. A Curriculum Committee member said the cases demonstrate the faculty's effort to respond to students' needs while addressing political mandates. This, in a sense, prompts the teacher educators to model ways to actively engage in school reform "in a way that lets you follow the law but at the same time, make sure the children we're teaching get the kind of education we know will benefit them."

The TEP faculty members point to their collaborative inquiry process affecting the program in several encouraging ways. Ironically, many agreed that their inquiry process revealed the importance of being willing to identify the program's weaknesses versus being "lulled" into complacency and thinking that "everything is A-ok." Several faculty members explained that even the difficult and tense part of their collaborative inquiry experience, such as engaging in hard critical dialogue, helped the program "move forward."

The Educative Effects of Inquiry: Seeing Process as Product

Overall, data show that the faculty's faith in their collaborative inquiry process has fueled their case work—providing sufficient motivation for faculty members to persevere when the work was difficult. The faculty, in fact, suggested that after two years of developing instructional cases, they came to regard the process as a product of its own. At first, however, the faculty struggled in recognizing the benefits of a long-term collaborative inquiry process that would not necessarily reap immediate, tangible results. In other words, a belief in the power of process emerged as one of the outcomes of the inquiry work. A faculty member stressed:

> I absolutely believe in process where I didn't before. I trust the process—that things will evolve if I just let them. So this last year, the process has affected my life in profound ways, even my personal life. I used to feel I had to figure everything out beforehand, plan each stage of an event. . . . I was stunned by how what seemed to be disparate pieces came together. Our ragged conversations somehow developed into the fabric of the case. . . .

The faculty specifically identified two important outcomes of learning to trust the inquiry process, which many initially greeted with reluctance or intimidation. First, these practitioner-based teacher educators said they became more confident in their ability to conduct research and write instructional cases. Second, they emphasized inquiry's positive and direct impact on the program overall. Case development meetings, retreats, committee work, inquiry sessions, and the case writing process became multiple sites of learning, where faculty gained professional insight and co-constructed their learning.

Collaborative Inquiry Competing with the "Bottom Line"

As described above, data from the first two years of the TEP faculty's collaborative inquiry process show the meaningful and productive qualities of such work. Indeed, the quantity of rewards that stem from the faculty's case development project seem to outnumber the challenges: nevertheless, the challenges are lofty because they pertain to faculty work customs that are hard to change.

For instance, data show that developing a truly collaborative writing process was difficult for many TEP faculty members (and for the inquiry coordinating team). The teacher educators, instead, wrote separately and then tried to patch a case narrative together, or, one or two committee members took the lead on writing the majority of the case narrative while other members added input upon reviewing a full draft. In addition, meeting deadlines was difficult and stressful for some, and committees differed in their beliefs about how to determine authorship. The faculty as a whole engaged in pointed conversations about authorship in which they debated issues of fairness, status, and value—in some cases, these debates temporarily undermined the camaraderie the inquiry process yielded.

Data show the most daunting challenge brought on by TEP's inquiry process,

however, was increased time demands. All of the faculty members, at some point during the first two years of the case development work, emphasized how complex and time consuming collaborative inquiry can be. Despite the educative and practical value of the case development project, most faculty members were adamant about not wanting it to hinder their work with students. A faculty member shared:

> I found the case study process to be exciting, motivating, engaging, and exhausting, ... It was really stressful a lot of times because as much as I know I personally enjoyed [it]—like our meetings and especially the creative process toward the beginning—the more into it we got, the more deadlines loomed, [which meant confronting the] monumental task of writing it and putting it all together . . .I just felt so torn because I recognized how important it was and how this had to happen. But on the other hand, I guess I always will feel that my most important responsibility is to my students and to my teaching and to the actual work . . . .

Another person said, "the bottom line is our students, so you know, if we're not there for them, that's a serious issue. . . ." Consequently, after two years of collaborative inquiry, faculty members agreed that the case development project was a "competing interest." A couple particularly characterized the inquiry process as work that has "taken its toll." Still, the teacher educators agreed that they wanted to continue the work, but they stressed the need to better integrate inquiry in their daily work routines and practice.

Implications: Sustaining Collaboration and Growth

TEP's case development project has engaged faculty members in a transformational collaborative inquiry process. Case development, coupled with the program's democratic committee structure, brought faculty members together to work within an interpretive zone where they shared ideas and co-constructed knowledge—all while investigating significant teacher education dilemmas (Wasser & Bresler, 1996).

The faculty's experience with collaborative inquiry influenced their professional identities and practice, inspiring many to reconsider their social justice philosophies and reassess how they interact with colleagues and students who have a variety of perspectives. Throughout the case work, the faculty also strategized about how to implement reforms that embody TEP's social justice mission. These results affirm the potential of collaborative inquiry to help educators working within all types of programs clarify their theories and appreciate how inquiry processes can increase their professionalization and efficacy (Rock & Levin, 2002; Sagor, 2000; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005).

While TEP's collaborative inquiry process helped faculty members forge a community of practice, their work did not escape conflict: their research experiences stand to inform and assist other educators who participate in this work. The concluding sections acknowledge the faculty members' rewards and challenges, and offer suggestions for sustaining an enriching collaborative inquiry process.

Building Trust and Sharing Knowledge across Committees

Data from TEP show that learning and relationships are at the core of collaborative inquiry. TEP's committee-based casework helped create communities of practice where teacher educators forged common knowledge, understandings, program priorities and even friendships—leading some faculty members to regard their committee as their "support group." TEP's shift to empowering faculty committees with decision-making and programmatic reform abilities was a positive move away from the traditional hierarchical structure of academic departments. Yet, the committee structure, coupled with the committee-based inquiry process, led to the development of separate communities of practice versus a whole one. Finding ways to build trust, communication and collaboration across committees is therefore essential.

Tackling Hard Discussions about Race and Identity

Collaborative inquiry, especially advanced by the Faculty Development Committee's case work, led to conversations about the faculty's own racial and cultural identities as teacher educators. Consequently, some heated topics and buried tensions, previously discussed with private cliques or avoided all together, were revealed during conversations about the program and social justice teacher education. Such exposure, and subsequent debate, prompted the faculty to more deeply examine the links between their ideologies, cultural backgrounds and educational practice. Engaging in these hard, faculty-wide dialogues is an integral, but difficult, part of collaborative inquiry and social justice education. While TEP's efforts in this area are probably on the cutting edge, faculty members would benefit from continuing to locate and use helpful resources (literature, media, activities, experienced moderators, etc.) that can inform their dialogue and increase their ability to build consensus or respectfully disagree. Connecting with faculties in other institutions who are participating in similar work may be a helpful source of information and support.

Making Time for Collaboration

The TEP faculty members undertook an intense collaborative inquiry project during a period when their program was expanding, their workload was increasing, and they were required to thoroughly respond to a host of state-mandated reforms. Thus, the case work was often a time demanding "add-on" to their regular responsibilities. This partly reflects the clash in the organizational norms of public universities, where faculty members' workload are heavy and multifaceted and many feel pressured to be as productive and efficient as possible, versus the organic, developmental and democratic norms of collaborative inquiry. Nevertheless, having adequate time is critical to the success of collaborative inquiry endeavors (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Merseth, 1991).

With time, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) suggest that a community's ideas "have a chance to incubate and develop, trust builds in the group and participants feel comfortable raising sensitive issues and risking self-evaluations" (p. 91). Still,

the faculty must address the reality of not having sufficient time to spend on case development as it is currently structured. Ways to restructure faculty work, alleviate some administrative or non-teaching responsibilities, and better align data collection with ongoing responsibilities should be considered, as well as reexamining the scope, structure and deadlines of the cases themselves. Involving students in the faculty's inquiry process may be one way to help accomplish the tasks listed above—this would also incorporate important, missing voices that would further increase the "authenticity" of the case work.

Conclusion

The first two years of TEP's case development work yielded a powerful learning effect—the faculty members' inquiry process became a product (case narratives), while part of the product was a process (learning, growing, and reforming). The case work led faculty members to study issues that directly impact them and their students; to focus on the educative value of collaborative inquiry; and to affirm their belief in sociocultural learning theory. Consequently, developing cases allowed TEP faculty members to model what they consider good practice.

In all, data show that collaborative inquiry is difficult, messy, and demanding, as it lacks the straightforwardness and efficiency that characterize some hierarchical research approaches. Yet, it aligns with democratic and social justice-oriented values. Engaging in collaborative inquiry helped faculty members advance their work as individual change agents, teachers and educational reformers. Co-constructing a collaborative case development project, therefore, proved worthwhile since the teacher educators' inquiry served as a tool for both professional development and program improvement. TEP's collaborative inquiry experience shows the potential of this type of action research process to inform, enlighten, challenge and align faculty members in other programs. In turn, faculty members can refine their ideologies and missions, and ultimately, improve their practice.

Notes

[1] The case development work is a product of the five-year funding that the Stuart Foundation granted to UCLA's Center X and UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA) in the summer of 2001. Now in their fifth year of inquiry, faculty members are working to compile their instructional cases into a book that will detail the case development (collaborative inquiry) process. The case development project is one component of the Urban Teacher Education Collaborative (UTEC), which comprises all of the faculty and staff from Center X, TEP, and IDEA who work on initiatives funded by the Stuart Foundation.

[2] Please see the UCLA Center X and TEP website at www.centerx.gseis.ucla.edu for more information regarding the program's history, mission and organization.

[3] The use of the word "faculty" refers to full-time and part-time faculty members, most of whom do not hold TEP leadership positions. "Faculty" also includes the directors of TEP and Center X who serve on committees. The directors (two total) have fully participated in the

collaborative inquiry process, assuming roles of peer participants rather than research leaders.

[4] I wish to thank the UCLA TEP faculty and Drs. Brad Olsen and Rebecca Joseph, professors at University of California, Santa Cruz, and California State University, Los Angeles, respectively, for their helpful feedback to earlier drafts of this paper. Drs. Olsen and Joseph served as vital members of the TEP case development team during the first two years of the project.

[5] As the former research coordinator of UCLA's TEP case development project, I have chosen to refrain from offering an elaborate personal reflection in this paper. This choice reflects my wish to honor the principle of not using my university researcher status to overshadow the work and perspectives of the faculty members/practitioners whose data inform the paper. I acknowledge that for two years I assumed an integral insider-outsider position within TEP, and I fluctuated between the center and periphery of the faculty's collaborative inquiry process. I, and the other case development team members, helped shape the TEP case development process; still, the faculty's work and ideas constitute the cases' true guiding force and the heart of the inquiry process. My coordinating role provided me with both partial and holistic views of TEP's collaborative inquiry that naturally informed the analysis I offer in this paper. Since some of my subjectivity is inherent, and I am the sole author of a paper that stemmed from collaborative work, further insertion of my perspective or role does not seem warranted.

[6] This taps into a finding by Cochran-Smith, et al. (1999) in which the authors attributed part of their success studying their teacher education program to their decision to steer clear of difficult and personal race conversations. UCLA TEP, on the other hand, determined that such conversations were an essential part of collaborative inquiry for social justice.

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