

Restructuring Pre-Service Teacher Preparation Programs for the Urban School Context

Shannon Alyse Rubio

Vanderbilt University

Abstract

This capstone proposes a restructured pre-service teacher preparation program aimed at better preparing pre-service teachers to respond to unfamiliar communities and cultures encountered in the *urban school context* (Bandura, 1977). Given the impact teacher responsiveness has on *academic achievement*, pre-service teacher preparation programs must provide curriculum and field experiences that work to dispel the misconceptions and negative dispositions inhibiting *effective teaching practices*, positive student-teacher relationships, and successful learning environments (Haberman, 2000).

Restructured *pre-service teacher preparation programs* can nurture *culturally responsive teaching* practices beneficial to the urban school context where *novice* and *pre-service teachers* lack exposure and maintain unchallenged knowledge (Milner, 2012). Through self-reflecting curriculum and community-building field experiences, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to reconsider the urban school context as a community, the importance of the urban school teacher, and the need to end perpetuated misconceptions and dispositions that deter pre-service teachers from considering career opportunities in the urban school context (Brown, 2004).

Keywords: pre-service teacher preparation programs, pre-service teachers, the urban school context, culturally responsive teaching practices, and novice teacher

Introduction

Discrepancies between race, social class, and socioeconomic status are often identified to rationalize the struggles pre-service teachers may encounter amongst the unfamiliar urban school context and its diverse community members (Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008). These inconsistencies, and the potential barriers they may create, play a large role in maintaining effective teaching practices and nurturing student-teacher relationships. However, these discrepancies alone should not be considered the culprits of unsuccessful teaching in the urban school context (Haberman, 2005). Rather, consideration for the ways teachers interact with, address, and respond to these discrepancies might allow for an increase in positive learning experiences for students and pre-service teachers of this specific context (Haberman, 2000).

While emphasizing the impact of teacher interactions with, and responses to, these discrepancies, this capstone intends to discuss the potential consequences of misconceptions, negative dispositions, and reinforced stereotypes that may develop when pre-service teachers are ill-equipped to encounter varying student needs exclusive to the urban school context (Borrero, 2011). Given the need to dispel the misconceptions and stereotypes inhibiting academic success in the urban school context, this capstone proposes a restructured pre-service teacher preparation program aimed at better preparing pre-service teachers to respond to unfamiliar communities and cultures (Heinemann, 1992).

Moreover, it aims to deliver a synthesized understanding of how pre-service teacher preparation programs can nurture culturally responsive teaching practices through employing meaningful curriculum and field experiences that enhance positive relationships, supportive learning environments, and the academic success of all students (Milner, 2006). Furthermore, it will identify the positive outcomes of participating in programs restructured for the urban school

context that provide an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching. Lastly, before concluding, this capstone will address the potential resistance, limitations, and implications of restructuring pre-service teacher preparation programs for the urban school context (Brown, 2004).

Literature Review

Novice teachers are often placed in schools where they serve not only the poorest students, but also the students needing the most help. Unfortunately, novice teachers enter the urban school context with insufficient training and little ability to help as a result of their participation in preparation programs lacking learning experiences and interactions with the community members seeking their assistance (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). The problem lies in the fact that most urban school teachers are inexperienced, middle- class, White students who were trained to teach students from backgrounds similar to their own (Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008). Exposure to students from unfamiliar backgrounds, differing socioeconomic statuses, and contrasting life experiences may leave novice teachers, attempting to work in the urban school context, uncertain of their capabilities to benefit students and their academic success (Haberman, 2005).

Because novice teachers in the urban school context are not often provided with ongoing professional support or mentorship programs, which aid the development of important pedagogical knowledge, attributes, and dispositions necessary to assist this particular student population, demands for assistance may become too overwhelming and can contribute to the reliance on trial and error to develop strategies of survival even though they can be detrimental to student achievement (Haberman & Richards, 1990). Given the lack of exposure some novice teachers have to the urban school context, pre-service teachers may utilize preconceptions or negative dispositions to identify the cultural discrepancies between their students and themselves

as inhibitors to fostering the knowledge and skills essential for academic success in the classroom (Hill, Phelps, & Friedland, 2007). With minimal concern or consideration for how important teacher effectiveness is to student achievement, ineffective teachers may lower their own expectations for student performance resulting in the unfortunate absence of challenging, high-level courses, advanced placement courses, and gifted and talented programs (Milner, 2006).

Unfortunately, when pre-service teachers maintain a deficit view of these inconsistencies, they not only reinforce the harmful stereotypes they associated with the urban school context, but they neglect other possible reasons why they encounter ineffective instruction (Sirota & Bailey, 2009). Furthermore, without addressing the assumptions and beliefs that individuals maintain, classroom field experiences have the potential to actually increase prospective teachers' stereotypes of diverse students, compromising their effectiveness as urban educators and inhibiting future learning (Haberman & Post, 1992). Although research supports the belief that students can meet high expectations if they are given the opportunity and support, the lack of effective assistance and perpetuation of low expectations, resulting from unfamiliarity with the urban school context, highlight the need for conversations of restructuring teacher preparation programs for the urban school context if participants hope to thrive as novice teachers following the completion of curriculum and field experiences intended to prepare them for success (Wong & Glass, 2005).

Defining Key Terms

The Urban School Context: schools in urban communities typically characterized with high teacher attrition, English language learners, and bureaucratic control while lacking funds, resources, and teacher autonomy.

Academic Success/ Academic Achievement/ Student Achievement: when a student achieves desirable or superior levels of academic performance.

Novice Teacher: teacher with less than two years of teaching experience.

Pre-Service Teachers: a college student enrolled in a school-based field experience working under the supervision of a cooperating teacher.

Pre-Service Teacher Preparation Programs: the combination of theoretical knowledge and teaching practice prior to obtaining autonomy in one's own classroom.

Effective Teaching Practices: teaching or instruction that yields desirable or superior levels of academic performance.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices: pedagogy which supports creating a learning environment that helps students to reach their highest levels of academic achievement and can influence a student's desire to learn.

Mentor: training staff to assist novice teachers.

Theoretical Framework

In an effort to help novice teachers employ effective teaching, foster academic achievement, and eliminate harmful misconceptions and dispositions towards the urban school context, pre-service teacher preparation programs must promote a framework embedded in culturally responsive teaching and meaningful field experiences reflective of the students and community members urban school teachers could potentially work amongst (Haberman, 2005). If pre-service teachers possess the desire to nurture positive interactions with, and responses to, the cultural discrepancies faced in the urban school context, pre-service teachers must eliminate the deficit thinking accompanying the misconceptions and stereotypes they have perpetuated and address how these negative dispositions and perceptions indirectly affect student achievement given the establishment of lower expectations and unsupportive environments generated by ineffective instruction (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988).

If pre-service teachers are expected to succeed in the urban school context, preparation programs will need to focus on helping pre-service teachers acquire the knowledge and skills required to become an effective culturally responsive teacher capable of implementing useful strategies, developing understandings of what students bring to the classroom, and acknowledging the learning potential of all students (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Ultimately, the effort to work with the unique or unfamiliar strengths children bring to the classroom promotes the formation of more accurate insights into the effective relationships and positive learning environments established in the urban school context (Gay, 2000).

Proposed Restructuring Pre-Service Teacher Preparation for the Urban School Context

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 create

learning environments where all students of the urban school context reach their highest levels of academic achievement (Milner, 2012). To prepare culturally responsive teachers, teacher preparation programs must help pre-service teachers acquire this knowledge through meaningful experiences that require participation in extensive field experiences and practicums to explore and develop reflective, constructive responses to the teaching realities of the urban school context (Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008). Acknowledging the inequalities imbedded in the teaching realities of the urban school context will assist in the development of effective teaching practices that foster cultural competence, positive relationships, and high expectations for academic success (Brown, 2004).

Restructuring Pre-Service Curriculum for the Urban School Context

With an urgency to provide the urban school context with culturally responsive teachers, restructured curriculum must provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to understand how one's beliefs, motivations, and behaviors influence interactions with cultural discrepancies and how fostering positive relationships with students, encouraging classroom environments, and academic success cannot occur without the willingness to respond to unfamiliar cultures in the urban school context (Brown, 2004). Through the processes of self-reflection, cultural identity development, and the recognition of political and social realities, pre-service teachers are given the opportunity to question, consider, and modify the misconceptions and negative dispositions of the urban school context that might hinder culturally responsive teaching and academic success (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

Promote Self-Reflection

Pre-service teacher preparation programs restructured for the urban school context should provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to immerse themselves in experiences,

discussions, and examinations that facilitate construction of their identities as teachers and their perceptions of teaching in the urban school context (Delpit, 1995). Through self-reflection, pre-service teachers should consider their personal identities and develop self-awareness for how their personal identity might impact their professional identity (Brown, 2004).

A pre-service teacher may develop self-awareness by reflecting on one's behaviors and life experiences as well as by examining one's thought process and acceptance of unfamiliar experiences and knowledge (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007). Coursework restructured for the urban school context should encourage participants to question the ways in which they accept themselves or deny certain aspects while questioning the behaviors they condone or participate in (Brown, 2004).

Most importantly, a pre-service teacher curriculum, intended to prepare teachers for the urban school context, should encourage constant reflection of one's personal beliefs (Brown, 2004). Additionally, coursework should encourage candidates to reconsider past judgments, beliefs, and understandings of reality (Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008). Pre-service teachers should also consider how past judgments, beliefs, and understandings of reality might be different from the students and community members that encompass the urban school context (Merseeth et al., 2008). Hopefully, through meaningful self-reflection of one's beliefs, behaviors, and life experiences, pre-service teachers may have the opportunity to establish stronger understandings of how they may differ and interact with those in the urban school context. In addition to stronger understandings of one's self, meaningful self-reflection can strengthen their beliefs in what they can take away from their pre-service preparation program and successfully implement in their own classroom (Brown, 2004).

Develop Cultural Identity

In an effort to help foster opportunities for culturally responsive teaching, Pre-service teacher preparation programs restructured for the urban school context should place heavy emphasis on understanding one's culture and how it develops (Milner, 2006). The understanding of one's culture, and what influences its development, can facilitate the understanding of the cultural assumptions they may bring to the urban school context and community (LaDuke, 2009).

Additionally, the understanding of one's culture, and what influences its development, can facilitate the understanding of one's culture in relation to students from the urban school contexts (Rozansky-Lloyd, 2006). Without challenging what they believe they understand, pre-service teachers may fail to fully understand whom they are working with and what the students' circumstances are in the urban school context (Kozelski, 2010). Coursework that provides opportunities for these reflections and understanding are essential to the success pre-service teachers may have teacher in the urban school context.

Recognize Political & Social Realities of the Urban Context

If restructured pre-service teacher preparation programs intend to demonstrate how identities shape understanding of, and experiences in, school, pre-service teachers must be challenged to accept the urban school context as a social production constructed by the political powers and historical inequities they unknowingly perpetuate daily (Tatum, 2001). While non-minority pre-service teacher candidates, unfamiliar with the urban school context, may attempt to deflect accusations of involvement in these perpetuations, they need to be aware of how their understanding of one's self and their positioning in society have been socially constructed (Rozansky-Lloyd, 2006). Furthermore, pre-service teachers need to confront the realities of the

privileges they have and accept that obtaining them comes at a cost for people belonging to other ethnic or racial groups (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014).

With the understanding and acknowledgment that white culture and history come with privileges other cultures do not, pre-service teachers must recognize the continued invisibility of white privilege as the central, dominant society (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014). Ultimately, teacher preparation coursework must provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to challenge the invisibility of white privilege and reflect on their roles of challenging or maintaining the existing systems of dominance in the urban school context (Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005).

Restructuring Field Experiences for the Urban School Context

Because pre-service teachers are not often from the community or school context where they work, redesigning teacher preparation programs for the urban school context may provide meaningful field experiences to immerse themselves in unfamiliar cultures and neighborhoods (Brown, 2004). Ultimately, utilizing learning communities and community partnerships to gain experience in, and in relation to, the urban school context, while implementing the culturally responsive pedagogic from courses, should improve the potential success a pre-service teacher may have in this notoriously challenging atmosphere (Haberman, 2000).

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 school context (Feiman-Nemser, S. (2003). Field experiences offer an opportunity for pre-service teachers to acquire the attitudes, dispositions, and skill set indicative of culturally responsive teaching by creating experiences where they examine their current assumptions and perceptions while confronting their own beliefs and attitudes about schools, teachers, and their

future students (Olmedo, 1997).

School- University Partnerships

Redesigning pre-service teacher preparation to foster learning communities between universities, mentors, and the urban school context can provide participants with valuable opportunities for observing, reflecting, interpreting, implementing, and acquiring teaching practices appropriate and sensitive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Lee, Eckrich, Lackey, & Showalter, 2010). Creating a positive learning environment requires attentiveness to the way multiple cultures interact in the classroom and the willingness to understand the most effective way cultures communicate within the urban school context (Rozansky-Lloyd, 2006).

Provide Certified Cooperative Teachers and Formal Mentorship

In an effort to enhance the field experiences pre-service teachers participate in, mentorship should be provided as a resource for pre-service teachers to continue asking questions and being challenged to think about aspects of the urban school context that might be overlooked (Colbert & Wolff, 1992). A mentor should be a supporter who addresses new teachers' learning needs while helping them develop a principled teaching practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). The mentoring component should include formal training for mentor teachers so that they can be successful in helping new teachers achieve intended, successful outcomes (Oh et al., 2005).

Universities need to recruit, train, and certify mentors who maintain interactions within the urban school context and that will engage pre-service teachers in understanding the importance of teacher involvement in the community they serve (Tatum, 2001). Cooperating teachers should also be selected based on the exposure to experiences they can provide pre-

service teachers before teaching in the urban school context (Hill et al., 2007). Lastly, cooperating teachers who implement culturally relevant teaching strategies are more beneficial to teachers willing to attempt teaching in more difficult schools and should be selected over cooperating teachers who place a larger priority on surviving through the difficulties encountered in the urban school context (Wong & Glass, 2005).

Establishing Community Partnerships

Though teaching is structured within a framework that seeks to establish cultural continuity between home and school, when working to connect with a community, teachers, administrators, and faculty must come to recognize that they will be working with organizations, groups, and individuals whose lives are different than their own (Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008). Teachers need to be aware of the strengths of the urban community and develop a deep understanding of the experiences of the students and families with whom they will work (Lee et al., 2010). This requires talking to parents, students, and community members and immersing oneself in various aspects of the day-to-day environment that student's experience (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

By listening to and learning from community members, teacher educators and pre-service teachers can begin to understand how they perceive their neighborhood, the school, and society overall (Turner-Vorbeck & Marsh, 2007). Ultimately, this should lead to pre-service teachers developing an understanding of how exposure to different situations and places impact the differences between themselves and the community members of the urban school context (Delpit, 1995).

Reported Outcomes of Redesigned Pre-Service Teacher Preparation Programs

With the hope of underscoring the need for redesigned program frameworks to be embedded in culturally responsive teaching and meaningful field experiences, I examined three styles of pre-service teacher preparation programs with findings that emphasized the importance of a supportive urban school context and community, enhanced understanding of the role of the teacher in the urban school context, and the development of positive perceptions for teaching in the urban school context.

The first pre-service teacher program I examined was the Service Learning Project, which took place through a Mid-Atlantic University. Teacher candidates involved in this program provided service to the communities as they completed required coursework and critical reflections of their experiences (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007). The second pre-service teacher program I examined was the Urban Immersion Program at University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This particular urban immersion program provided pre-service teachers with opportunities to immerse themselves in urban school where they worked along cooperating teachers and students through all grades (Schaffer, Gleich-Bope, & Copich, 2014). The third program I examined was the Cross-Cultural Immersion Program at Indiana University. During the immersion experience of this program, participants completed a student teaching experience while devoting time to community involvement (Sleeter, 2001).

New Understanding of The Urban School Context & Community

Through the Mid-Atlantic service learning teacher preparation program and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Urban Immersion Program, teacher candidates took advantage of authentic community and school-based experiences to reconstruct their perceptions of community members from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Schaffer, Gleich-Bope, & Copich, 2014). By reflecting on previous perceptions and

reconstructing their beliefs, pre-service teachers were able to develop mutual respect with community partners that benefited everyone (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007).

Participants of the Indiana University Cross-Cultural Immersion program reported a positive impact on their attitudes and knowledge of the community members as they participated in partnerships that provided learning from those who encompass the community. Participants of this program used their knowledge as a way to connect their classrooms to the community members and their values, beliefs, and experiences (Sleeter, 2001).

New Understanding of the Role of Teacher in the Urban School Context

Through the service-learning program, pre-service teacher candidates were given opportunities to engage in practical and personal experiences through with communities different from their own (Sleeter, 2007). Through these experiences, participants were able to reflect on their own assumptions and social inequalities as they recognized the challenges faced by families and their communities (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007). With the understanding of the challenges and experiences community members encounter in the urban school context, participants were able to recognize that their role as an urban school teacher would need to be adjusted if they wanted to help and respond to student needs (Schaffer, Gleich-Bope, & Copich, 2014).

Through the Indiana University Cultural Immersion Program, pre-service teacher participants found a new understanding of the role of the urban schoolteacher when they found themselves in communities where they were part of the minority population rather than majority (Sleeter, 2001). These participants had to learn to navigate through the community and understand how their role as an urban schoolteacher had to be adjusted given the inability to retreat from their new community (Sleeter, 2001).

New Perceptions & Intentions of Teaching in the Urban School Context

Opportunities to interact with new communities and settings allowed participants of all three programs to examine the limited expectations they had for the children, families, and communities (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007). Through these programs, centered on culturally responsive teaching, participants found their experience to have a lasting impact on their dispositions towards teaching in diverse settings and communities different from their own (Sleeter, 2001). Additionally, these opportunities reshaped the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding urban schools and provided pre-service teachers with an increased confidence and interest in teaching in the urban school context (Schaffer, Gleich-Bope, & Copich, 2014).

Potential Pushback and Resistance

While providing meaningful field experiences and coursework to reflect the specific urban school context may seem beneficial to student-teacher relationships, effective instruction, and academic success, they may not necessarily be received easily by all members of the urban school context and community (Kozleski, 2010). Colleges and Universities hoping to build partnerships with the urban school context should be prepared to encounter hesitancy and skepticism from community members given past experiences with organizations that had unrealistic expectations for the community, organizations that were not devoted to the community, or organizations that left before making progress (Cooper, 2007). They must be willing to work through the jadedness induced by weak organizations and concentrate on building partnerships where colleges and universities are seen as participants “of” the urban school community serving the community rather than simply “in” the urban school community serving the pre-service teachers working towards obtaining a teaching certification (Waddell, 2011).

Pre-service teachers uncomfortable engaging in discussions and reflection of privilege, entitlement, discrimination, or racism have the ability to shut down whole class discussions through derailing conversations, dismissing claims, withdrawing from conversations, or interrupting speakers (LaDuke, 2009). Pre-service educators' understanding of pre-service teachers' preconceptions, world views, and life experience are imperative for the development of intervention strategies that minimize resistance and misinterpretations of attempts to engage in discussions of whiteness and privilege amongst white pre-service teachers (Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008).

Limitations of Restructured Pre-Service Teacher Preparation Programs

The reliance of creating better attitudes for pre-service teacher candidates coming from different backgrounds and experiences than the ones of those they teach limits the possibility for variation in recruiting candidates who come from diverse backgrounds and bring knowledge and experiences that may allow effective teaching experiences in the urban school context (Haberman, 1995). Limiting recruiting efforts to pre-service preparation programs also exclude alternatively certified candidates who may share backgrounds and experiences similar to the students of the urban school context (Haberman, 1996).

Support for pre-service programs with potential to benefit pre-service and novice teachers in the urban school context is limited given an inadequate number of teacher preparation programs and the participants in them (Young, Grant, Montbriand, & Therriault, 2002). Because pre-service coursework and field experiences are devoted to self-reflection and meaningful relationships, few of the studies mentioned previously truly examined the impact of how pre-service teachers actually teach students in their classes or approach the content students must master to achieve academic success (Kozleski, 2010).

Implications for the Future

While pre-service teacher preparation programs structured for the urban school context follow a framework that should transfer once pre-service teacher candidates become novice teachers, the use of induction, in-service, and retention after a pre-service teacher preparation program may assist in managing the troubling teacher attrition rates common to the urban school context (Heller, 2004).

In order to show how impactful preparation programs can be in the urban school context, researchers must obtain honest, unbiased research that examines the effectiveness of culturally responsive practices in relation to content and student mastery (Wolffe, 1996). Also, Tracking student-teaching placement and teacher employment, retention, and development, may help programs gain support for collaboration with communities fearful of the vulnerability that comes with outside partnerships (Young et al., 2002). Ultimately, extended research must occur and support the ability for similar results to transpire in other colleges and universities pre-service teacher preparation programs (Oh et al., 2005).

Conclusion

Before pre-service teachers can understand the importance of being prepared for the urban school context, they must understand the relationship teacher effectiveness has with student success in the classroom (Haberman, 2000). Without the willingness to address this correlation, pre-service teachers may not see the need to experience teacher preparation programs that explore communities different from their own (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Consequently, college and university pre-service preparation programs have a responsibility to challenge negative misconceptions and dispositions by providing opportunities that build more accurate perceptions of the urban school context (Haberman, 2000). Ultimately, hands-on,

community-based, immersive activities, combined with structured opportunities for critical reflection, must provide students with the opportunity to modify perceptions of the skills needed to effectively educate the diverse learners in the urban school context (Milner, 2006).

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