

# TEACHERS WHO CAN: AN APPROACH TO STUDENT TEACHING THAT PROMOTES PERSEVERANCE AND TEACHER QUALITY

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## Abstract

*A year-long teacher residency program is cultivating excellence in pedagogy by giving students in a teacher preparatory program an extended, authentic experience in the classroom. Teacher residents grow alongside their students during a full academic year as they practice exemplary research-driven pedagogical strategies modeled by mentor teachers. By developing an advanced preparation program with our strategic partners, including multiple co-teaching methods, high-impact AVID® (Advancement Via Individual Determination) learning strategies, social-emotional learning, culturally relevant/responsive teaching, and Sanford Inspire/Sanford Harmony professional development modules, we offer a diverse and well-balanced approach to teaching that maximizes teacher quality.*

Keywords: co-teaching, AVID®, social-emotional learning, culturally relevant/responsive teaching, Sanford Inspire/Sanford Harmony

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**D**uring the spring of 2020, the College of Education faculty at the University of Texas Permian Basin (UTPB) embraced a new vision for our student teachers: a year-long residency program that would afford students a full year's experience in the classroom along with the compensation of a salary and benefits that matched those of the clinical teachers. In cooperation with strategic national and local partnerships, we brought this vision to fruition in the fall of 2020. At the time, UTPB was the 23<sup>rd</sup> university in a growing cohort of institutions transitioning to year-long teacher residencies. We were pioneers, however, in securing paid residencies for our teacher residents—a model quickly embraced by other universities across Texas and the United States.

The pilot year vision was expanded through the structuring of a program in which teacher residents would learn through a progressive model of co-teaching, the implementation of high-impact learning strategies (AVID®), evidence-based social and emotional learning programs, culturally relevant/responsive teaching, and the completion of professional development modules (Sanford Inspire/Sanford Harmony). The purpose of this manuscript is to demonstrate how our collective approach to an innovative student teaching program—i.e., the year-long paid teacher residency—enhanced student learning and prepared teacher residents to be classroom leaders.

## Strategic Partnerships

Key partnerships serve as the backbone of our successful year-long teacher residency program. National

partnerships include the University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (US PREP) and Opportunity Culture® (an initiative of Public Impact®). US PREP generates on-the-ground support and services designed for training and retaining high-quality teachers for historically underserved communities ([www.usprepinternational.org](http://www.usprepinternational.org)). A Regional Transformation Specialist (RTS) is assigned to the university for the ongoing support that includes a series of professional development opportunities for all stakeholders, targeted training, and monthly leadership meetings. Additionally, US PREP assigns an academic coach to work with site coordinators who are university faculty members selected to instruct, mentor, and evaluate teacher residents. Both the RTS and coach provide support virtually and in person, frequently traveling to our campus and respective districts. This support focuses on a collective vision of pedagogy that provides mentoring and coaching along with an integration of campus coursework and clinical experiences.

The Opportunity Culture® partnership is also vital to the success of the teacher residency. Each school district partner assigns an Opportunity Culture director to lead this work. The directors, school administrators, and university partners work in tandem for the selection of student and clinical teacher pairings, a vetting process by which candidates are carefully chosen and matched for exemplary results ([www.opportunityculture.org](http://www.opportunityculture.org)). The partners further collaborate in the selection of clinical teachers, titled multi-classroom leaders (MCLs), and help to secure generous stipends for MCLs as compensation for their year-long mentoring. MCLs subsequently provide mentoring for teacher residents following a gradual release approach. They implement a suggested co-teach model, explained in greater detail later, that allows teacher residents to first observe, then assist, and eventually to take leadership of the classroom with solo teaching lessons. Teacher residents meanwhile receive a year-long paid teaching contract complete with benefits and a year in their selected retirement system.

Local partnerships include the progressive involvement of the MCLs and school administrators with university site coordinators, who coordinate data meetings designed to provide ongoing, real-time support for programmatic improvement. MCLs meet with site coordinators every other month to review collected data from teacher resident observations, celebrate achievements, and discuss needed refinements within the classroom. Feedback from these partners is critical to the success of the program. Likewise,

school administrators meet every other month with site coordinators to review the data and discuss needed refinements within the building. During these governance meetings, principals share successes and challenges of the residency program in their respective schools so that their feedback can be used for programmatic changes. Finally, site coordinators also meet monthly with Opportunity Culture directors from each district to invite their feedback and questions regarding the status of the residency program in their districts and suggestions for continuous improvement and growth.

Our combined national and local partnerships serve to provide the foundation for our year-long teacher residency program. This requires the collaborative cooperation of our College of Education dean, department chairs, and assigned faculty, along with the district site coordinators who have the most critical role. Currently, we have four full-time faculty members assigned the roles of site coordinators to oversee the program and provide on-site clinical support. They provide evaluative feedback to teacher residents, to MCLs, school administrators, Opportunity Culture directors, US PREP partners, and our College of Education administrators.

Piloting a year-long teacher residency program for the first time during the 2020-2021 academic year highlighted unanticipated logistical and pedagogical issues, from which we learned, allowing for real-time adjustments to support continuous programmatic improvement. Most improvements were the direct result of feedback received from our strategic partners. Thus, our year one teacher residency that included 15 teacher residents and MCL pairs, across two districts, grew to 24 teacher residents and MCL pairs in year two. Currently, the UTPB teacher residency program focuses on the two largest local school districts with plans to include many rural districts. This would include offering rural students distance learning opportunities.

Recruitment for year three of the local residency program is meanwhile underway. Reflecting upon the extraordinary benefits of assigning an education student to a year-long pedagogical experience, administrative conversations are now focused on scaling the program so that all education students, most of whom currently complete a non-compensatory single-semester student teaching program, will eventually participate in the year-long, paid teacher residency. Thus, what began as a pilot

with limited participants will become the inclusive standard for all UTPB student teachers.

## Co-Teaching

Implementing a model in which co-teaching is fundamental has improved the teacher residents' experiences and learning outcomes. Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989) developed co-teaching as a pragmatic merger of expertise between the general and special education teachers to support diverse learners in the general education setting. Cook and Friend (1991) later shortened the term from cooperative teaching to co-teaching and further clarified the characteristics of a genuine co-teaching relationship as “two professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space” (p. 2). This clarification of the definition meaningfully extended the use of co-teaching beyond the general education and special education boundaries to any teaching environment which supports diverse learners.

A meta-analysis of research on co-teaching by Murawski and Swanson (2001) revealed that co-teaching positively impacted student outcomes. Similarly, a meta-analysis by King-Sears (2021) confirmed that students with disabilities made significantly better progress in a co-teaching environment than in a self-contained or special education environment and experienced a quicker rate of progress. Co-teaching has been critical to our year-long teacher residency program, as well, and something site coordinators model during the teaching of the weekly seminars.

A variety of co-teaching strategies have been developed to meet the needs of the individual teachers, the subject matter being taught, and the students within the classroom. These models include One Teach, One Observe; One Teach, One Assist; Team Teaching; Station Teaching; Parallel Teaching; and Alternative Teaching. A key aspect of co-teaching success is the use of co-planning meetings. Murawski (2005) detailed a plan for co-teaching in which the co-teachers met frequently to communicate plans regarding specific lessons, discuss personal teaching styles and preferences for classroom management, and ensure each teacher understands his or her role in the upcoming co-taught lesson. Co-planning is also noted as one of the biggest barriers to co-teaching due to lack of time for meetings and communication barriers (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011).

Cook and Friend (1995) identified two key tenets for effective co-teaching: 1) Teachers must demonstrate parity by switching roles often so that no one teacher is always with a small group or providing support by circulating while the other does all the large group instruction; 2) Heterogeneous groups must be maintained by switching students often within large and small groups so that no one student is stigmatized as being in the lower group. Another key element for successful co-teaching is the use of reflection meetings to identify which parts of the lesson went well, how the roles worked, and what areas need improvement in the implementation of the co-teaching strategy.

Scholar Michele Kamens (2007) evaluated the use of co-teaching in the pre-service teachers training model and revealed that introducing pre-service teachers to this collaborative teaching experience enhanced their ability to work as a team, communicate more effectively about the classroom and students, and helped them structure teaching to better meet the needs of diverse learners in the classroom. In a co-teaching model, pre-service teachers could assume the role of a lead teacher more quickly than in a traditional student teaching model—something we saw mirrored in our year-long residency program. Pre-service teachers' self-esteem was enhanced by the affordance of sharing their ideas for lessons, and exploring their teaching styles, while being in a supportive co-teaching relationship with a mentor teacher.

In alignment with best practices, our year-long teacher residency model places teacher residents in a co-teaching position with a master teacher for the full academic year. Co-teaching strategies are observed and evaluated by site coordinators during informal observations with the results reported during stakeholder meetings. Teacher residents and MCLs are provided with a partner-developed progression timeline that outlines the various co-teaching methods and suggests when, week by week, each of the methods should be implemented. The goal of the progression timeline is to both guide MCLs with release time and transition teacher residents from One Teach, One Observe to initiating greater leadership in the classroom with progressive co-teaching strategies of assisting, station teaching, team teaching, alternate teaching, and parallel teaching.

## Progression of TR Development and Release Time

ELEMENTARY				
Week	Suggested Residency Co-Teaching Strategies	Minimum Teacher Resident Responsibilities	Minimum Multi-Classroom Leader Responsibilities	Release Time Recommendations
1	One teach   one observe  One teach   one assist  Alternative teaching	Assume partial responsibility for leading classroom routines (e.g., attendance, bell work, dismissal)  lead small group activities planned by the MCL (recommended that MCL establishes groupings and provides small group plans).	Modeling for TR  Include TR in team planning time (suggested min. 2 hours per week). Reserve additional 1:1 planning time with TR (suggested 30 minutes per day, alone and/or w/new teachers on team).  Provide TR all whole group and small group lesson materials in advance and give access to curriculum	TR provides 0 minutes of release time  Suggested Activities Planned and Guided by MCL: Calendar activities, planner set up and checking, Go noodle/Brain break activities, small group support (e.g. math facts, sight word review, vocabulary, etc...)
2-4	One teach   one observe  One teach   one assist  Alternative teaching	Assume partial responsibility for leading classroom routines (e.g., attendance, bell work, student engagement direction/ redirection, dismissal)  Lead small group activities planned or heavily guided by the MCL  Co-teach whole group activities  Begin to prepare to take on the planning for one content area	Modeling and co-teaching with TR.  Include TR in team planning time (suggested 2 hours per week). Meet and plan with TR at a consistent time (suggested 30 minutes, 2-3 times per week, alone and/or w/new teachers on team).  Provide TR all lesson materials in advance and review (and potentially rehearse) TR planned lessons in advance	TR provides 30 minutes to an hour per team member (3-4 team members) per week*  Suggested Activities: Read Aloud and "SSR" time, supervise student independent work-time, small group instruction/ support, supervise lunch/recess  Teach lessons that have been co-planned and practiced in detail with MCL and ideally modeled by MCL in an earlier period (these "highly guided" lessons can be

### High-Impact Learning Strategies: AVID®

Including high-impact strategies is essential to an effective teacher education program. At UTPB, we implement AVID® (Advancement Via Individual Determination) across disciplines to deepen engagement and increase academic rigor. The AVID strategies are strategically modeled in multiple courses within the college (faculty create crosswalks of AVID strategies used cross-

lesson plans. Over the past two years, the use of AVID strategies has increased in our year-long teacher residency program. Faculty, teacher residents, and MCLs attend one or more AVID professional development training each year. Teacher residents experience and use AVID strategies in their coursework as well as in their seminars. AVID strategies are taught during the seminar with the expectation that teacher residents will implement these strategies in their classrooms. Teacher residents help MCLs

debrief the strategy as well as the social-emotional and culturally relevant/responsive teaching used. Teacher residents also reflect on the parts of WICOR® (writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading) and how they impact the lesson content being taught (Shapiro & Cuseo, 2017).

The AVID strategies are a key piece of our standard UTPB lesson plan format. These strategies are both taught and modeled by site coordinators during seminars. Teacher residents are expected to select an appropriate strategy for their students based on the content and student needs. Each teacher resident must state why she or he selected the strategy for their students. Teacher residents must also articulate how social-emotional learning and culturally relevant/responsive teaching are supported by the strategy. The teacher residents' students frequently receive differentiation, accommodations, enrichment, and English language support through the strategies. These strategies and best practices help to foster collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning, and further promote an equitable, student-centered approach to learning that helps to close the achievement gap for all learners.

One of the required course texts for the seminar is Drumright et al (2016) *AVID Elementary Foundations*, and teacher residents use it regularly when completing assignments for the weekly seminar as well as when they are designing lesson plans. This text is also utilized in other education courses in our program. In the seminar, we focus heavily on strategies that develop collaboration, a key component of AVID's instructional methodology (the C in WICOR). According to Drumright et al. (2016):

A collaborative classroom is an intentional environment in which collaboration and social development are infused into academic content. In collaborative-rich classrooms, student collaboration goes beyond conventional cooperation and compliance, as students become invested, caring members of a learning community (p. 146).

Collaboration does not come easily. As such, we know that skills must be explicitly taught so that students are successful when working with others. As they collaborate with their peers while engaging in these strategies, our teacher residents gain an understanding of both the challenges and the benefits of working with others with different perspectives and learning styles. Through AVID strategies with a focus on collaboration, "Students learn to

value and appreciate the diversity that other students bring to the classroom, which is a critical component in creating a safe classroom with mutual trust and respect" (Drumright et al., 2016, p. 146). Collaboration is essential for student success. We want our teacher residents to experience these collaboration strategies in the weekly seminar so that they might better understand the value of using them and how best to implement them in their classrooms.

## Social-Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is another central focus within our year-long teacher residency model. Defined as acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals...establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2013a, 2013b), SEL is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful (Jones et al., 2013).

Based on extensive research by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) the following five sets of competencies have been identified as the key to SEL:

- **Self-awareness.** The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior.
- **Self-management.** The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations, and to set and work toward personal and academic goals.
- **Social awareness.** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures and to recognize family, school, and community resources and support.
- **Relationship skills.** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups through communicating, listening actively, cooperating, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
- **Responsible decision-making.** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on

consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, the realistic evaluation of the consequences that stem from actions, and the well-being of self and others.

Teacher residents in the year-long residency model are coached by site coordinators on the significance of embedded SEL during seminars and in pre-observation conferences. This includes instructing teacher residents how to integrate SEL into their classrooms through weekly self-reflection, the completion of Sanford Inspire and Sanford Harmony modules, the development of their weekly lesson plans, and the inclusion of high-impact AVID strategies, and modeling from site coordinators.

### Culturally Relevant/Responsive Teaching

Culturally relevant/responsive teaching is a term that was coined by Ladson-Billings in 1995. She defined it as a “pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Drumright et al., 2016, p. 147). Culturally relevant/responsive teaching

involves knowing the whole child—their culture, ethnicity, language, race, social class, background, and gender—and using all of these as strengths to build upon. Teachers who embrace this pedagogy find ways to connect students’ home lives to their school lives. Culturally relevant/responsive teaching is therefore another critical component of our year-long teacher residency program.

According to Berg and Brooks (2020), “CRT isn’t a singular strategy that one applies in classroom teaching. CRT practices are a vehicle to embrace equity by design and help students to feel part of the community of learners and valued as an individual.” Such practices are multifaceted with multiple dimensions: diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). *Diversity*, having a wide range of attributes, qualities, or beliefs, can be applied to an individual, group, or community. *Equity* is achieved when one seeks to understand an individual’s needs and then provides support to help meet those needs. It ensures everyone can experience an equitable outcome. When a group or organization encourages individuals from all backgrounds to fully participate, *inclusion* is the result.

**Table 1**

*Demographics of our university, teacher residents, and students in the districts we serve*

	University	Teacher Residents	District 1	District 2
Hispanic	49%	55%	63.6%	77.2%
White	35%	42%	23.8%	16.4%
African American	7%	0%	7.7%	3.9%
Asian	3%	0%	2.6%	.9%
Other or Two or More	6%	3%	2.6%	1.6%

The UTPB year-long teacher residency program currently serves the two largest school districts in our geographic area. The diversity of the two districts (Texas Public Schools, 2022) mirrors the diversity of our university student body (Univstats, n.d.) as well as the diversity of our teacher residents (see Table 1). Many of our residents will transition into jobs in these districts. Thus, it becomes vital that they develop an awareness of,

and an ability to implement, culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy.

Self-paced Sanford professional development modules (outlined in the next section) not only help teacher residents in understanding and fostering SEL, but the modules also promote culturally relevant/responsive teaching, such as *Using Critical Consciousness to Challenge Inequity* and *Affirming Difference and Valuing Background Knowledge* (Sanford Inspire and Sanford Harmony, n.d.). The use of

AVID-inspired graphic organizers (Drumright et al., 2016, p. 288-299) for debriefing the strategy yields another strong connection for increased learning. One example is teacher residents creating a Mind Map (p. 288-291) in which they connect the concepts and then explain why they made the connections.

Teacher residents further participate in professional learning opportunities related to culturally relevant/responsive teaching. They attend a six-hour AVID training titled *Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices* in which they gain an understanding of how culturally relevant/responsive teaching is defined and the impact that equitable instruction, teacher expectations, and relational capacity can have on student success. This instructs teacher residents on how to create a safe and inclusive classroom environment for all students. They engage in critical conversations about assumptions, perceptions, and stereotypes that impact the classroom environment. They discuss the values inherent in culturally relevant/responsive educators and how those values translate into their instruction. Finally, teacher residents learn about their role in closing opportunity gaps. They learn how to implement instructional practices that can potentially close achievement gaps and increase academic success for all students. We offer this training because “woven throughout AVID’s curriculum and philosophy are the culturally relevant/responsive practices that help educators build authentic relationships, hold high expectations, empower student voices, engender self-advocacy, respect experiences, and build on assets” (Drumright, et al, 2016, p. viii).

In a culturally relevant/responsive classroom, building relational capacity is key. The teacher focuses heavily on the quality of interactions between students and building a community of learners—a community that is safe for all students and draws on their background knowledge and experiences. To do this, teachers must explicitly teach and model communication skills, then allow plenty of opportunities for students to practice these skills. Icebreakers, community builders, and energizers (Drumright et al., 2016, p. 147) are AVID strategies we use in the seminar to build relational capacity. To connect theory to practice, we also have our teacher residents consider culturally relevant/responsive teaching when writing their weekly lesson plans. For each plan, they are asked to include an AVID strategy and to explain how the strategy supports culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy.

## **Sanford Inspire/Sanford Harmony**

The goal for teacher residents in our year-long residency program is to advocate for learning blocks fundamental to an equitable and successful teacher preparation program. Sanford Inspire and Sanford Harmony offer free online modules and downloadable materials that assist this objective (Sanford Inspire and Sanford Harmony, n.d.). Teacher residents can work through the modules at their own pace. The modules also have transcripts and resources to support users. This flexibility supports our teacher residents’ schedules and personal lives.

Teacher residents are assigned Sanford Inspire modules to complete before coming to the seminar which supports a flipped model. They earn 30- or 60- minute certificates for thirteen modules. The teacher residents debrief the modules using AVID strategies before sharing their thoughts during the seminar. The variety of topics addressed through a wraparound approach supports teacher residents at various stages of their professional development.

During seminars, the Sanford Inspire modules are discussed, and any points of confusion (POC) are addressed. By collaborating, the teacher residents support each other’s growth. They can therefore experience student agency in action. The Sanford Harmony activities are used during seminars to deepen understanding of SEL, specifically focusing on the CASEL 5 framework. Several seminars focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to model and support teacher residents in their understanding of how to approach the topic with their students. They complete Sanford Inspire and Sanford Harmony modules which yield a diverse and well-balanced approach to teaching that maximizes teacher quality.

## **Next Steps**

As we recruit education students for year three of our teacher residency program, we reflect upon the two previous academic years. When teacher residents were anonymously surveyed during the final seminar of the 2021-2022 year, their overwhelming consensus was expressed gratitude for the year-long experience. As one resident shared, “Residency was one of the hardest things I’ve done, but it was so worth it” (Anonymous, 2022). Another resident added, “I would choose the teacher residency program a million times simply because I had so much support” (Anonymous, 2022). Although our teacher residents will benefit from the \$24,000 salary during their

year of residency, along with receiving health and retirement benefits, the nine months spent in their respective classrooms Monday through Friday, from August till May, far outweigh the monetary benefits. This consensus was further supported by aggregate impact survey results compiled by our UTPB data lead, Dr. Kevin Badgett (2021). Teacher residents, university personnel, and district partners were united in saying they shared strong confidence, a shared vision, and preparedness resulting from participation in the UTPB year-long teacher residency program.

Two years of collected data reflect that our year-long teacher residents experienced significant gains that have prepared them to be excellent 21st-century educators. Darling-Hammond (2006) affirmed the need to create more effective teacher preparation programs through integration of coursework and clinical work, extensive supervision of clinical practice, and proactive relationships with key stakeholders. We accomplished these goals by structuring a year-long program that yields an authentic and synergetic classroom experience for teacher residents, ongoing and systematic clinical observations that helped to advance teacher resident competency, and data-driven meetings with our national and district partners. Indeed, we would not have achieved this success without the ongoing support of our essential partners who helped to define and redefine the vision. Fostering strategic national and local partnerships to facilitate and fund this vision was key. Neither would we have been successful without the inclusion of research-driven best practices that include the practice of co-teaching models, the implementation of high-impact AVID® strategies, fostering social-emotional learning, and promoting culturally relevant/responsive teaching, in part, through the completion of Sanford professional development modules.



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