



## Case Story

# Community of Practice, Community of Support: IHE teacher preparation using a servingness professional development model for creating community

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### Abstract

In order to humanize and connect future educators across programs, this case study explains how a Northern California four-year university created a weekly professional development speaker series, Teachers, Eduleaders, Advocates, and Scholars (TEAS). TEAS aims to connect future educators to current practitioners to better meet the needs of PK-12 students and use a “servingness” model to meet the needs of diverse future educators. While TEAS has been successful at connecting educators across programs and humanizing education, an unexpected benefit has been educators that appear more confident in joining the profession.

*Keywords: professional development, community of practice, servingness, HSI*

### Introduction & Background

Nationally, new teachers report lack of confidence in intercultural competencies, partially due to damage-centered teacher education (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Humanizing practices invite pre-service teachers and teacher educators to grow together in critical knowledges about the world. Carter Andrews (2019) adds that “educating students in a manner that affirms and sustains their humanity and raises their critical consciousness about societal injustices should be normative and should provide students with a liberatory learning that contrasts oppressive policies and practices” (p. 5). Humanizing practices in teacher preparation allow preservice teachers to build their skills and knowledge of social justice and inclusive teaching practices as opposed to damage-centered practices that describe communities and identities by what they are lacking and their deficits. Professional development models of community engagement are one method to achieve humanization, as long as the professional development happens across the community and allows time for reflection (Romijn et al., 2021). In addition, learning communities across courses and cohorts are a high-impact practice with significant educational benefit (AACU, 2022).

In California there is a teacher shortage - one out of every five classrooms having uncredentialed teachers (Lambert, 2022). Some groups have argued the shortage is only dire in science, math, English, career and technical education, preschool, urban and rural schools, and special education, but that is enough to be felt in every district in the state. There are many reasons for the shortage of credentialed teachers, including; slightly increasing P-12 enrollment; a large number of retirees; lack of people enrolling in teacher preparation programs; and high attrition rates of unprepared teachers (California Teacher Shortage Fact Sheet, 2016). Equally important, California has a huge discrepancy between the rates of Students of Color and Teachers of Color. Teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to recruit,

retain, and encourage diverse students to pursue educational careers (Garcia, 2020).

Uncredentialed teachers often enter the classroom without the prerequisite skills necessary for success in the classroom. Madigan and Kim (2021) found that unprepared teachers are more likely to leave the profession due to burnout, which includes, “emotional exhaustion (comprising feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted because of one’s work), cynicism (a cynical and impersonal reaction toward those around you), and reduced efficacy (no longer feeling like you are competent and successful at work)” (p. 3). Humanizing education can help educators feel more prepared and connected; prepared and connected educators are more likely to remain working in education.

### Purpose & Setting

This case story documents the School of Education at Cal Poly Humboldt’s effort to create community across programs and work towards a servingness model for their diverse students. With 5,739 students and 490 faculty members and 59 majors, Cal Poly Humboldt is one of 100 public, 4-year Hispanic Serving Institutions in the United States (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022). As the university strives to go from Hispanic enrolling to Hispanic serving (Garcia, 2017), the education department decided to create a professional development program for future educators across majors, credential programs, and graduate programs. Preservice teachers exit surveys had found that the cohort model employed by the program led to a network of support for students during their programs. That same cohort model also led candidates to feel disconnected from the greater university community, other future educator groups, and the local education community that they joined at graduation. COVID-19 had only increased that feeling of isolation.

The Teachers, Eduleaders, Advocates, and Scholars (TEAS) program, which is designed to build community among future educators Cal Poly Humboldt, bridges the gap between preservice teachers and the larger PK-12 education community, enhances intercultural competencies, and improve professional confidence, is an effective way to prepare future educators to be inclusive and just educators who are connected to their communities and have the skills necessary to enter and stay in P-12 schools. Students at the university, across many programs, were invited to attend through posters and emails, but the program partially grew due to word-of-mouth.

### *Alignment with Servingness Model*

TEAS adapts the Cal Lutheran University servingness model of capable, connected, and inspired. Servingness can include non-academic outcomes that increase diverse students’ sense of belonging to the campus and the profession. For example, Cal Lutheran University’s model of servingness includes an academic mindset development framework that focuses on students being capable, connected, and inspired (Beltran et al., 2020). TEAS aims to provide participants with connection across programs and with the larger educational community, intercultural competence in order to be inclusive and just educators, and professional confidence to enter and stay in P-12 schools. TEAS is a weekly university professional development series for future educators and school social workers, serving undergraduates, credential candidates, and masters’ students.

### *Community-Building with Future Educators at University*

Statewide program completion surveys administered to credential candidates, across programs, pointed out a feeling of not being connected to the entire School of Education, nor the larger PK-12 education community. Graduate-level preservice teachers reported not feeling connected to the campus, just their cohort and professors. Between fieldwork in PK-12 schools and their night coursework, they rarely met teacher candidates in other programs, other education faculty, future teachers in education pathways, future early childhood educators, or Pupil Personnel Services Credential students. Many

graduate-level preservice teachers are re-entry students without strong campus connections through housing, athletics, clubs, or campus events. The TEAS program was designed to better allow humanizing connections between all of the future educators at the university. Liberal studies undergraduates, future content area undergraduates, future school social worker undergraduates, elementary 5th-year credential candidates, special education 5th-year credential candidates, social worker 5th-year credential candidates, secondary 5th-year credential candidates, and masters students in education, along with faculty, all can participate in TEAS sessions.

### *Networking with the Larger PK-12 Community and Professional Confidence*

Graduates' exit surveys also pointed to a lack of connection to the larger PK-12 education community in Humboldt County. Some reported not meeting any teachers other than their fieldwork mentor teachers, and most were unclear on the services provided by the Humboldt County Office of Education. TEAS was designed to bring PK-12 classroom teachers and county office specialists into community with the preservice teachers, bridging the gap identified in graduate's exit surveys. Virtual classroom tours allowed preservice educators to see practical classroom design and management and meet teachers from different districts across the county. Local education nonprofits have also joined TEAS, sharing information and service-learning opportunities with students.

Most TEAS speakers were local teachers or county office of education specialists that our participants may work with in the future. For example, a local 2nd grade teacher gave a video tour of her classroom to show students how the classroom was organized to nurture student autonomy, which also led to better classroom management. The librarian of the Humboldt County Office of Education showed students resources that teachers can check out for their classrooms, including hands-on and inquiry-learning kits. Another local teacher explained teachers' responsibilities for setting up Gender Inclusive Classrooms.

TEAS also addresses professional confidence through offering career services. The informal interview and application coaching of the first year has evolved into a year-long partnership with the College of Professional Studies Career Advisor. In the fall semester, TEAS participants learn how to shop for their ideal jobs, ask for letters of recommendation, keep track of application requirements, and plan for virtual job fairs. In the spring semester, TEAS participants work on interview skills for virtual job fairs and job interviews.

### *Intercultural Competencies*

Cal Poly Humboldt and the School of Education prides itself on fieldwork immersion, social responsibility, and close-knit community. TEAS was envisioned as a way to connect future educators, current education practitioners, and humanizing ideas about students and their assets. Speakers from different cultures and home languages speak to TEAS about supporting students with different home languages. Additionally, in the second year of TEAS, a partnership with the Campus Dialogue on Race allowed TEAS participants to also attend sessions in a weeklong series focused on justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### **Program Features**

School of Education faculty decided to hold weekly TEAS sessions via video conferencing early in the morning before PK-12 schools started. Early sessions allowed future educators to attend as they breakfasted, while driving to fieldwork sites, and before university coursework. While video conferencing was a requirement in Fall 2021 due to the pandemic, we found that video conferencing allowed our students in online programs to attend and feel part of the School of Education. Video conferencing allowed preservice teachers to attend TEAS no matter how far their fieldwork sites were from campus.

Video conferencing also allowed experts across the state to be our guest speakers. Participant surveys in Fall 2022 led to TEAS being adjusted to better fit into students schedules.

A key tenet of humanizing pedagogy is not only connecting and growing across teacher education and PK-12, but including time for reflection (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Romijn et al., 2021). TEAS sessions were one hour in length and designed with built-in reflection and application time. After a short introduction, guest speakers present on the day's topic for 25 minutes, followed by an activity or breakout rooms to apply the concept, then questions. In the last ten minutes of the hour, participants thank and bid the speaker goodbye, so that they can reflect together and connect what they learned to coursework, fieldwork, and previous TEAS sessions.

As the name implies, all future teachers, advocates, eduleaders, and scholars are invited to TEAS. Undergraduate students from education pathways including art, kinesiology, history, English, and science education majors; students from the integrated bachelors and elementary program; future social workers in the Pupil Personnel Service Credential; early childhood education undergraduates; Masters of Arts in Education, future scholars and administrators; and graduate-level credential candidates in Elementary Education, Secondary Education, and Special Education can all attend TEAS. Some of our participants are first-generation; some are from underserved minority groups. Faculty can also attend, and some faculty have been enthusiastic about learning new things alongside our students outside of the classroom. The conversations and connections are richer for that diversity of viewpoints.

School of Education faculty utilized a Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions grant to fund TEAS to meet our social responsibility to our community and the PK-12 schools. TEAS sessions promote intercultural competencies by exploring the cultures, languages, and needs of local PK-12 students. Sessions included: Yurok Language Project, What Every Teacher Should Know About Dyslexia, Hmong Languages and Culture, Inclusive Physical Education and Movement, Hispanic Heritage Month, Teaching Black Excellence, Restorative Practices, and Gender Inclusive Classrooms. We did not talk about achievement gaps, but opportunity gaps that could be addressed by better knowing and understanding our students.

Many of the topics were suggested by faculty at first, but TEAS participants soon felt empowered to speak up and request topics they wanted to know more about to improve their teaching and understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Requested topics included physical education integrated into the P-12 school day for schools that cannot afford a physical education specialist, resources available from the county office of education, and an entire series based upon teacher emotional regulation, breathwork, mindful classroom practices, and social emotional learning. Participants also requested sessions devoted to applying for education jobs and financial planning for teachers. Bringing in experts from CalSTRS and human resources coaches made education a more accessible field for participants who are first generation college students.

*Table 1: Sample Sessions*

Session Title	Number of Participants
Self-advocacy for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder	14
Breathwork/Yoga for Children	8
Incorporating theater and dance into TK-12	7
Diverse Childrens' Literature	12
Forest Schools	11
Part 1: Supporting Indigenous Youth	14

In Fall 2022, TEAS also partnered with the Campus Dialogue on Race (CDOR), a campus wide weeklong series of speakers on justice, diversity, and equity. A CDOR organizer came to TEAS and spoke to participants about the schedule of speakers, ways to access the talks, and keynote speaker, Cornelius Minor. TEAS participants could attend CDOR events and receive TEAS credit as they developed their cultural and professional confidence outside of TEAS sessions.

TEAS employed a constant improvement model. Every week, participants took part in an attendance process that asked for input on future speakers and processes. The first year a mid-year focus group gathered ideas on sustaining structures, marketing, and requested speakers. At the end of the first year, a Post-Year Survey was conducted with a random sample to consider effectiveness on TEAS stated goals of connectedness, intercultural competence, and professional confidence. Changes to TEAS made from the constant improvement cycle have increased the number of participants by 100% over the course of its first year. Data was also collected on participants' job outcomes through student reports. The Post-Year Survey will be repeated yearly to guide TEAS growth and determine its effectiveness.

## Results

### *Increased Sense of Community*

TEAS sessions created conversation between undergraduates, credential candidates, faculty, and Master of Arts students about ideas that humanize education. The local County Office of Education found the sessions so helpful that they offered to include them on the county calendar of professional development activities. Some graduates of credential programs have asked to be able to continue to attend as first-year teachers. Of the 63 participants in 2021-2022, eight were randomly chosen for the Post-Year Survey after the school year ended. 75% of participants surveyed claimed they felt more connected to the education community after participating in TEAS. All of the participants surveyed would recommend participating in TEAS to future educators at the university.

#### Participant statements:

- I understand my journey throughout this program was not a smooth one, however the resources, opportunities, and experiences have truly made me feel set and confident to become the educator I know I can be.
- I learned a lot from these TEAS! I hope you have them next year. It was so much fun.
- I plan to continue with the TEAS conferences because they have been super enriching.
- I plan on supporting all gender identities, disabilities, and accommodate for all kinds of people in my art classrooms in the future.
- I found the meetings lead by current teachers to be the most informative.

#### Presenter statements:

- It was my pleasure! I loved having this wonderful opportunity. Thank you again for inviting me. I look forward to working more with you and the School of Ed in the future.
- Please know that I gladly share the work at [...] preparing teachers with the tools to create equitable environments for all learners. What a huge undertaking and you are doing an amazing job at allowing them to spend time creating a space that allows this level of development. ... I love the topic and am looking forward to being with you all again.

### *Increased Intercultural Competence*

Surveys throughout the year showed that participants enjoyed and requested more sessions learning about different cultures in our community and curriculum celebrating excellence like the Teaching Black Excellence and Yurok Language Program sessions. Several students used curriculum and ideas

from TEAS in their fieldwork. Three-quarter of participants surveyed in the Post-TEAS evaluation agreed that “I am confident in my understanding of inequities surrounding race in education” and “I am comfortable addressing issues of inequity,” while 87.5% agreed “I am confident in my abilities to be culturally responsive” after participating in TEAS.

### *Increased Professional Confidence*

An unexpected TEAS benefit was greater professional confidence. After learning about applying for education jobs by participating in TEAS, TEAS participants reported shopping for districts they would like to work in, attending virtual job fairs, and asking for letters of recommendation. Anecdotally, faculty reported that TEAS participants seemed more excited and confident about job searching than their peers. All of the participants surveyed in the Post-TEAS evaluation reported that they would incorporate what they learned from TEAS into their teaching. Three-quarters of participants surveyed in the Post-TEAS evaluation reported that participating in TEAS made them feel more prepared to be educators.

### **Conclusion**

TEAS enters its second year of programming with ideas suggested by the future educators it serves. The diverse undergraduates, credential candidates, and Masters students are co-creating a serv- ingness model of connectedness, intercultural competence, and professional confidence. Humanizing education for TEAS means being responsive to PK-12 students, but also to the university students who want to work in PK-12 schools.

TEAS is a professional development speaker series, but it is also a conversation between faculty and all of the students from different programs about what it means to be culturally competent and about how we show up for each other and students. By bringing together faculty members and students from different programs, TEAS aims to create a sense of community and connection. This means that people can learn from each other, share their experiences, and build relationships that transcend their individual programs and years of study. Finally, TEAS is about humanizing education, aiming to promote a more holistic and compassionate approach to education, where people are seen as individuals with unique needs, strengths, and experiences. By focusing on cultural and professional competency and community-building, TEAS is helping to create a more humanized and inclusive education system.

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