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Urban Immersion: Changing Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of Urban Schools

Connie Schaffer, Deborah Gleich-Bope
and Cindy B. Copich

Abstract

This research investigated the impact of an Urban Immersion (UI) program which partnered urban schools with a university's teacher preparation program. The UI program provided experiences for pre-service teachers by completely immersing them, along with their university instructors, in urban schools where they worked and learned alongside K-12 teachers and students. Data collected from pre and post experience surveys provide statistically significant evidence that the UI program reshaped the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding urban schools and also increased their confidence and interest in teaching in an urban setting. The success of traditional field experiences is indecisive (Mason, 1999; Sleeter, 2001); however, approaches such as the UI program may positively impact the recruitment of teachers to urban schools. This innovative approach to pre-service teacher preparation has tremendous potential. Longitudinal research will be important as this urban university and the local urban school district work together to provide high-quality educational opportunities for all of their students.

Keywords: *urban immersion, urban schools, pre-service teachers, pre-service teacher preparation, urban field experience*

Introduction

A fundamental premise for teacher preparation programs is to prepare pre-service teachers for the K-12 workplace. Programs must prepare pre-service teachers for a classroom that may be far different from the one they experienced in their own personal journeys through elementary and high school. While many pre-service teachers are from white, middle class backgrounds and were raised in suburban and rural areas, the future workplace for many pre-service teachers will be classrooms in urban settings with increasingly diverse students (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2010; Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008; Landsman & Lewis, 2011; United States Census Bureau, 2012; Valentiin, 2006).

This is concerning as studies suggest teacher preparation programs may fall short in their goal to train pre-service teachers to work with diverse student populations (de Freitas & McAuley, 2008; Feldman & Kent, 2006; Mills, 2008; Valentiin, 2006). This is critical given that research indicates that teachers are more effective when they are proficient at teaching classrooms made up of diverse students, and these skills can increase student motivation and learning (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2013). If pre-service teachers are not adequately trained to work with diverse populations, how can they be expected to be effective in the workplace of the future?

The Urban Immersion (UI) program was designed to better prepare pre-service teachers for urban schools and the diverse students found in those settings. The program, which coupled a faculty-supervised field experience with a unique coursework delivery model, was developed to assist pre-service teachers in forming more accurate perceptions of teaching in diverse K-12 urban schools as well as increase their individual sense of preparedness to teach in those settings. The program was designed through an existing partnership between a large urban teacher preparation program and the surrounding urban public school district and implemented at elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Literature Review

Pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher preparation programs are comprised of individuals with distinctive dispositions. These dispositions consist of beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions, which are integrated within the context of the K-12 classrooms they encounter during the preparation program. The concepts of race and class are two important socially constructed categories for pre-service teachers to consider as they develop into professional educators who very likely may teach in urban schools. Universities preparing pre-service teachers have a responsibility to consider how these integrations lead pre-service teachers in reshaping their interactions with students and to design programs that provide opportunities for them to form more accurate perceptions of themselves and others (Freedman, 2008).

Understanding pre-service teachers' perceptions of students who have differing backgrounds from themselves is increasingly important. This is especially true as demographic trends in the US indicate the future demand for teachers will be greatest in urban schools that have diverse student populations (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2010). This is a challenge for the profession because pre-service teachers often report a lack of confidence in their ability as well as inadequate preparation to teach in urban schools, particularly to teach students from diverse backgrounds (Burstein, Czech, Kretschmer, Lombardi, & Smith, 2009; Desimone, Bartlett, Gitomer, Mohsin, Pottinger, & Wallace, 2013; Whitney, Golez, Nagel, & Nieto, 2002).

Pre-service teachers, many of whom are white and from middle-class communities, may have few genuine interactions with minorities from poor communities. As a result, white pre-service teachers may have limited opportunities to become culturally literate or build awareness of how education may be experienced by different groups (Hancock, 2011). The challenge becomes to "no longer graduate white teachers from colleges and schools of education who are not culturally literate" but to address the issue by providing "prolonged opportunities" for pre-service teachers to be in urban settings where they themselves become the minority (Hancock, 2011, p. 105).

The need to better prepare pre-service teachers to work in urban schools has not gone unnoticed by teacher preparation programs (del Prado Hill, Friedland, & Phelps, 2012; Jacob, 2007; Nieto, 1992; Sleeter, 2001). Approaches taken by teacher preparation programs to prepare future teachers for success in urban schools have included initiatives to: (1) increase their sociocultural competence, (2) foster high expectations for student achievement, (3) build collaborative skills, and (4) equip them with instructional strategies that promote learning within diverse populations (Voltz, Collins, Patterson, & Sims, 2008).

Many teacher educators believe an effective means of learning any teaching competency or skill is to purposefully link university coursework with experiences in K-12 schools (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). These opportunities, referred to as field experiences, are a requirement of every nationally accredited teacher preparation program (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2007; Teacher Education Accreditation Council, 2010). During field experiences, pre-service teachers observe and interact with students and staff while gaining valuable teaching opportunities in K-12 schools.

While participating in these experiences, pre-service teachers begin to challenge their existing and often highly ingrained perceptions and assumptions of schools-- perceptions that have developed over the numerous years they themselves have spent as K-12 students (Lortie, 1975). Field experiences have long been viewed as a potential means to alter pre-service teacher perceptions, specifically those related to teachers and students in urban schools (Haberman & Post, 1992; McDermott, Johnson Rothenberg, & Gormley, 1999; Olmedo, 1997; Singer, Catapano, & Huisman, 2010). Historically the results of these efforts have been mixed (Mason, 1999; Sleeter, 2001). Like the research on general field experiences, urban-based field experiences appear most promising when they are tied to coursework and closely supervised (Mason, 1997; Olmedo, 1997). Ideally, urban field experiences should also be long-term and take place in high-quality urban schools (Voltz, Collins, Patterson, & Sims, 2008).

Defining Key Terms

Urban Areas and Urban Growth

Concepts related to this discussion include urban population trends and the definition of urban schools. Urban areas are commonly defined in terms of population density (Howey, 2008). The US Census Bureau classifies urban areas as "densely developed residential, commercial and other nonresidential areas" (United States Census Bureau, 2012, p. 1). Urban growth can be described in terms of population trends. In 2008, 3.3 billion people were estimated to live in urban areas worldwide. By 2030, this number is expected to grow to almost five billion, well more than half of the earth's population (Schlein & De Capua, 2012). The 2010 US census reported the rate of population increase in urban areas was 9.7% greater than the overall rate of population increase for the country (United States Census Bureau, 2012).

The growth in urban populations and the increased diversity of those populations are important reasons why teacher preparation programs must prepare pre-service teachers to work with the children represented in these demographic groups. Many people living in urban areas will represent racial minorities and will require education for their children. In fact, population growth in the US is now concentrated in urban areas and is becoming more culturally diverse. Many metropolitan areas already report a majority, non-white status among those under the age of 18 (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2010).

Urban Schools

Urban schools educate nearly one quarter (23%) of all public school students in the US (Howey, 2008). However, the study of these institutions is confounded by the varying definitions of urban schools (Milner, 2012a). Milner found that some definitions focus on the deficits of students or families and seem to discount the geographical or social context

of the school. Milner suggests that urban schools be defined using a three-tiered typology that focuses primarily on the population of the city in which a school is located and the surrounding context of the school's environment (considering elements such as poverty, housing, and transportation).

Using this typology, *urban intensive* districts are those in major metropolitan centers such as Los Angeles and New York City. *Urban emergent* districts are those located in cities with large populations, but fewer than one million residents. *Urban characteristic* districts are not located in urban areas, but experience the challenges and characteristics similar to those associated with the other two categories of urban schools (Milner, 2012a). In addition to city size, other definitions of urban schools include the racial diversity and socio-economic status of students, as well as barriers commonly found in urban schools (Howey, 1996, 2008; Russo, 2004; Urban Schools Resources at The Ohio State University, 2005). These barriers include declining physical and structural properties of neighborhoods, fragile family structures, influential youth subcultures, segregated bureaucratic school districts with large student populations, individual schools with poor facilities and resources, as well as a teaching staffs characterized by high rates of turnover and provisional certification (Chou & Tozer, 2008; Howey, 1996; 2008; Ravitch, 2013). Using Milner's definitions, urban intensive and emergent districts are located in large cities. Urban characteristic districts are not. If urban characteristic districts are considered as part of the definition of urban schools, the percentage of children attending urban schools may be even higher, making the need to adequately prepare pre-service teachers even greater.

The characteristics of urban schools and the growing need for urban teachers have a significant impact on staffing issues in urban schools. "Hard-to-staff" schools are defined by some of the very same criteria that have been used to define urban schools (Chou & Tozer, 2008; Horng, 2005). Hard-to-staff schools contain a high percentage of students who are below grade level and eligible for free and reduced meals. These schools also face issues related to facilities, resources, and bureaucratic structures. All of these characteristics contribute to staffing issues in K-

12 schools. Individual teachers base their decisions regarding where they choose to teach on these characteristics, making it difficult to attract and retain teachers to work in schools which serve large concentrations of low-performing students, low-income students, and/or students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Glennie, Coble, & Allen, 2004; Horng, 2005, Ravitch, 2013).

Hard-to-staff schools are often located in urban settings. They have high turnover rates in their teaching staff, sometimes exceeding 15-18% annually and often contain 25% or more teachers who have emergency or probationary licensure (Chou & Tozer, 2008). The diversity of urban students, growing demand for urban teachers, and factors which make urban schools difficult to staff are important reasons why teacher preparation programs must graduate pre-service teachers who are both interested and equipped to work in urban schools with diverse student populations.

Diversity in the 21st Century Classroom

Current K-12 classrooms reflect a diverse student population. The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reports that slightly less than half (47.6%) of elementary and secondary school students represent ethnic minorities, and the Center projects the percentage of minority students will continue to increase over the next decade (2012). Teacher education programs must ready pre-service teachers to meet the needs of all learners in today's classroom (Simonds, Lippert, Hunt, Angell, & Moore, 2008). To do so, an appreciation and understanding of diversity is essential because as Allen (2004) states, "most children attend schools segregated by race, ethnicity, and class" (p. 106). "Cultural knowledge is attained through socializing agents such as family, school, church, community, etc." (Valentiin, 2006, p. 197). Teacher preparation programs can also serve as an important socializing agent if they provide pre-service teachers the opportunity to filter their perceptions of the diverse students found in urban schools. This is particularly important if pre-service teachers have cultural backgrounds dissimilar to those of the students they are likely to have in the classroom (Landsman & Lewis, 2011).

Preparing Pre-service Teachers for the 21st Century Urban Classroom

The widening cultural gap between teachers and urban K-12 students is concerning particularly if it results in a growing number of teachers who fail to understand cultural differences. Despite the increasingly diverse K-12 student population, the majority of current K-12 teachers and pre-service teachers continue to be white, female, middle class, and from rural or suburban backgrounds (Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008; Landsman & Lewis, 2011;Valentiin, 2006). The privileges conferred through being both middle class and white has been described as *whiteness*—“a socially constructed norm that focuses white privilege in the center at the cost of other cultures” (de Freitas & McAuley, 2008, p. 431). The saliency of white dominance in the teaching force is "heralded by the current demographics of in the urban school teachers and student population" (Hancock, 2011, p. 96) and the possibility that teachers who are culturally different from their urban school children may underestimate their unique educational "capital" (unique abilities and assets) and misinterpret their behavior and communication styles (Gay, 2000; Lazar, Edwards, & McMillon, 2012; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Yosso, 2005).

Research suggests that non-minority pre-service teachers may often resist pedagogies that address these inequalities if they themselves are directly implicated in the systems causing oppression for others (de Freitas & McAuley, 2008; Hampton et al., 2008). As a result, pre-service teachers need to be given the tools and support to deal with this cognitive dissonance and to avoid a resistance to honest reflection. Without adequate support and understanding, pre-service teachers may practice the “pedagogy of poverty” which emphasizes teacher control and student passivity and may limit critical thinking strategies and other methods that utilize the skills and creativity of students to learn from one another (Allen, 2004; Fecho, 2004). Thus, in order to foster these skills, it becomes essential to help pre-service teachers develop more accurate perceptions of the opportunities and challenges facing students in today’s urban schools (del Prado Hill et al., 2012).

Teacher preparation programs also compete with other socializing institutions, such as the media, impacting the perceptions of pre-service teachers (Hampton et al. 2008). The media's representation of urban schools tends to be over-simplified and biased. For example, the popular and award-winning documentary, *Waiting for Superman* (Chilcott & Guggenheim, 2011), was viewed by many as an incomplete and misrepresentative portrayal of public schools (Ladson-Billing, 2013; Ravitch, 2013). This type of portrayal often depicts urban schools as failing due to ineffective teaching practices and poor support from administrators. Due to the media's representation of urban schools, it is possible that pre-service teachers may incorporate these generalizations into their own perceptions.

Theoretical Framework

Given the diversity found in urban schools and the importance of developing accurate perceptions, culturally responsive teaching provides a framework for understanding pre-service teachers' perceptions of urban schools. Among other things, culturally responsive teaching pedagogy recognizes the attitudes and expectations teachers hold for students will impact their ability and interest to learn. In addition, within the context of culturally responsive teaching, diverse student populations are not seen as being socially or academically deficient (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Lazar et al., 2012).

Rather, culturally responsive teaching theory rejects this deficit approach. In fact, culturally responsive teaching thrives on the "rich array of intellect, experience, and know how" of K-12 students and capitalizes on these to customize and create "relevant and responsive learning opportunities" for unique students in unique learning environments (Milner, 2012b, p. 182-183). Culturally responsive teaching views the social context, cultural identities, and distinctive experiences of students as potential resources to engage, motivate, and empower students to construct meaningful learning experiences and potentially provide a means for them to move beyond the marginalized position they may encounter in school and society (Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner,

LePage, Darling-Hammond, Duffy, & McDonald, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Nieto, 2010).

If pre-service teachers form attitudes and expectations based on un-informed perceptions of urban school environments and carry these into their future classrooms, it may negatively influence their ability to effectively teach and connect with their students. The same misperceptions may also contribute to the common pattern of inexperienced teachers accepting positions in urban schools—only to teach in these settings until they secure a position elsewhere (Jacob, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This staffing pattern exacerbates the issue of resource inequity, in this case teacher experience, which exists between schools in affluent, predominantly white communities and those in low-income minority communities (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Ravitch, 2013). In urban districts, the annual teacher attrition rate has grown to 19-26%; this is higher than the attrition rates previously used to describe hard-to-staff schools. Over the past decade, the five-year attrition rate has consistently remained at 50% or higher, causing many urban districts to encounter a revolving door of inexperienced teachers that may impede student achievement (Chou & Tozer, 2008). Two of the most commonly cited reasons for urban teacher attrition include lack of adequate preparation and lack of adequate mentoring support (Waddell, 2010).

Rather than abandoning urban settings at the first opportunity, culturally responsive teachers embrace working with diverse students as a professional calling (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and view this teaching environment and student diversity from a positive perspective. Teacher preparation programs may be able to counteract the urban attrition rate and contribute to the development of culturally responsive teaching by immersing pre-service teachers, along with the presence and support of their professors, in urban school settings. With guidance and opportunity, pre-service teachers may be able to develop what Price (2011) termed as personal power, the "spiritual internal force that every person is born with that enables him or her to know that he or she can indeed create positive change" (p. 271). Price goes on to propose that this can "provide teachers, regardless of their color, with a tool that transcends the barriers of race and provides them with the opportunity to empower

and motivate students to learn and achieve" (p. 273). This is the foundation of culturally responsive teaching.

Pre-service teachers have the potential to become culturally responsive teachers if they are motivated to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, and skills needed to be culturally responsive (Milner, 2012b). To prepare culturally responsive teachers, teacher preparation programs must help pre-service teachers acquire this knowledge and skill set by creating experiences in which they confront their own beliefs and attitudes about schools, teachers, and their future students (Banks et al., 2005). Field experiences offer an opportunity for pre-service teachers to not only apply their knowledge and skills but to also examine their current assumptions and perceptions (Olmedo, 1997) and acquire the attitudes and dispositions indicative of culturally responsive teachers.

The Urban Immersion Program

The UI program was examined as a method to increase the culturally responsive dispositions of pre-service teachers. This approach increased faculty supervision of pre-service teachers and immersed them in urban school environments. University coursework and field experiences were simultaneously delivered in K-12 urban school buildings and changes in perceptions of those pre-service teachers who participated in the program were measured.

The program was designed by administrators in the teacher preparation program and their K-12 urban school district partner. The two met regularly as part of a multi-district K-12 human resources task force and specifically worked together on a variety of the program's field experiences and student teaching experiences. In this context, they begin to discuss pre-student field experiences and this led to the conceptualization of the UI program. The preparation program hoped UI would improve its pre-student teaching field experiences, and the district hoped to capitalize on pre-student field experiences to recruit more student teachers and eventually classroom teachers.

The teacher preparation administrators created a unique course delivery model, and district administrators selected the UI school sites. The sites were located in an urban area as defined by the US Census Bureau (Howey, 2008). According to 2011 estimates, schools participating in this field experience program were located in a mid-sized metropolitan city with a population over 400,000 (United States Census Bureau, n.d.), and in the largest K-12 school district in the state. Based on Milner's (2012a) categories, each of the settings was urban emergent.

Through prior models, pre-service teachers at this university completed pre-student teaching field experiences in a variety of local school settings while enrolled in education courses which were delivered on the university campus. There was no on-site university supervision of these field experiences. Through the UI program, the pre-service teachers and program instructors conducted the university courses within the urban schools, literally learning and teaching side-by-side with the K-12 teachers and students. The corresponding field experiences were also completed in the same schools and, because the university faculty were on-site, supervision of the pre-service teachers was possible.

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of the research was to examine pre-student teaching field experiences that were: (1) located in a K-12 urban school, (2) structured through a school-university partnership, (3) between 30 and 40 hours in length, (4) paired with university coursework, and (5) supervised closely by a teacher preparation faculty member. Pre-service teachers completed a four-week, urban school field experience that was a result of a partnership between the university and a large urban school district. The experience immersed the pre-service teachers in urban school settings as both the courses and the field experiences were entirely delivered in urban school buildings. The research examined the self-re-

ported perceptions of pre-service teachers before and after the UI courses and field experiences.

The UI program was implemented in two university courses: (1) Human Growth and Learning (HGL) and (2) The Art and Science of Teaching in Secondary Schools (ASTSS). HGL was delivered in an elementary school for two weeks and then moved to a second delivery site, a middle school, for the remaining two weeks. The field experience in HGL focused on observations. Three sections of HGL offered over a three-year period were included in this study. ASTSS was delivered in a secondary setting for the entire four weeks. The field experience in ASTSS included working directly with individual and small groups of secondary students. Some, but not all, pre-service teachers in ASTSS taught whole-group lessons. Two sections of ASTSS included in the study were delivered over a two-year period and in two different schools. The first year the ASTSS course and field experience was delivered in a high school. Due to scheduling conflicts during the second year, the location was changed to a middle school.

The demographics for all four schools indicated poverty (determined by the percentage of students receiving free or reduced meals) and minority student enrollment rates far above state averages. The elementary and both middle schools also exceeded the poverty and minority student enrollment rates of the district (State Department of Education, 2011). The average years of experience of the teaching staff in all four buildings was lower than the averages reported at both the district and state levels (State Department of Education, 2011). This may have been an indication of the staffing challenges and teacher attrition rates often associated with urban schools. In addition, all the schools were embedded in either an urban business area or an urban neighborhood.

Participants

Participant identification and methodology were approved by the program's Institutional Review Board. Participants in the UI program were pre-service teachers enrolled in HGL and ASTSS courses that were

part of a traditional teacher education program. Administrative permits were required to enroll in the courses. The permits were issued to students based on recommendations from academic advisors and faculty members. Pre-service teachers in HGL (62% of participants) had no prior field experiences and were in the beginning phase of the teacher preparation program. Pre-service teachers in ASTSS (38% of participants) had more than 50 hours of previous field experiences and were approximately 75% of the way through the teacher preparation program.

Seventy-seven pre-service teachers completed the UI pre and post survey, field experience, and coursework. Participants' demographics, self-identified through the survey included: certification level, gender, age, race/ethnicity, and community of origin. Upon graduation, 27% of participants would be certified to teach at the elementary level, 65% at a secondary level, and 8% any grade K-12. There were 51% female and 47% male (2% did not identify their gender) participants with the majority (68%) between the ages of 20-24, 14% between the ages of 25-29, and 13% between the ages of 30-35. Only 3% of participants were between the ages of 35-49 (2% did not identify their age).

As reflective in the national trends and Figure 1, the pre-service teacher participants in the study were predominately white (Caucasian). Ninety-two percent of participants self-identified as being Caucasian, 4% as being Hispanic, 3% as being from more than one race or ethnicity, and 1% as being Native American/Native Alaskan. Figure 2 represents the participants' self-identified community of origin, again showing the participant group of the study represented the national trends. Community of origin was self-reported by asking participants to identify the type of high school(s) they attended: 38% attended suburban schools, 31% attended small-town schools, 19% attended urban schools, 8% attended rural schools, and 4% attended school is a combination of two of these types of communities.

Data Collection

Participants completed a pre-experience survey instrument on the first day of course instruction and then completed a condensed, three-credit hour course and corresponding field experience delivered entirely within a K-12 urban school. The survey was based on an extensive literature review, created by the program's field experience coordinator and the chair of teacher education, and reviewed for validity by the faculty members teaching the courses - one of whose area of expertise was culturally responsive teaching. This was the first time the survey was used. The UI program created a four-week experience in which pre-service teachers were immersed in an urban school setting. Furthermore, as the university faculty members delivered on-site course instruction, it provided those faculty members the opportunity to closely supervise the field experience of the pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the courses. Upon completion of both the field experience and coursework, participants concluded the UI program by completing a post-experience survey.

The same instrument was used for the pre- and post-experience survey. The survey consisted of 28 items indicated in Table 1. Participants rated each item on a four-point Likert-scale: Strongly Agree (4) – Agree (3) – Disagree (2) – Strongly Disagree (1). Pre- and post-experience surveys were analyzed in relationship to the following research questions. To what extent did the (UI) program change pre-service teachers':

1. perceptions of urban schools?
2. sense of preparedness to teach in urban schools?
3. interest in student teaching or teaching in urban schools?

The survey also had several open-text questions including:

1. What prepares a teacher to work in urban schools?
2. What experiences in your teacher preparation program have helped to prepare you to work with children from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds?

3. What was the best thing about the UI program? (post-experience survey only)
4. What changes would you make to the UI program? (post-experience survey only)

Data Analysis

Table 1 shows the survey, pre- and post-test data (means and standard deviations), the repeated-measure *t*-test value, and the significance. For each individual question, there was a statistically significant difference between pre-service teachers' pre- and post-data, indicating a change (all post-test scores were significantly altered from the pre-test scores at the .01 alpha level except for item 5b, 6b, and 6c) in their perceptions of urban schools. Results indicate no significant difference in post-test scores between the various demographic groups.

Findings

The findings indicate field experiences, when paired with on-site university supervision and related course work, positively influenced the participants' perceptions of urban schools. The data provided an indication that participants, regardless of progression in their preparation program, certification level, gender, age, race, or community of origin, were impacted by the program. Results revealed that participants increased their level of confidence related to teaching in an urban K-12 school and reported that they had a more accurate perceptions of the challenges and opportunities facing teachers and students in urban schools.

According to the data shown in Table 1, after completing the UI program, participants felt they had a more accurate perception of urban schools (Item 4). They had a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of urban teachers (Items 7 & 8) and urban students (Items 9 & 10). The participants also indicated their perceptions were now more influenced by past college courses (Item 6c) and their direct experience

in K-12 urban school settings (Item 6a). Post-survey results showed participants' perceptions were less influenced by the media (Item 6b). As a result of this experience, participants also felt more prepared to teach in urban settings (Items 11a-11k, & 12). Finally, participants developed greater interest in both student teaching and applying to teach in an urban environment (Items 13 & 14).

Participant responses to the open-text questions on the survey provided additional insight into the UI experience. The responses were analyzed using a method of reduction by proceeding from identifying statements of meaning, to grouping those meanings into emergent themes, and finally to developing a description of the essence of the UI model as experienced by this group of pre-service teachers (Creswell, 1998). Their comments can be summarized in three underlying categories: (1) the impact of the UI approach, (2) the specific benefit of sustained and substantial time spent in the urban schools settings, and (3) their perceptions of urban schools.

Pre-service teachers recognized the opportunity the UI program offered in terms of connecting the theory taught in the coursework to realities of the K-12 urban classroom. One student simply stated, "No book work could prepare you." Other students made comments such as, "This class has been the best experience to prepare me for these students because the past classes talked about it instead of letting students experience it." In a similar vein, another student stated, "It [the UI program] allows me to apply concepts and knowledge to experience and reality."

Comments also indicated the benefit of the sustained time participants were able to spend in the urban school setting. Responses regarding the amount of time included phrases such as "longer observations and sequential days added tremendous benefit" and "it is that continuous time spent in the classroom that has helped so much!" They saw the "amount of observation time we were allowed and actually being in the room to interact with the students" as assets of the program, and that "being in the room with other students [pre-service teachers] was helpful in the discussions of the observations." The suggested changes overwhelmingly focused on extending the length of the experience. Some

participants wanted the additional time because they felt the demands the UI program were too intense to complete in only four weeks. Others wanted added time to allow for more opportunities for interactions with student and teachers.

Finally, they voiced a change in their perceptions of urban schools. When asked to comment on the benefits of the program, they identified things such as "a new understanding and perception" and a "comfortable base that I hadn't had before." They recognized that the UI experience allowed "students [pre-service teachers] to form their own perceptions based on their experiences." They mentioned initially perceiving urban schools as "a little scary" but then "seeing how great the kids could be." Combined with the quantitative data, the comments provide evidence that participants regarded the UI program as influential in terms of building their confidence as a future classroom teachers and altering their perceptions of urban schools.

Implications

The implications are clear based on the findings that are aligned with existing research. As this study demonstrates, the UI program had a significant impact on pre-service teachers. As teacher education programs face increased scrutiny regarding their value, programs which have pre-service teachers participate in more comprehensive, first-hand urban school experiences may be able to show the "value added" of such experiences. Immersion programs provide the benefit of a unique depth of experience because the faculty members are on-site giving real-time support to pre-service teachers. The program combined field experiences with on-site university instruction that allowed pre-service teachers to connect pedagogical theory to classroom practices. These authentic learning opportunities led to more confident pre-service teachers who may be more likely to implement culturally responsive teaching practices and improve learning opportunities for urban students.

With the faculty member on-site, immersion programs, such as the UI program, have the potential to build strong school-university partner-

ships through the consistent university presence in the K-12 school. By participating in this type of program, university instructors have the opportunity to improve their own understanding of urban schools while also enhancing the experience of the pre-service teachers. For the teacher preparation program in this study, the results informed the complete redesign of its pre-student field experiences. Specifically, the sustained, day-to-day delivery model within specific partner schools along with the on-site supervision became priorities for field experience in urban settings. Other programs should also consider the findings related to the UI approach to inform their program improvement.

When considering the benefit for K-12 urban schools, the UI program addresses staffing challenges. Participation in UI or similar programs may increase the willingness of pre-service teachers to seek teaching positions in K-12 urban school settings. The goal of effective staffing practices is to reduce teacher attrition and retain effective teachers in their schools. Immersion programs offer pre-service teachers authentic first-hand urban school field experiences which can increase their confidence as well as their desire to seek employment in urban schools.

Limitations

The first limitation of this research was the number of participants, particularly at the elementary level. A second limitation was having participants complete the same survey twice in a four-week period. Responses may have been impacted by repeated exposure to the survey in a relatively short period of time. Third, research was also limited to participants enrolled in one teacher preparation program and who completed the experience in one school district. In addition, further research should be conducted to determine if results could be replicated in other universities with similar pedagogical approaches and practices. Finally, future research should investigate the long-term benefits of the UI program in the areas of urban teacher retention and culturally responsive teaching pedagogy.

Conclusion

As the demographics of the US continue to transform, teacher education programs are being asked to create programs that respond to the changing dynamics of K-12 classrooms. The nationwide push to redesign teacher education programs in order to allow pre-service teachers the opportunity to participate in more comprehensive, first-hand urban school field experiences can be addressed through programs similar to the one described here. Perceptions of pre-service teachers, like all other people, are influenced by media images and other socializing agents. It has become the responsibility of the university to challenge what may be limited perceptions and educate pre-service teachers not only in methods and pedagogy but also in the sociology of urban schools. It is imperative that preparation programs develop well-rounded teachers who are equipped with the skills needed to effectively educate a wide range of diverse learners. Immersion approaches, such as the UI program, provide pre-service teachers the opportunity to build more accurate perceptions of urban schools.

As this research shows, the participants who completed the UI program indicated a greater willingness to apply for teaching positions in an urban school district along with an increased feeling of preparedness to meet the needs of students in urban school settings. Without their participation in the UI program, it is possible that these pre-service teachers would be more reluctant to apply for a position in an urban school setting. The UI program, which offers real-life urban school field experiences, may motivate a greater number of pre-service teachers to seek employment in urban schools because they are confident and comfortable working with the diverse students of the 21st-century.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Racial & Ethnic Identity of Pre-Service Teacher Participants

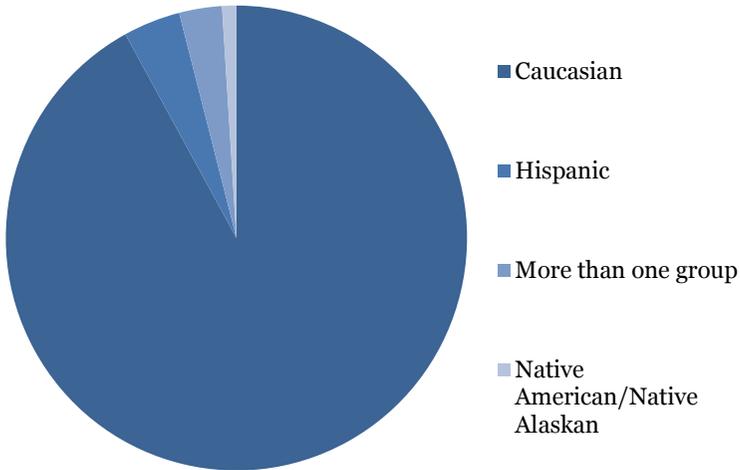


Figure 2: Community of Origin of Pre-service Teacher Participants

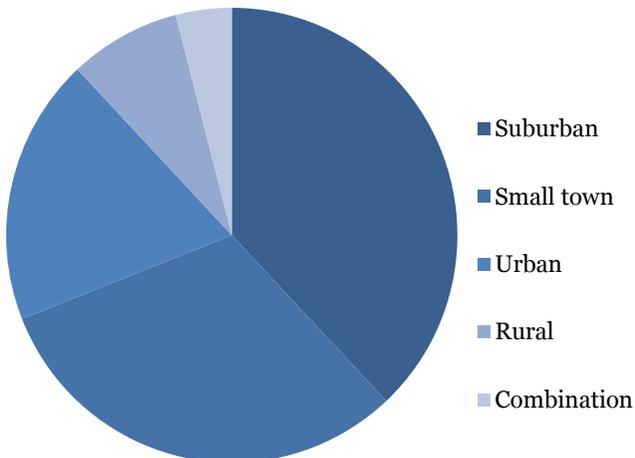


Table 1: Urban Immersion Pre- Post-Survey Results

Questions Answered by Pre-service Teachers	N	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test Standard Deviation	Post-test Mean	Post-test Standard Deviation	t	p
1. I feel comfortable in K-12 school settings.	77	3.42	.52	3.69	.47	4.52	<.01
2. I feel comfortable in K-12 urban school settings.	77	3.09	.67	3.53	.50	5.71	<.01
3. I have an accurate perception of K-12 schools.	77	3.05	.48	3.50	.50	6.50	<.01
4. I have an accurate perception of K-12 urban schools.	77	2.81	.59	3.43	.52	7.73	<.01
5a. My perception of K-12 schools is most influenced by my own experiences.	77	3.53	.64	3.82	.42	3.31	<.01
5b. My perception of K-12 schools is most influenced by the media.	75	2.37	.63	2.29	.73	1.03	.03
5c. My perception of K-12 schools is most influenced by past college course work.	75	2.95	.66	3.17	.79	2.27	<.01
6a. My perception of K-12 urban schools is most influenced by my own experiences.	76	2.92	.97	3.60	.67	5.97	<.01
6b. My perception of K-12 urban schools is most influenced by the media.	76	2.56	.76	2.35	.83	2.28	.03
6c. My perception of K-12 urban schools is most influenced by past college course work.	75	2.99	.67	3.19	.73	2.07	.04
7. I understand the opportunities for teachers in urban school settings.	77	2.75	.67	3.52	.53	11.12	<.01
8. I understand the challenges for teachers in urban school settings.	77	2.97	.73	3.63	.48	8.23	<.01
9. I understand the opportunities for K-12 students in urban school settings.	77	2.82	.72	3.41	.59	6.43	<.01
10. I understand the challenges for K-12 students in urban school settings.	77	2.94	.68	3.56	.55	7.29	<.01
11a. (If I student teach or teach in an urban school setting, I feel prepared to...) Build effective rapport with my students.	77	3.12	.54	3.62	.51	6.72	<.01
11b. Teach students from diverse cultural	77	3.08	.60	3.61	.49	6.35	<.01

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backgrounds.							
11c. Teach students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.	77	2.52	.72	3.09	.59	6.25	<.01
11d. Teach students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.	77	3.10	.53	3.67	.47	7.63	<.01
11e. Plan effective lessons.	77	3.02	.65	3.51	.55	6.36	<.01
11f. Differentiate instruction.	77	3.05	.59	3.56	.55	6.19	<.01
11g. Connect content to the daily lives of students.	77	3.04	.59	3.52	.58	5.59	<.01
11h. Manage classroom behavior.	77	2.92	.72	3.34	.53	4.98	<.01
11i. Positively impact student learning.	77	3.30	.51	3.66	.48	5.27	<.01
11j. Communicate with parents.	77	3.01	.57	3.50	.55	6.38	<.01
11k. Collaborate with colleagues.	77	3.29	.51	3.65	.51	4.78	<.01
12. I feel my teacher preparation program has prepared me to meet the needs of students in urban school settings.	76	2.88	.46	3.47	.53	7.63	<.01
13. I would like to student teach in an urban school setting.	77	2.87	.78	3.32	.63	5.90	<.01
14. I am likely to apply for a teaching position in an urban school district.	77	2.79	.82	3.27	.66	6.52	<.01