

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation in Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities: Confronting the Challenges

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Abstract

The current narrative surrounding urban education, while incomplete, often focuses on concerns related to student achievement, failing schools, and teacher quality. This article targets teacher preparation as one response to these challenges and investigates the extent to which liberal arts colleges and universities are involved in this work. The article provides a summary of practices associated with effective urban-focused teacher preparation and analyzes data from liberal arts teacher education programs. Based on this research, the author categorizes the programs' various approaches and offers recommendations for maximizing the ability of such programs to effectively engage in this crucial work.

Keywords: teacher education, urban education

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation in Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities: Confronting the Challenges

The current narrative surrounding urban education in the United States emphasizes failure and crisis. While this uncritical emphasis on the negative yields an incomplete and inaccurate characterization, research has highlighted the very real challenges facing many urban schools. Too many schools are characterized by low student achievement and graduation rates, a shortage of qualified teachers, and a lack of adequate funding or resources (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Hollins, 2012; Howard, 2013; Kirp, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Furthermore, racism and discrimination in the form of school disciplinary practices, tracking, and limited opportunities are the reality (Carter, 2005; Noguera, 2008, Oakes, 2005). Moreover, a growing demographic divide between teachers and students complicates the student-teacher relationship and their efforts to succeed in reaching their goals (Jupp, 2013; Sleeter, 2001; Zeichner, 2003). While the term crisis should not be used indiscriminately to describe urban education in general, it is clear that many urban schools face significant obstacles.

Efforts to reform urban education have naturally included a focus on teachers, teaching, and teacher preparation. Teacher quality has a significant impact on student learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Howard & Milner, 2014). Furthermore, the effects of teacher shortages and unqualified teachers are experienced disproportionately by students of color, in low-achieving schools, and in high poverty areas (Rizga, 2015; Zeichner, 2003). In addition to questions related to teacher preparation, it is also imperative to consider the types of programs and institutions that are engaged in this work. Currently, the majority (91%) of teacher candidates are enrolled in university-based teacher preparation programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), and many of these are part of liberal arts colleges and universities.

Within the larger context of teacher preparation, this study focuses on those programs located in liberal arts colleges and universities. It is situated at the intersection of three current realities related to urban education in the United States: the perceived crisis in urban schools, the calls for improvement

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

in teacher preparation, and the fact that a significant number of urban teachers are emerging from university-based teacher preparation programs housed in liberal arts colleges and universities. Specifically, this project contributes to our understanding of whether or not, given current realities and constraints, liberal arts colleges have the resources to effectively prepare teachers for work in urban schools. This article provides a summary of the qualities and characteristics associated with effective preparation of teachers for work in urban schools, reports on the findings of a small study of urban-focused teacher preparation in liberal arts colleges, and offers recommendations informed by this discussion and analysis.

Understanding Urban Education

Given the various ways that researchers, practitioners, and the public use the term urban (Howard & Milner, 2014), it is essential to frame our understanding of urban education. Current statements about the crisis in urban education are often overstated, inaccurate, or simply assumed given the deficit perspective that dominates the rhetoric surrounding urban schools (Gadsden & Dixon-Román, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Pollack, 2012; Sirrakos Jr., 2017). This perspective is fueled by the negative connotations that have been mapped onto the term *urban* when describing schools, students, families, and communities. While in the past *urban* was defined in contrast to *village* to describe “the highly complex changes in ways of thinking and behaving that accompanied revolutions in technology, increasing concentrations of people in cities, and restructuring of economic and political institutions into large bureaucracies” (Tyack, 1974, p. 5), in recent years urban has become code for “low-income students and families of color” (Gadsden & Dixon-Román, 2017, p. 431) and “a signifier for poverty, nonwhite violence, narcotics, bad neighborhoods, an absence of family values, crumbling houses, and failing schools” (Kincheloe, Hayes, Rose, & Anderson, 2007, p. xi).

This narrow frame is dangerous because of the way it reinforces negative stereotypes, misrepresents many of the challenges facing urban schools and students, ignores societal and systemic issues, and hides the complexity, strength, and beauty of urban

Walcott

schools and urban spaces. Leonardo and Hunter (2009) noted that “representations of urban schooling most commonly evoke images of the urban as ‘jungle’” (p. 154), complete with racist overtones and visions of gangs, violence, and danger. They argued, however, that these characterizations ignore the way urban also can be envisioned as a sophisticated space of modernization and technology and as an authentic place of identity, home to the people who reside there and to their diverse and rich cultural practices. Discussions of urban education, therefore, need to move beyond the negativity associated with the term urban and “must consider how students and their families grow, think, behave, and enact their identities as well as the inextricability of these identities to local context and to locations within place” (Gadsden & Dixon-Román, p. 433). Teacher preparation needs to include a re-imagining of urban spaces and urban schooling, a “radical questioning of the way educators and concerned people currently imagine the urban from a place of decline to a place of possibilities” (Leonardo & Hunter, 2009, p. 164). Teacher candidates, then, need opportunities to engage in critical discussions about and interactions with both urban schools and communities and the dominant discourse surrounding urban education.

While seeking, then, to add to an informed and critical perspective of urban education, it is also necessary to understand how urban education is used to describe specific schools. Milner and Lomotey (2014) noted that urban schools are generally considered to be located in large metropolitan areas, include a diverse student population, and be underserved in terms of resources. Furthermore, there is a recognition that students in these schools are frequently marginalized due to societal and educational inequities. Within this group, however, there remain significant differences. Milner’s (2012a) typology of urban education has proved useful in characterizing schools as urban intensive, urban emergent, or urban characteristic. Urban intensive schools are located in the small group of very large metropolitan cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Urban emergent schools are located in large cities such as Nashville, Tennessee, and Charlotte, North Carolina, and share many of the characteristics and challenges of urban intensive schools. Finally, urban

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

characteristic schools, while not located in large cities, encounter challenges often associated with urban schools.

The study of urban education, therefore, needs to include an understanding and celebration of the complexity, diversity, strengths, assets, and beauty inherent in urban communities and schools while also recognizing the unique and serious challenges regularly facing urban schools, educators, students, and the communities in which they are located. Urban education, then, describes both the realities of urban schools and communities and an approach to teaching and learning that acknowledges and builds on those realities.

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

Efforts to improve urban education are multi-faceted and reflect a variety of perspectives, but there is widespread agreement that teacher preparation must be at the heart of urban school improvement (Howard & Milner, 2014). As Milner (2012b) has strongly asserted, “There is no issue more important to improving urban education—particularly the instructional practices of teachers in urban classrooms—than the preparation of teachers” (p. 700). The focus on teacher preparation is also fueled by concerns about low student achievement and a shortage of qualified teachers (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Howard, 2013; Kirp, 2013). In addition, the fact that 12% of public school teachers are in their first two years (Sawchuk & Rehora, 2016) highlights the need for teacher candidates who are ready to be successful on their first day in the classroom.

However, preparing teachers is demanding work, and this is especially true of urban-focused teacher preparation. Duncan-Andrade’s (2011) assertion that “not every program needs to commit to preparing teachers to work in urban schools, but for those that do, it should be their only focus” (p. 322) reflects the challenging nature of this work along with the dedication needed to do it well. It also serves as a challenge to institutions that have not traditionally been involved in urban education. The question of whether or not these institutions can effectively engage in this work, and if so, how, is salient as we consider how to improve schooling for all students.

Walcott

Although teacher preparation for urban education is still a developing literature field (Howard & Milner, 2014), there is a growing body of research articulating its essential components. Scholars have emphasized the need for preparation that immerses candidates in urban communities, provides an intellectual framework for understanding students' realities, critically engages with issues of equity and justice, and equips teachers to meet the needs of all learners. Furthermore, program structure must include coherence and integration of coursework with clinical practice, extended field experience, effective partnerships with local schools and communities, and attention to recruitment.

Immersion in Urban Communities

Teacher candidates need to be engaged with and culturally immersed in urban communities (Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2001; Sleeter, 2001; Noel, 2013) in order to move beyond the "artificial" domains of the university and a single field-based practicum (Solomon & Sekayi, 2007) and to confront the negative stereotypes often resulting from limited contact with urban communities (Solomon & Sekayi, 2007; Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Leitze, 2006). Teacher preparation programs have been successful in confronting these challenges by involving teacher candidates in community-based projects, service learning, and personal interaction with urban communities. These involvements have provided teacher candidates with a deeper and more realistic perspective of urban communities (Massey & Szente, 2007; Solomon, Manoukian, & Clark, 2007) and have been linked to positive changes in attitudes toward issues of multiculturalism and difference (Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Leitze, 2006).

Intellectual Framework

In addition, teacher candidates need a framework through which they can understand their students' experiences, cultural and linguistic background, and strengths and weaknesses in order to contribute positively to their students' academic achievement (Banks, 2016; Duncan-Andrade, 2011; Emdin, 2016; Milner, 2006; Tidwell & Thompson, 2009) and to confront prevailing deficit perspectives (Sirrakos Jr., 2017; Stairs, Donnell, & Dunn,

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

2012). They need to understand the multiple and complex characteristics that students bring to the classroom and the way these impact their experiences, behavior, and learning (Banks, 2016). As articulated by Howard and Milner (2014), “In its simplest conception, research has suggested that teachers need to build knowledge about and be aware of the racial and cultural background of students in order to address the range of needs students bring to school” (p. 206).

Furthermore, successful urban education programs should help teacher candidates recognize the impact of race, culture, and social class in urban communities (Milner, 2006). Pollack (2012) has highlighted the use of targeted critical listening through the use of observation, reflection, and journaling as effective in helping teacher candidates uncover and challenge deficit narratives. In addition, the use of counterstories grounded in the knowledge and experience of people who have often been marginalized in our society can help teacher candidates reject and challenge deficit narratives (Yosso, 2006). Specialized coursework and structured field experiences along with field- and inquiry-based approaches and school partnerships are crucial in helping teacher candidates develop the necessary framework for understanding their students’ realities (Tidwell & Thompson, 2009).

Critical Engagement with Equity and Justice

Critical engagement with issues of equity and justice is also an essential component of urban-focused teacher preparation. Teacher candidates must be prepared to engage in the struggle to transform both the school and society (Giroux, 2009; Giroux & McLaren, 1996; Kincheloe, 2004). They need to understand the ways that schools support the dominant ideology and thereby reproduce social inequality and that the pursuit of justice in education necessarily includes a fight for justice in society (Ewing, 2018; Love, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Cultural studies should be at the heart of teacher preparation to provide candidates with the framework necessary to examine school and classroom relations (Giroux, 2009). Similarly, the development of critical consciousness, including “critiquing relations of power, questioning one’s assumptions about reality, and reflecting on the

Walcott

complexities of multiple identities” (Nieto & McDonough, 2011, p. 366), is a necessary part of effective teacher preparation.

Darder (2012) also argued that teacher education must help teacher candidates “develop a critical understanding of their purpose as educators . . .” (p. 104). Building on Darder’s critical bicultural principles, Lopez (2012) stated that urban teacher preparation must “empower teachers in creating culturally democratic classrooms, where the lived experiences of bicultural students are not only validated but also utilized to foster critical consciousness and social transformation” (p. 169). Teacher candidates must be equipped to challenge their internal biases, listen to the voices of their students and families, and understand the way schools work to reproduce inequality (Lopez, 2012).

Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Furthermore, urban-focused teacher preparation must prepare candidates to meet the needs of all students. Howard (2003) noted that teachers “will continue to come into contact with students whose cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and social class backgrounds differ from their own” and therefore “must be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students’ social and cultural realities” (p. 195). Teacher candidates, therefore, need to understand their students and how to engage in pedagogical practices that promote the achievement of all learners. They need to be equipped to build on and value students’ experiences and implement asset-based pedagogies founded on the belief that students can find success in school (Michie, 2019; Stairs, Donnell, & Dunn, 2012). Preparation should include an emphasis on culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2016) and multicultural education (Grant, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Program Characteristics

Certain program characteristics are also requisite to effective teacher education. The first is coherence and integration of coursework and clinical practice. Programs that incorporate coherent visions of teaching integrated across courses and

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

field experiences have a greater impact than those that consist of a largely disconnected set of courses (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). Therefore, field placements—such as student teaching and other practicum experiences—need to be accompanied by courses that give teacher candidates the opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Milner, 2006).

Second, field experiences have long been considered a crucial, if not most important, component of preservice teacher preparation (Hollins & Torres Guzman, 2005), and research has demonstrated the positive effect of early field experiences and longer internship placements (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005). Darling-Hammond (2008) noted that over 300 teacher education programs have added a fifth year to the traditional four-year bachelor's degree program in order to incorporate a yearlong teaching internship that allows teacher candidates to focus exclusively on learning to teach and to better link coursework and teaching.

Third, the importance of close university-school partnerships is also linked to effective teacher preparation. Darling-Hammond (2006) affirmed the need for teacher education programs to develop proactive relationships in places “where practice-based and practice-sensitive research can be carried out collaboratively by teachers, teacher educators, and researchers” (p. 309) and in schools that include diverse learners. Stairs and Friedman (2013) relied on a situative perspective on learning—stressing the need to situate learning within the context of the object of study—to describe and discuss the positive impact of urban school-university partnerships on preservice teacher preparation. Noel (2013) also advanced the value of building on community strengths in the work of urban-focused teacher preparation and urged “teacher educators to move all or part of their programs directly into urban schools and communities” (p. 217). These partnerships are crucial in providing teacher candidates opportunities to learn about and practice culturally responsive pedagogy “in schools and classrooms that value students’ diverse cultures in connection with university programs that hold a strong commitment to educating students in historically underserved urban schools” (Olson & Rao, 2016, p. 139).

Walcott

Finally, the issue of recruitment is crucial in the preparation of urban teachers in two key ways. First, given the demographic divide that commonly exists between urban students and teachers and the importance of increasing the diversity of the teaching force, recruitment of teacher candidates of color is an essential strategy for improving urban schools (Duncan-Andrade, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Sleeter, 2016). Second, programs are encouraged to screen teacher candidates in order to identify individuals who possess the necessary experiences, characteristics, and dispositions—including persistence, empathy for others, an understanding of diversity, and a commitment to equity and justice (Ladson-Billings, 2001)—to succeed both in teacher preparation and in classroom teaching.

Teacher Preparation in Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities

Continued focus on and assessment of the manner in which teacher candidates are being prepared for work in urban schools is both warranted and necessary. Given the complex nature of teaching and of teacher preparation it is important to explore the question of whether and how liberal arts colleges of education can effectively engage in this work. The purpose of the study reported here is to provide a starting point for an understanding of the extent to which such institutions are engaged in urban-focused teacher preparation.

Method

A content analysis of program web-sites and publicly available documents of teacher preparation programs provided data about the manner in which these programs were engaged in urban-focused teacher preparation. Programs were chosen for inclusion in the study based on their membership in a national association of teacher preparation programs at liberal arts colleges. This purposive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) provided a list of 128 institutions, public and private, of various sizes and geographical regions throughout the United States.

The data gathered from the various programs were analyzed using a set of provisional codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) based

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

on the current discourse surrounding urban-focused teacher preparation. These included explicit mention of urban education and communities along with reference to issues and practices associated with urban education, including multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, equity, social justice, field placements, and community involvement. In order to increase accuracy, the coding process was repeated for each set of documents and then, when necessary, subjected to further review to resolve discrepancies.

Findings

The analysis revealed four distinct approaches to the preparation of teachers for work in urban schools (see Table 1). A small percentage (8%) of programs demonstrated a clear focus on preparing teachers for work in urban schools. This was clearly evident throughout their program and appeared in mission and vision statements along with program and course descriptions. Teacher candidates at these institutions would clearly understand urban education as the unique focus of the program. For example, a private liberal arts college of 3000-4000 students in the Midwest highlighted its urban location, the students' continuous involvement with service-learning experiences in urban classrooms, required field service experience in an urban school, and its commitment to preparing responsive educators able to thrive in diverse settings.

Other institutions (8%) included an urban option. Some of these programs allowed students to participate in an urban cohort or to choose urban education as an area of study. Others offered the opportunity to participate in an optional program or do their teaching internship in an urban center. However, urban education was not articulated as the focus of the entire program. For example, this urban option was present in a small college (1000 students) in the Eastern United States that advertised a collaborative program with a partner organization that would work with its students to facilitate service learning and field placements in a metropolitan area located approximately 70 miles from its campus. The program also included a required course as part of its teacher preparation program designed to expose students to

Walcott

issues of race, class, and culture in urban schools. The program clearly demonstrated a desire to be involved in preparing teachers for work in urban schools without making this the focus of its entire program.

Table 1
Teacher Preparation Categories

Category	Description	Number of Institutions
Urban Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• clearly stated urban focus throughout program• continuous involvement in urban classrooms• required field service in urban school• commitment to culturally relevant teaching	10 (8%)
Urban Option	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• urban education not given as focus of program• optional participation in study of urban education, urban placement, or urban cohort• commitment to culturally relevant teaching	10 (8%)
Urban Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• reflects values associated with urban teacher preparation• commitment to social justice, diversity, multicultural education	21 (16%)
No Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• no reference to urban education or associated values	87 (68%)

A larger number of programs (16%) reflected values associated with urban teacher preparation. These included an emphasis on social justice, diversity, multicultural education, and other qualities associated with effective urban schooling. These themes, however, were not evident throughout the program and were not part of a specific urban focus or option. For example, the introductory webpage for the teacher education program at a small, faith-based university in the Midwest clearly stated its commitment to multicultural education and diversity in its work with teacher candidates. Similarly, the School of Education at a slightly larger liberal arts institution in the Eastern United States highlighted its commitment to social justice and diversity in its philosophy statement. In each case, however, these values were not explicitly tied to a broader focus on urban education. Finally, the majority of schools (68%) did not give any specific evidence

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

of involvement with urban-focused teacher preparation or of values and issues associated with urban education.

Discussion

In summary, this broad review of one group of teacher education programs affiliated with liberal arts colleges and universities suggests a useful categorization of these programs into *urban focus*, *urban option*, *urban values*, or *not evident* in terms of their level of involvement in urban education. While there are limits to what we can learn from a study of this nature, the clear differences in the way these liberal arts colleges and universities describe their goals related to teacher preparation in general and urban-focused teacher preparation in particular can serve as the foundation for further discussion and research. Furthermore, an analysis of these programs in light of a research-based understanding of effective preparation of teachers for work in urban schools and communities provides a starting point for considering whether or not small, liberal arts institutions can effectively prepare teachers for urban schools and/or how they can minimize the limitations and constraints they encounter.

First, it is important to highlight that the majority of these institutions did not give specific evidence of involvement with the preparation of teacher candidates for urban schools. The location of many of these institutions—far from urban centers—explains some of this. While not stated explicitly, it is likely that many are focused on preparing teachers exclusively for rural or suburban settings. It may also be that some programs do not feel the need to include an explicit focus on urban teaching and learning. They may not believe that “urban teachers need more than the generic teaching competencies...” (Oakes, Franke, Hunter Quartz, & Rogers, 2002, p. 228) and therefore feel that teacher preparation does not need to consider the types of schools in which teacher candidates are likely to work (Hollins, 2006). This one-size-fits-all approach to teacher preparation contradicts current literature about effective practices in urban teacher preparation and would certainly be a cause for concern. More study is warranted to determine how many, if any, teacher preparation programs represent this perspective.

Walcott

Second, although many liberal arts colleges and universities—32% of the programs reviewed—are making efforts at including coursework, values, or experiences related to urban education, very few (8%) meet the standard of incorporating a unique and specific focus on urban education throughout their program. Duncan-Andrade's (2011) stance that programs that intend to prepare teachers for work in urban schools need to be solely focused on that goal would suggest that it might not be possible, then, for small, liberal arts institutions to attempt this work. However, given the reality that many teacher candidates from these programs do take positions in urban schools, suggesting that they stop their efforts is not an option. Nevertheless, these programs need to recognize the constraints they face and search out ways to maximize their ability to offer effective preparation to their teacher candidates heading to urban communities.

The literature has highlighted the need for teacher preparation that immerses candidates in urban communities, provides an intellectual framework for understanding students, critically engages with issues of equity and justice, and prepares teachers to meet the needs of all learners. Further study is required to investigate the extent to which the urban focus programs realize these goals, but programs in the urban option and urban values categories clearly fall short. Some of the programs provide urban immersion opportunities through their optional urban education cohorts; others include courses designed to engage students critically in issues of justice, equity, culture, difference, and power, among others. Several programs also include courses in multicultural education or diverse learners. However, candidates' opportunities related to these characteristics are uneven, sporadic, and not infused throughout the program.

Teacher preparation literature has also stressed that program design must include coherence and integration of coursework with clinical practice, extended field experience, effective partnerships with local schools and communities, and attention to recruitment. Reference to these qualities is absent from all but the urban focus programs. The nature of an urban option program excludes the level of integration and coherence necessary to provide teacher candidates a deep and critical level of understanding

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

of urban teaching, students, communities, and sociocultural factors. Additionally, while urban option programs have established partnerships with urban collaboratives or schools, there is no evidence that the work of the partner organization plays a role in the teacher preparation program beyond providing an urban field placement for teacher candidates.

Rather, the data suggest that “add-on” or superficial approaches to urban-related issues that are criticized in the literature (Sleeter, 2001; Solomon & Sekayi, 2007) are a reality in many teacher preparation programs. Those that offer an urban option for student teaching or include a course or two designed to introduce students to issues related to urban education are not providing their teacher candidates with the coherency required of effective programs. Furthermore, these distinct experiences are not able to give candidates the space needed for reflection, dialogue, and cultural immersion that have been demonstrated to be effective in providing students with the necessary framework for successful urban teaching and to combat deficit-based stereotypes and perspectives (Milner, 2006; Noel, 2013; Pollack, 2012; Sleeter, 2001). Although providing students with the opportunity to join a teacher collaborative in an urban community to complete their teaching internship seems like an efficient way to provide interested candidates with urban experience, it involves only limited engagement with urban communities and lacks the appropriate integration of theory and practice.

Finally, these programs do not mention recruitment efforts designed to increase the number of teachers of colors or candidates predisposed to working successfully in urban communities. While additional research is required to thoroughly understand these programs, the data suggest that the great majority of teacher preparation programs in these institutions fail to meet the standards identified in the research literature.

As noted above, there are clear limitations to a study of this nature. An analysis of program documents and websites offers only a surface view of these institutions. Further research is needed to fully understand the manner in which specific programs are addressing issues related to urban teaching and learning. In depth case studies including interviews with faculty,

Walcott

teacher candidates, and school-based mentors along with observations of specific courses and field placements would increase our understanding of how these programs are enacted and understood along with a sense of their effectiveness. This study, however, increases our understanding of the extent to which these teacher preparation programs are engaged in urban-focused teacher preparation and provides a foundation for further study.

Implications

The limitations of the vast majority of programs highlighted here are substantial and troubling. While this is not an in-depth study, the evidence suggests that the vast majority of these teacher education programs fall far short in providing the focus, experiences, content, and coherence required for effective urban-focused teacher preparation. Programs that truly desire to realize their commitment of preparing teacher candidates to teach all students, therefore, must take steps to improve their capacity. Building on the existing scholarship on the preparation of teachers for work in urban schools, these programs can begin by incorporating a commitment to program coherence and integration, deep and effective partnerships with urban schools and communities, and intentional and strategic recruitment of students and faculty.

First, teacher education programs need to assess their coursework and student learning outcomes to ensure that preparation to meet the needs of all learners and to prepare culturally responsive and competent teachers is a part of all classes and field experiences. Only through this commitment to program coherence and integration will they be able to provide their teacher candidates with “a common, clear-vision of good teaching that permeates all coursework and clinical experiences, creating a coherent set of learning experiences” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 305). While the idea of an urban option does not meet the requirement for coherence throughout the program nor reflect a complete focus on urban education, smaller programs may be able to successfully incorporate optional urban placements for field work if, and only if, these experiences are grounded in coursework and community experiences that provide the knowledge, skills, and dispositions

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

required for successful teaching in urban schools. All teacher candidates need to be prepared to teach all students, and therefore introductory and pedagogy courses must address issues of equity, diversity, and justice as well as prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. These courses, then, will provide a foundation and framework to prepare teacher candidates for clinical experiences in urban communities as well as providing all candidates, even those who choose not to pursue an urban placement, with necessary preparation for teaching.

Secondly, school and community partnerships need to be a necessary and essential component of these programs. Zeichner and Payne (2013) have argued for the creation of “hybrid spaces” in which “academic, school-based, and community-based knowledge come together in less hierarchical and haphazard ways to support teacher learning” (p. 6). These focused partnerships provide teacher candidates with diverse perspectives and sources of knowledge and push teacher education programs to involve expert, practicing teachers throughout the program. The image of school-based teacher preparation needs to go beyond considering our local schools as sites for the placement of teacher interns to include embracing expert teachers as school-based teacher educators essential to our programs and involved in planning, teaching, and program evaluation. This is an effective practice in teacher education in general, and it is essential for programs that, due to small program size, may not have enough faculty with urban knowledge and experience who can provide the type of mentoring and support needed by teacher candidates.

Finally, intentionality in faculty and student recruitment should be a fundamental component of urban-focused teacher preparation programs. Many liberal arts colleges and universities confront the reality of relatively small numbers of teacher candidates and faculty. They understandably find it difficult to offer expert and first-hand knowledge about urban teaching to their teacher candidates. They may also find it more difficult to recruit a diverse group of teacher educators than larger university-based programs located in urban centers. These realities make it difficult for such institutions to offer programs characterized

Walcott

by the qualities associated with effective urban-focused teacher preparation. While school and community partnerships should be leveraged to provide expert teachers who can help fill this gap, these programs also need to commit to recruiting and attracting a diverse faculty with experience in urban schools. In addition, just as in-service P-12 teachers need continued professional development related to urban teaching and learning, current teacher education faculty must be provided with opportunities for continued growth in their understanding of urban education and of effective teacher preparation. This will also require the support of the administration and admissions offices in order to dedicate the necessary resources to recruit a diverse pool of teacher candidates. Furthermore, programs should institute a screening process for those interested in urban education to ensure that these teacher candidates have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to succeed in this work (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Conclusion

There is still more to learn about how to effectively prepare teachers for work in urban schools, especially in the context of small, liberal arts, teacher preparation programs. Of the programs reviewed, only ten (8%) showed evidence of being urban-focused, and the limited scope of the study does not ensure that their programs incorporated all of the qualities associated with effective teacher preparation. In addition, although many of the institutions reviewed are involved in some ways in preparing teachers for work in urban communities, there is little evidence that they provide the sort of urban focus required for effective teacher preparation.

There is an obvious need for more research of programs that are being effective, even in small ways, and for collaboration among programs to facilitate the sharing of ideas related to coursework, student and faculty recruitment, field experiences, school partnerships, and how to confront the challenges that exist in small programs with limited resources. The current reality is that many graduates of these programs will teach in urban communities and that the student characteristics traditionally associated with urban schools—cultural and linguistic diversity, low socio-economic

Urban-Focused Teacher Preparation

status, and diverse student populations—are evident in a growing number of schools across the nation. Therefore, a commitment to prepare teacher candidates for work in urban education and to taking the steps necessary to overcome existing challenges and constraints is an obligation rather than an option.

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Walcott

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Walcott

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