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Developing Teachers for High-Poverty Schools

The Role of the Internship Experience

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This investigation sought to determine if there was a difference in the development of effective urban teacher characteristics after completing a traditional internship experience or a Professional Development School internship experience. The Urban Teacher Selection Interview was used to assess 10 characteristics including persistence, value of children's learning, putting ideas into practice, approach to at-risk students, professional/personal orientation to students, the bureaucracy, fallibility, teacher success, student success, and planning and organization. Assessments were completed before and after subjects participated in urban internships. Pre- and posttest scores were compared using descriptive statistics and a paired-samples *t* test. Results communicated no significant difference between pre- and posttest scores when student interns completed a traditional or Professional Development School internship experience. This suggests that although the internship experience is often viewed as the capstone experience of teacher preparation programs, short-term experiences do not adequately prepare teacher candidates for urban school teaching.

Keywords: *urban; high-poverty schools; student teaching; internships; teacher development*

Never before has there been such a critical demand for quality teachers and instruction to meet and overcome the barriers and challenges of

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teaching in our nation's urban high-poverty schools. In an era of school accountability, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act mandates that highly qualified teachers be placed in every classroom. The guidelines and criteria of this legislation describe highly qualified teachers as those teachers who hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree, obtain full state certification or licensure, and demonstrate subject area competence in each of the academic subjects in which they teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). However, there is continuing debate in regard to the professional preparation of teacher candidates needed to meet the statute outlined in NCLB and whether, as defined, a highly qualified teacher has the ideological preparation needed for the urban context (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004; Haberman, 1995, 2005; McKinney, Fuller, Hancock, & Audette, 2006; Rebell & Hunter, 2004).

Although some urban high-poverty schools have overcome the bureaucratic, societal, and cultural challenges often perceived as obstacles to success, many continue to struggle and fall short of meeting the educational needs of students in poverty. With more than 14 million children living in poverty, "Every miseducated child represents a personal tragedy" (Haberman, 2003, p. 2). Meyerson (2001) concurs with the magnitude of this dilemma by stating, "The failure of most public schools to teach poor children is a national tragedy and national disgrace" (p. 1). The literature reports that low-income students underperform on cognitive assessments in all subject areas when compared to more affluent students (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Haberman, 1995, 2005; Kopetz, Lease, & Warren-Kring, 2006; McKinney et al., 2006; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004). For example, according to Education Trust, Inc. (2004), eighth-grade students from higher income families demonstrate overall higher math skills and abilities when compared to lower income students. Likewise, the Trial Urban District Assessment, a special project of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, reported that fourth-grade students in urban school districts typically score below their peers in mathematics (Rampey, Lutkus, & Dion, 2006). Meyerson (2001) refers to the disparaging underperformance of high-poverty schools as "educational malpractice" (p. 1). However, research has confirmed that effective educators can improve the academic outcomes of low-income students and provide them with hope and promise for the future (Banks, 2001; Haberman, 1995, 2005; Hollins, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2007; Olson & Jerald, 1998; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003).

It is well documented that teacher quality is the single most accurate indicator of students' academic success and achievement rates (Brown, 2002; Carter, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Haberman, 1995, 2005; Kopetz et al., 2006; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Steinberg & Kincheloe,

2004). Yet many urban districts report problems and frustration with attracting and retaining quality educators (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Graziano, 2005; Haberman, 2005). According to the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future (2002), 50% of urban teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years of their career. Reasons reported for leaving include lack of support from school administrations, student behavior problems, classroom intrusions, and not being adequately prepared for the demands of urban teaching (Dill & Stafford-Johnson, 2003; Graziano, 2005; Haberman, 1995, 2005; Kincheloe, 2004; Song, 2006; Stafford & Haberman, 2003). Especially alarming, some urban districts report that this turnover period can be as short as 3 years (Haberman, 1995, 2005). Furthermore, according to Darling-Hammond (2000), urban high-poverty students are taught by more new, under-prepared, and less experienced teachers, which contributes to the disparities in achievement among majority and minority populations.

Because of these distressing affairs, concentrated efforts have been made by many urban districts to aid in teacher attraction and recruitment. These efforts have focused on monetary incentives such as signing bonuses and college loan forgiveness as well as financial assistance to enroll in graduate-level programs (Claycomb, 2000; McKinney et al., 2006). Although these incentives have yet to be fully evaluated for their impact on urban teacher retention, the literature clearly indicates that urban teachers are more likely to remain because of altruistic motivations and opportunities (Haberman, 2005; McKinney, Berry, & Dickerson, 2007; Stotko, Ingram, & Beaty-O'Ferrall, 2007). Colleges of education have responded as well by providing alternative routes to teacher certification and establishing programs specific for urban teacher development such as Career Switchers and Teaching Fellows (Cicchelli & Cho, 2007; Claycomb, 2000; Council of Great City Schools, 2000; McKinney et al., 2006; McKinney, Robinson, & Spooner, 2005; Stotko et al., 2007).

Many teacher preparation programs have begun to concentrate their efforts on providing quality opportunities during the internship experience to better prepare teacher candidates specifically for high-poverty schools. Thus, the Professional Development School (PDS) movement emerged. These schools evolved in the mid-1980s to focus on urban school reform while igniting public schools and university partnerships. The partnerships would assume greater responsibility for the preparation and retention of new teachers for urban districts when compared to traditional teacher preparation programs (The Holmes Group, Inc., 1990). The literature supports this movement in preparing student interns for urban school environments. For example, Fountain (1999) concluded that student interns who completed their internship

experience in a PDS setting showed significant differences in efforts to collaborate with fellow colleagues, teach diverse students, believe in the capabilities of urban students, and understand the out-of-school factors that can influence teaching and learning when compared to student interns not so involved. Houston (1999) concluded that PDS student interns spent more time interacting and responding to their students. Furthermore, significant differences in retention rates of teachers were found between schools identified as PDSs and those not so identified (Fleener, 1998).

In response to the national need to develop and attract teachers specifically for urban high-poverty schools, this study sought to determine if colleges of education's internship experiences aided in the development of effective urban teachers. The research questions that guided this investigation were as follows:

- Is there a significant difference in student interns' development of effective urban teacher characteristics, as measured by the Urban Teacher Selection Interview, after completing a traditional internship experience?
- Is there a significant difference in student interns' development of effective urban teacher characteristics, as measured by the Urban Teacher Selection Interview, after completing a nontraditional PDS internship experience?

A Review of the Literature

Effective Urban Teachers

Haberman (1995) reported that "having effective teachers is a matter of life and death. These children have no life options for achieving decent lives other than by experiencing success in school" (p. 1). Supported by current research, having an effective teacher in every classroom should be first priority for high-poverty schools and is critical for improving urban schooling (Dill & Stafford-Johnson, 2003; Graziano, 2005; Haberman, 1995, 2005; Kincheloe, 2004; Stafford & Haberman, 2003).

Representing more than four decades of ongoing research in urban teacher education, Haberman's *Star Teachers: The Ideology and Best Practice of Effective Teachers of Diverse Children and Youth in Poverty* (2005) and *Star Teachers of Poverty* (1995) identified 15 characteristics of effective urban teachers. These characteristics include (a) protecting children's learning, (b) persistence, (c) approach to at-risk students, (d) theory into practice, (e) professional/personal orientation to students, (f) fallibility, (g) emotional and physical stamina, (h) organizational ability, (i) explanation of teacher success, (j) explanation of children's success, (k) real teaching, (l) making

students feel needed, (m) the material versus the student, and (n) gentle teaching in a violent society. He referred to those educators who possess these characteristics as “star teachers” and pointed out that it is their ideology that separates them from teachers who are not successful teaching in urban school settings. For example, how a teacher approaches working with at-risk students is a powerful indicator of their potential success in the classroom (Haberman, 1995, 2005). Star teachers are able to capture the spirit of learning for all students regardless of their socioeconomic status, background, life circumstances, or life experiences.

Other scholars have also focused their research on those attributes of teachers that make them successful in the urban classroom and for working with at-risk students. The work of Baron, Rusnak, Brookhart, Burrett, and Whodley (1992) identified nine behaviors and practices of effective urban teachers and organized them to encompass both internal (classroom practices) and external (outside school) practices. A few of their findings include active teaching and knowledge of urban and multiethnic society (Baron et al., 1992). Additionally, McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) triangulated data from three focus groups made of up parents, teachers, and students to identify the necessary characteristics and practices of high-performing teachers in high-poverty schools. They concluded that (a) building trusting relationships with both students and families, (b) communicating frequently with families, (c) demonstrating high expectations, and (d) integrating students’ cultural knowledge throughout the curriculum were the characteristics and practices identified as essential for teacher and student success. Foster’s (1994) research identified (a) a disposition of cultural congruency, (b) skills of cultural compatibility in communication patterns, (c) a disposition to focus on the whole child (intellectually, socially, and emotionally), and (d) the dispositions and skills to connect classroom content with the life experiences of students as the functions necessary for effective urban teachers. Clearly, the findings of these researchers illustrate considerable correspondence and alignment.

The Internship Experience

The internship experience, or student teaching, is often viewed as the most significant component of teacher preparation and is thought to be the capstone experience by preservice teachers. In fact, Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy (2001) report that “experienced and newly certified teachers alike see clinical experiences (including student teaching) as a powerful—sometimes the single most powerful—component of teacher preparation” (p. 17). Its intent is to bridge theory to practice, provide preservice teachers with the practical

reality of the demands of teaching, and enable them to practice their craft under the guidance of veteran and master teachers.

Specific internship requirements often vary among teacher preparation programs and even within colleges of education (Wilson et al., 2001). For example, some preparation programs require year-long internships, whereas others require semester-long stints in the classroom setting. Differences may also extend to grade-level placement, meaning some programs mandate an internship experience within one grade level and others provide multigrade-level opportunities. The procedures for school placements can also differ; settings may be selected according to the availability by school districts, which often affects the integrity of the placement, and not by specific contextual settings (Wilson et al., 2001).

Completing the student teaching experience in an urban school setting can be particularly overwhelming and challenging, especially if colleges of education provide a traditional teacher education program that focuses on universal requirements and generic processes (Haberman, 1996, 2005). “Completing a traditional program of teacher education as preparation for working in this emotional cauldron [urban, high-poverty schools] is like preparing to swim the English Channel by doing laps in the university pool” (Haberman, 1995, p. 2). Kincheloe (2004) reported that many teacher candidates new to the urban environment experience culture shock or experience an unhealthy attitude of trying to “save” the children. He also proposed a rigorous, teacher education program that addresses the “complex content in which urban education takes place” (p. 14).

Although there is a broad consensus among researchers that high-quality internship experiences are vital for learning to teach, the research base is inconclusive on the effectiveness of various internship experiences (Allen, 2003). As a result, the Education Commission of the States (2003) reported the need for teacher preparation programs to develop a strong field experience that unites professional practice and pedagogical coursework. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to determine if an urban traditional and urban PDS internship experience was effective in developing the characteristics needed to be successful in urban school environments.

Method

Using a one-group pretest–posttest design, this study sought to determine whether the internship experience contributed to student interns’ development of effective urban teacher characteristics. For the purpose of this study, quality

Table 1
Profile of Student Interns

	Traditional Internship Experience		Professional Development School Internship Experience	
	<i>N</i> = 29	(%)	<i>N</i> = 30	(%)
Gender				
Male	6	20.7	4	13.3
Female	23	79.3	26	86.7
Years of Teaching				
None	12	41.4	8	26.7
0-3	17	58.6	22	73.3
Age				
20-30	23	79.3	21	70
30-40	4	13.8	9	30
40+	2	6.9	0	0
Race				
Euro-American	17	58.6	22	73.3
African American	5	20.7	3	10
Native American	0	0	1	3.3
Asian	1	3.4	0	0
Other	5	17.3	4	13.3

urban teachers are defined as those who possess the characteristics of effective urban teachers, or “stars” as identified by Haberman (1995, 2005).

Participants, Setting, and Procedures

The sample for this investigation consisted of 59 student interns who were placed in urban high-poverty schools in two large metropolitan school districts for their internship experience. Of this population, 30 interns were also placed in an urban high-poverty school environment. A total of 29 student interns completed their internship in an urban high-poverty PDS site. However, this placement followed a traditional internship experience.

Participants were predominately White, Euro-American, and female; had 0-3 years of teaching experience; and were 20-30 years of age. A complete profile of the student interns is provided in Table 1.

To address the first research question, we followed participants who were student interns completing their internship experience in urban high-poverty elementary schools. This internship experience followed a traditional route

of teacher preparation that modeled the student intern, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor triad relationship. The grade level and cooperating teacher were decided by the building principal, and the university supervisor was selected by each university's Office of Teacher Education Services. The university supervisor was required to conduct bimonthly observations and weekly seminars (of choice), and the building administrator was required to complete one formal observation. The internship experience also allowed the student interns to transcend gradually in accepting responsibility for full-time teaching. The first 2 weeks of the experience required the student interns to observe, the third week required them to teach one subject, the following week, two subjects, and so forth. The student interns were required to teach all subject material and manage the classroom environment for 2 consecutive weeks. The cooperating teacher was then phased back in to take control of all responsibilities. A school–university partnership did not extend beyond the input of the university supervisor.

To address the second research question, we followed participants who were also student interns placed in urban high-poverty elementary schools. However, these interns followed a PDS model of teacher preparation. This model extended to the establishment of a school–university partnership, with the goal to prepare teacher candidates specifically for the urban school environment, and was visible throughout the internship experience. For example, the PDS steering committee selected each cooperating teacher based on an established set of criteria, and these sites participated in several university–school initiatives that focused on urban education. All student interns were provided training in Frieberg's (1996) Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline Project to enhance and improve student cooperation and self-discipline. Seminars and workshops were regularly provided that focused on the demands and challenges of urban teaching. The cooperating teacher and university supervisor worked in conjunction to provide the interns with meaningful feedback and insight. In an effort to understand the out-of-school life of urban students, each student intern was provided with community experiences such as visiting the neighborhoods and after-school centers. Overall, a more focused urban experience, with many means of support, was offered through the PDS model.

Assessment Instrument

The Urban Teacher Selection Interview was used to assess the student interns' development on 10 of the 15 effective urban teacher characteristics both prior to and at the conclusion of their internship experience. These

10 characteristics include (a) persistence, (b) value of children's learning, (c) theory to practice, (d) work with at-risk students, (e) approach to children, (f) the bureaucracy, (g) admitting mistakes, (h) teacher success, (i) student success, and (j) planning/organization. Developed by Haberman, this 50-item research-based questionnaire measures stable attributes such as relationship skills and ideologies (M. Haberman, personal communication, November 30, 1998). Correct responses for each item are those made by star teachers. To pass the oral interview, participants may not have a low ranking on any of the characteristics. Total score and rank were provided for each candidate. Rankings are assigned according to the number of correct responses for each characteristic. Approximately 1 out of 10 undergraduates in traditional education programs pass the Urban Teacher Selection Interview (Haberman, 2005).

The instrument predicts who will pass an oral interview conducted by school personnel at an extremely high rate; 100% of those candidates with scores less than 30 do not pass the oral interview, whereas 100% of teacher candidates with scores greater than 43 pass the oral interview. Furthermore, 0% of those teachers who left the urban environment with poor evaluations or described themselves as unable to continue teaching in this type of environment passed the assessment instrument (Haberman, 2005).

Predictive reliability ($r = .93$) was established using previous interview scores as the criterion and reinterviewing the candidates. There are no differences based on sex, age, or ethnicity when teacher candidates are interviewed a second time. This instrument has been periodically tested since 1962, and no changes have been made based on this discrimination level. Numerous doctoral dissertations have also supported the stability of the identified characteristics and their resistance to traditional teacher education courses and experiences (Haberman, 2004). Legal validation was also established in *Rodriguez v. the Chicago Board of Education*; in 1996, the court held that the Urban Teacher Selection Interview was a valid instrument that school districts had the right to use (Haberman, 2004).

Data Analysis

There was not a significant difference between pre- and posttest scores on the Urban Teacher Selection Interview after completing a traditional internship experience at an urban high-poverty school. The mean pretest score for the 30 student interns was 34.50 ($SD = 3.721$), whereas the mean posttest score was 33.57 ($SD = 4.629$). This difference was not significant at the .05 level of probability when a paired-samples t test was conducted ($t = .322$, $df = 29$, $p > .05$).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Traditional Internship

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Paired Differences			
				<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Pretest	30	34.50	3.721				
Posttest	30	33.57	4.629	0.933	5.078	0.927	0.322

$p > .05$.

Table 3
**Descriptive Statistics for Professional Development
 School Internship Experience**

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Paired Differences			
				<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Pretest	29	34.28	4.495				
Posttest	29	33.07	5.567	1.207	4.030	.748	.118

$p > .05$.

In regard to completing an internship at an urban high-poverty PDS, there also was not a significant difference between pre- and posttest scores. The mean pretest score for the 29 student interns was 34.28 ($SD = 4.495$), whereas the mean posttest score was 33.07 ($SD = 5.567$). This difference was also not significant at the .05 level of probability ($t = .118$, $df = 28$, $p > .05$). Descriptive statistics for each group are provided in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

Discussion

Although student teaching, or the internship experience, is often viewed as the most significant component of teacher education programs, this study suggests that the significance of a short-term internship may not extend to the preparation of teachers for the urban school context, even when the internship experience exemplifies a strong school–university partnership. Erskine-Cullen and Sinclair (1996) concluded from their investigation that

faculties of education and [public] schools need to work more closely in partnership to present a more realistic picture of the challenges present in many of today's schools, and prepare teachers for the complexities of teaching in these types of environments. (p. 12)

However, Wilson et al. (2001) concluded that a lack of knowledge and expertise in how best to prepare urban teachers contributes to the shortage of sound research in teacher preparation. Clearly, there is a call for continued research in urban teacher preparation.

The results from the PDS student interns call attention to the many attempts for the improvement of urban teacher development. This internship experience was designed specifically to better prepare prospective teachers for the complexities of teaching in an urban school environment. Student interns were provided with opportunities to learn how to address the ideological context of "urban" within their pedagogical philosophy by challenging their personal views and beliefs regarding diversity (The Holmes Group, Inc., 1990). However, even when the student interns were provided with research-based opportunities and effective practices for teaching in an urban context, these skills were not readily demonstrated during their actual classroom teaching. This suggests that although the student interns were provided with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions for working with urban at-risk students, a link could not be established with actual classroom practice.

As noted in Tables 2 and 3, the mean scores for the Urban Teacher Selection Interview decreased by 0.933 and 1.207 from pretest to posttest for each group, respectively. This may suggest that a traditional and non-traditional urban internship experience can actually hinder teacher candidates' motivation and commitment to teach in an urban school environment. The data also suggest that earlier and more experiences in an urban setting are needed by prospective urban teachers. In fact, "Urban teacher preparation actually occurs in schools, with children, while functioning in the role of teacher with the help of a coach or mentor and not as an undergraduate in a generic teacher preparation program" (Haberman, 1994, p. 22). Clearly, critical resurrection and reframing of teacher preparation programs are necessary to better prepare teacher candidates for the urban school context (Berry et al., 2004; Haberman, 1996, 2005; Kincheloe, 2004).

It is evident that colleges of education need to take unprecedented steps to redesign current teacher education programs to include a specific framework for the development of prospective urban teachers. For example, teacher selection may be the key ingredient for improving urban schools (Haberman,

1995, 2005). He concluded that mature teachers who are able to “integrate their personal experiences with theory, research, logic, and a system of morality and apply them to the persistent problems of living in a free society” (p. 20) make the strongest candidates for urban school teaching because they are able to perform at a high conceptual level. These are the individuals most likely to succeed in an urban environment, even in spite of the challenging and debilitating conditions (Haberman, 2005).

However, until colleges of education are willing figure out the type of experiences that enhance the development of effective urban teachers, urban school students may have highly qualified teachers, as defined by NCLB legislation, but not teachers of high quality for urban high-poverty schools. To eliminate further victimization of both underprepared teachers and low-achieving students, only highly qualified star teachers should staff those schools in high-poverty areas.

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