Factors Influencing Teacher Candidates' Participation in a Paid Field Experience with Urban Students

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To the dismay of educators, reformists, politicians, and American citizens, the achievement gap between the haves and the have-nots continues to exist. When educational standards are set and then used to compare districts, there is an assumption that all students have had equal opportunities to meet those goals, and this is simply not the case (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000). The current state of urban schools and their crumbling facilities, lack of resources, and lack of qualified teachers makes the playing field anything but level (*Williams et al. v. State of California et al.*, 2005; Bohn & Sleeter). Because of these and other factors, children in urban schools with high percentages of minority students consistently under-perform white students on standardized assessments, drop out of school at a much higher rate than whites, and fail to acquire the basic academic skills that lead to successful employment and self-sufficiency (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2000). Mean achievement scores in both math and reading for fourth and eighth graders in large central city schools nationwide are significantly lower than the national average (NCES, 2005).

A review of the literature on urban schools points to several factors contributing to disparities in education in addition to the funding formulas currently utilized for urban and suburban/rural districts. Unqualified

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and unprepared teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2005), and the mismatch between the teaching force and their charges (Burstein & Cabello, 1989; Gomez, 1996; Hodgkinson, 2002; Terrill & Mark, 2000) are among the most prominent contributing teacher factors, while teacher education curricula inadequately addressing the needs of the ever-changing student population (Foote & Cook-Cottone, 2004) is a contributing factor of teacher education. Possible solutions have included alternate teacher recruitment strategies (Haberman, 1995), including alternative routes to certification (Berry, 2001; Weiner, 2002), and a reevaluation and redesign of teacher education programs, curricula, and field experiences (Sleeter, 2001; Webb-Johnson & Artiles, 1998).

Challenges Facing Urban Schools

Despite the multiplicity of our nation's students, diverse demographics have yet to be seen in our teaching force (NCES, 2003). Low numbers of minority teachers in schools and in teacher education programs may be due to the increased opportunities in fields outside of education for people of color (Hodgkinson, 2002); however, it is also more than likely due in part to the high dropout rate of minority students in urban schools (NCES, 2000), the percentage of students following alternative paths to graduation (Ladson-Billings, 2005), and therefore, the smaller number of people of color in teacher preparation programs (Sleeter, 2001). Since student diversity will continue to be an issue in our nation's schools, today's teachers need to be taught how to effectively teach students from cultural groups dissimilar from their own. High teacher turnover rates in urban schools continue to be a result of candidates who are unprepared for urban schools, the high needs of their students, and in the poor working conditions they find themselves in (Kozleski, Mainzer, & Deshler, 2000). Another challenge is oftentimes the unexamined biases or stereotypes that many white middle-class preservice teachers have towards people of diverse cultures, languages, or socioeconomic status (SES) (George, & Aronson, 2003).

Attempts to Remedy

The belief that teachers must be taught to work with children from other cultures has spurred the inclusion of culturally relevant pedagogy into our nation's teacher education programs. Even if an increasingly diverse teaching force is achieved, there will still be a need for multicultural education (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Teachers of color may have a "richer multicultural knowledge base" than white teachers do (Sleeter, 2001, p. 95), but they do not necessarily bring more knowledge about effective pedagogical practices for urban minority students. This may occur

because teachers tend to fall back on and teach in the ways that they are most familiar (Swartz, 2003), and because many people of color were taught by white teachers who, because of a lack of focus by teacher education on culturally responsive pedagogy, may have used instruction methods that obstructed instead of complimented the education of students from non-dominant cultures. Knowledge of cultural differences and suggestions for how to best address these issues may help limit the misconceptions of inexperienced teachers who interpret student behaviors as a result of their home life instead of cultural differences (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000).

Culturally relevant pedagogy and urban field-based experiences are essential because the realities of the job market may force candidates to seek employment in urban districts whether or not they want to and whether or not they feel prepared to do so (Swartz, 2003; Wolffe, 1996). However, there is a lack of empirical research on the type and amount of curriculum that sufficiently prepares teachers to face diversity in the classroom (Sleeter, 2001; Webb-Johnson & Artiles, 1998). Exposure to diversity is essential when one considers the demographics of our nation's teachers: for example, white, non-Hispanic adults comprise over 80% of the teachers in the United States (NCES, 2003). Fear may be a factor influencing teacher candidates' willingness to teach in urban schools since many of them have not attended public, high-need, urban schools. Field experiences in urban schools may serve as a way to lessen these fears and acquire a respect for both urban students and teachers (Heinemann, Obi, Pagano, & Weiner, 1992; Pagano, Weiner, Obi, & Swearingen, 1995).

According to Proctor, Rentz, and Jackson (2001), candidates' willingness to teach in urban schools following experiences in these schools was positively influenced as a result of the following: their impact on students, their ability to help those in need, student responsiveness and appreciation. To reduce prejudice and discrimination often found in urban schools, teacher candidates must have opportunities to reflect on their beliefs about multicultural education and diverse cultures and simultaneously add to their cache of knowledge of how to address it in the classroom (Middleton, 2002). While some authors warn that too much exposure to urban schools as a part of field experiences may limit desire to teach in such settings (Proctor, Rentz, & Jackson), others caution that spending a limited amount of time in urban classrooms may actually reinforce stereotypes of minority cultures unless there is an opportunity for dialogue and increased understanding (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Some may enter the field with the notion that they can "fix the system." Haberman (2004) suggests that teacher education programs offer extensive field experiences and courses that highlight the conditions in urban schools. He asserts that discussions and reflections on the

realities of urban teachers will enable teacher educators to prevent pre-service candidates from seeing themselves as "saviors" of the system and instead turn them into teachers who will help students succeed despite the system. Brutal honesty about and experience with the conditions and bureaucracies of urban schools may also help prepare candidates who would be less likely to leave after a few years (Haberman).

Clearly, no formula currently exists for teacher preparation programs that will guarantee an increased willingness or ability to effectively teach children in urban schools (Cochran-Smith, 2005). Unfortunately, schools of education cannot put a stamp on diplomas or teaching certificates indicating those populations they feel candidates would be best suited to teach (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Thus, all teacher education programs must ensure that an emphasis on diversity is incorporated into curricula and field experiences. These authors argue that teacher preparation programs should attempt to provide opportunities for candidates to help them make informed decisions regarding urban schools as a viable employment option upon graduation.

This study reports problems faced by urban schools as well as teacher education's attempts to remedy these problems, and explores one college's effort to understand the complexities of teacher candidates' decision to work in urban schools. A paid field experience in an urban school district allowed teacher candidates to explore their perceptions of urban schools based on their previous experiences, or lack thereof, and their willingness to work in urban settings. The program, Summer in the City (SITC), was funded by a grant from the New York State Department of Education to an urban school district and was implemented at the end of the college's spring 2005 semester (May to June). SITC had two goals: (1) to help prepare both elementary and secondary students for final district grade-level exams, and (2) to influence teacher candidates' consideration of urban schools as an employment option. The experience differed from practicum requirements as it was voluntary, paid (approximately $2000 per participant for 90 hours of field experience and 12 hours of training), and included no substantive assignments (as did field experiences tied to courses in candidate programs). Faculty members who worked with SITC candidates were also interested in those who chose not to participate given the timing, the pay, and the minimal demands of the program in contrast to coursework. Teacher candidates were required to complete the training and offer tutoring to their charges. There were no written assignments or grades attached to the experience.

Specifically, the following research questions guided the investigation: (1) Was there a difference between SITC and non-SITC teacher candidates in (a) the number of hours spent in urban practica settings

before the SITC program?; (b) their ratings of previous urban field experiences?; (c) their willingness to teach in an urban setting?; and (d) the demographics of race/ethnicity, home environment locale, and school locale?, and (2) What reasons did candidates claim influenced their decision whether or not to participate?

Method

Participants

Undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in a teacher preparation program at a private, religiously affiliated college in an urban area in the Northeast were offered the opportunity to participate in the SITC program toward the end of the Spring 2005 semester. SITC was a state funded program designed to have pre-service teacher candidates tutor students in high-need urban settings in an effort to better prepare the district's students for final exams and to entice teacher candidates to consider seeking employment options at high-need urban schools. Candidates applied to the program and were selected based on criteria including successful completion of 60 or more college level credits, full-time enrollment in an approved teacher preparation program, and good academic standing. Ninety-five teacher candidates were selected for SITC. Of these participants, approximately 85% were undergraduate students. Nineteen candidates (20%) were male and 76 (80%) were female. The mean age was 21.34 years. The median family income level was $50,000-74,999.

Subjects for the control group who had also completed at least 60 credit hours and met the other eligibility criteria previously listed were approached by college faculty during class sessions in the teacher preparation programs. If they had not applied for the SITC program, full-time faculty members asked them to consider completing a brief survey. Fewer candidates participated in the comparison group because the program was rather popular, and the number of people who had not applied was smaller than the number who did apply: 8 (16%) non-SITC teacher candidates were male while 41 (84%) were female. The mean age was 22.53 years. The reported family income level fell into the same category as the SITC group. Table 1 reports the race/ethnicity of both the experimental and the control groups. Demographics of both groups were representative of the school of education's students.

Procedure

Before the program began, both groups completed a survey designed to elicit candidate demographic information, (including gender, their own

Table 1
Race/Ethnicity of Participants

	Experimental Group		*Control Group*	
Race / Ethnicity	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Caucasian	86	91	45	92
African American	3	3	1	2
Hispanic	1	1	0	0
Native American	1	1	1	2
Asian	0	0	2	4
Multiracial	1	1	0	0
Other	3	3	0	0
Total	95	100%	49	100%

Note: $x^2 (6, N=144)=6.84$, p>.05

P-12 schooling locale, socioeconomic status [SES], and race/ethnicity), candidate experience in high-need urban education (including number of hours and satisfaction with previous urban field practice), and candidate willingness to teach in a high-need urban setting. These items were written in question form followed by a forced-choice response scale format, deemed appropriate to use in the assessment of perceptions and attitudes (Isaac & Michael, 1981).

Also included on the survey were questions formatted to elicit free response. Applicants were asked to identify the top three factors that influenced their decision of whether or not to apply to the SITC program.

Instrument

Survey structure and questions were formulated based on previous perception research conducted in the fields of urban education (Baca & Cervantes, 1998; Figueroa, Fradd, & Correa, 1989; Gersten & Baker, 2000), field-based experiences (Utley, Delquadri, Obiakor, & Mims, 2000), and teacher attrition (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997). Two graduate students and several experts in the field reviewed and provided feedback concerning the validity of the survey. Revisions were made by the researchers as a result of these comments and suggestions.

Although a sizeable body of research in education focuses on the identification of effective teaching practices, few studies were located that specifically addressed the perceptions teacher candidates have of their experience in urban schools and how it impacted their decision to seek employment in a specific locale. The resulting survey was administered before the *Summer in the City* program began, but after participants were notified of their acceptance.

Data Analysis

Previous Field Experience Hours

An analysis was conducted to determine if there was a difference between the SITC and the non-SITC candidates in the number of hours they had spent in urban practica settings before the program. Eighty-one members (85.3%) of the SITC group had previous urban field experiences and 14 (14.7%) had none; in the non-SITC group 36 (73%) had completed urban field experiences while 13 (26.5%) had not. Candidates reported the approximate number of clock hours (ranging from 7 hours to 600 hours) they had spent in field-based practica. The SITC group had a mean of 96.83 (SD=127.54) hours while the non-SITC group had a mean of 36.94 (SD=43.93) hours. Clearly, while similar percentages in the two groups had been placed in urban classrooms for fieldwork, there must have been large differences in the number of hours required or in the number of practica opportunities in urban classrooms. For example, some programs may place candidates in urban schools for nearly all placements and some candidates had completed their student teaching placement in an urban setting, therefore, there is a large range for number of hours. As seen in Table 2, an ANOVA was conducted to determine statistical significance and the resulting F-statistic was significant, $F(1,141)=10.15$, $p=.002$. SITC candidates had a significantly greater average number of hours spent in urban based practica when compared to the group of non-SITC candidates.

Ratings of Previous Field Experience

A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if there were significant differences between the SITC and non-SITC candidates on their ratings of previous urban field experiences. Candidates rated their prior urban field experiences as *extremely positive*, *somewhat positive*, *somewhat negative*, or *extremely negative*. Descriptive results reported in Table 3 indicate the two groups were not significantly different on their ratings of satisfaction of previous urban field experiences.

Table 2
Analysis of Variance for Previous Field Experience

Source	*SS*	*df*	*F*	*MS*	*p*
Previous Field Experience	115534.4	1	10.148	115534.37	.002
Error	1605330	141		11385.32	
Total	1720864	142			

Table 3
Satisfaction of Previous Urban Field Experiences for the Two Groups

Ratings	SITC Candidates		Non-SITC Candidates	
	n	%	n	%
Extremely positive	36	45	11	31
Somewhat positive	39	49	22	61
Somewhat negative	5	6	3	8
Extremely negative	0	0	0	0

Note. The numbers in both groups are less than the total number of candidates partici-pating. Several candidates had not previously participated in urban field experience and were instructed not to respond to this question on the survey.

An ANOVA was conducted to determine statistical significance of the mean willingness ratings by the rating levels of previous field experiences, and the resulting F-statistic was significant, $F(2,51)=5.78$, $p=.005$. The mean for willingness to teach in urban schools is calculated for those candidates who had urban field experiences in each of the satisfaction rating levels and is presented in Table 4. For example, candidates who rated their previous urban field experiences as extremely positive had a mean willingness of 8.17 (out of 10) to teach in urban schools. Table 5 contains LSD post hoc analyses revealing that candidates who rated their previous field experience as *extremely positive* were significantly more willing to teach in urban schools than candidates who did not rate their experience as such. As seen in this table, candidates who rated their previous field experience as extremely positive or somewhat posi-tive, when compared to those with lower ratings had mean willingness scores that were significantly greater.

Willingness to Teach in Urban Schools
An ANOVA was also conducted to determine if there was difference between SITC candidates and non-SITC candidates on their willingness to teach in an urban setting. Responses from the SITC candidates on

Table 4
Comparison of Satisfaction of Previous Urban Field Experiences
Scores and Mean Willingness to Teach in Urban Schools

Ratings	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)
Extremely positive	47	8.17 (1.86)
Somewhat positive	61	5.77 (2.29)
Somewhat negative	8	3.25 (1.91)
Extremely negative	0	------------

Table 5
LSD Post Hoc Analyses for Ratings of Previous Urban Experience
and Mean Willingness to Teach in Urban Schools

Rating of previous urban field experiences [A]	Rating of previous urban field experiences [B}	Mean Difference in Willingness to Teach in Urban Settings [A – B]	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
extremely positive	somewhat positive	2.404(*)	.409	.000	1.59	3.21
	somewhat negative	4.920(*)	.802	.000	3.33	6.51
Somewhat positive	somewhat negative	2.517(*)	.790	.002	.95	4.08

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 6
One-Way ANOVA for Willingness to Teach in Urban Schools

Source	SS	df	F	MS	p
Willingness	69.245	1	11.270	69.245	.001
Error	841.777	137		6.144	
Total	911.022	138			

this question taken before the SITC program began were compared to
those from the non-SITC candidates. As shown in Table 6, the resulting
F-statistic was significant, $F(1,137)=11.27$, $p=.001$, indicating that at
the time of the initial survey, non-SITC candidates (M=5.42, SD=2.62)
were significantly less willing than SITC candidates (M=6.90, SD=2.40)
to teach in an urban school upon graduation.

Demographic Comparisons

A chi-square analysis revealed no significant differences between the
two groups on race/ethnicity, $x^2(6, N=144)=6.84$, p>.05. Because the pilot
study (Grande, Burns, Schmidt & Marable, 2008) indicated candidates who
attended urban schools were significantly more willing to teach in urban
schools than those who had not attended, the researchers were interested
in determining what differences existed between the groups in regards
to the locale of the schools they attended and their home locale. Tables 7
and 8 demonstrate there were no significant differences between the SITC
and non-SITC candidates in regards to the location of the P-12 schools
they attended, $x^2(2, N=135)=.52$, p>.05; however, there were significant
differences between the SITC candidates and non-SITC candidates in
regards to the location of their home, $x^2(2, N=144)=6.31$, p<.05.

Table 7
Description of P-12 School Locale for Study Participants

| | Experimental Group | | Control Group | |
School Locale	n	%	n	%
Urban	18	18.9	6	13.3
Suburban	67	70.5	32	71.1
Rural	8	8.4	4	8.9

Note: Missing data may have been from participants who felt their school experience fit more than one category.

Table 8
Description of Location of Home (Urban, Suburban, & Rural)
for Study Participants

| | Experimental Group | | Control Group | |
Home Environment Locale	n	%	n	%
Urban	14	14.7	8	17.8
Suburban	54	56.8	36	80.0
Rural	27	28.4	5	11.1

Influencing Factors

When participating candidates were asked to list the top three factors influencing their application to the program, an overwhelming 88.4% claimed it was for additional experience, and 31% of those specifically mentioned the opportunity for an urban experience. Other factors receiving high rankings included money (44.2%), helping children (30.5%), and previous positive experiences in an urban field experience setting (23.2%).

Descriptive data revealed that when asked to list the top three factors for choosing not to apply to the program, 39% of the non SITC already had a job, 29% cited previous commitments, 27% said they were unaware of the program, and 16% stated that time was a factor in their decision. Whether or not citing time meant they had previous commitments inhibiting participation or that the time commitment was too much (90 hours in five weeks) was not obvious and not explained by the respondents. Six percent indicated they were not interested in the program and gave no other information. Other factors cited between 5 and 10% of the time included candidates home being too far from the urban schools as well as childcare issues for those candidates with their own families.

Discussion

The SITC program presented a unique opportunity for teacher candidates and is therefore essentially very different from previous research investigating the impact of urban field experiences. First and foremost, there was a considerable stipend attached. Candidates who completed the required hours in the schools, along with the training required would receive $2000. Second, the demands were not as great as those placed during typical field placements. There were no assignments to be turned in, and no formal observations by college faculty. Finally, it provided vital experience that was not tied to grades. Given these three facts, college faculty were interested in those teacher candidates who did and did not choose to participate.

Survey data revealed that a possible contributing factor for participation seemed to be related to the number of hours the candidates had spent in previous field placements. Candidates who were involved in SITC had completed more hours of experience in urban schools than their non-SITC counterparts at the time of their initial application. An explanation for the difference may be that exposure to urban settings decreased their fears and/or increased their willingness to participate because of positive field experiences and/or personal relationships with urban students (Heinemann, Obi, Pagano, & Weiner, 1992; Hlebowitsh, 1993; Proctor, Rentz, & Jackson, 2001; Pagano, Weiner, Obi, & Swearingen, 1995; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). It appears that exposure to urban settings was an impetus for candidates to want to continue on in those settings.

The difference in ratings of previous urban field experiences between SITC and non-SITC candidates were non-significant. Only a small percentage indicated a somewhat negative urban field experience, and none of the respondents indicated an extremely negative experience. The fact that there was no difference between the groups suggests that satisfaction with previous field experience is not the only or most important factor influencing their decision regarding participation in the SITC program. This parallels the findings of Conaway, Browning, and Purdum-Cassidy (2007) and may suggest that teacher education should focus on providing multiple field experiences in urban settings. Some researchers have suggested that being placed in the worst schools for field experience may be even desirable (Haberman, 1995) although being placed with a low quality cooperating teacher may not be as helpful. However, ratings of previous urban field experience had an impact on the mean willingness to teach in urban schools levels reported by the SITC and non-SITC candidates. Post hoc analyses indicated differences in each comparison row suggesting that when candidates feel satisfied

with their performance in their field experiences they tend to feel more confident of their teaching abilities and perhaps their ability to have a positive effect on diverse urban learners. It has been the authors' personal experiences that if students were dissatisfied with a suburban placement (that which they were familiar), the cooperating teacher was seen as the source of the problem and they were more than willing to return to a suburban placement. In contrast, if candidates were dissatisfied with an urban placement (that which they were unfamiliar), urban schools in general were seen as the reason for their dissatisfaction and their unwillingness to return to an urban setting.

The significant differences between the two groups in their willingness to teach in urban schools upon graduation also suggests that the amount of urban field experience is a contributing factor influencing participation in additional urban field experiences and candidates' subsequent consideration of employment in urban schools. If an institution of higher education is truly committed to preparing urban teachers, it should consider increasing the number of field experience hours that take place in urban schools.

The comparison of the demographics of the two groups revealed that while the candidates did not differ in the location of their P-12 schooling (urban, suburban, and rural), they did differ in the location of their homes in that significantly more SITC participants grew up in urban areas. This is similar to the finding from the pilot study that indicated students who had attended urban schools had a significantly higher mean score on willingness to teach in urban schools (Grande et al., 2008). The lack of difference between the two groups in race/ethnicity suggests that candidate race/ethnicity may not have been a factor that influenced their decision to participate in the urban tutoring program. In addition, the sample only had a small number of minority candidates. Future research should be done with more diverse populations of teacher candidates to determine if race/ethnicity of candidates is a factor that influences willingness to seek experiences in urban schools.

When candidates were asked to share the factors that influenced their decision to participate or not participate in the SITC program, the researchers were not surprised that race/ethnicity or personal demographics were not listed. It is possible that candidates may not be aware of the many factors that influence their decisions. Many of those who participated in the SITC program claimed it was their desire for additional experiences in urban schools and based on their satisfaction with past experiences in these schools. Surprisingly, only a small number of non-SITC candidates indicated it was because of a lack of experience in urban schools.

The authors acknowledge several limitations to the study. Because of the college's student composition, the subject population was not very diverse racially, ethnically, or socio-economically; however, it may truly reflect the population of teachers nationwide. The nature of the experience led to a mixed group of candidates with a variety of experiences. For example, both groups of candidates included undergraduate and graduate candidates with diverse field experiences, especially in regards to the number of total hours completed and number of hours completed in urban schools. Another limitation is that candidates represented the different teaching certification programs offered by the college (including early childhood, childhood, special education, literacy, and adolescence). The authors noticed fewer complaints from candidates working with elementary students when compared to those working with secondary students in the urban schools. Future research should attempt to identify whether it was the specific building that influenced their perceptions or the grade levels of the students with whom they were working. It is possible that these factors also may influence a candidate's willingness to teach in urban schools and this should be investigated in future research.

This program presented a unique opportunity for students. It is rare that candidates have a choice, or a voice, in selecting characteristics of the schools they would like to be placed in for field experiences. The authors thought more candidates would have claimed their reason for applying was the lucrative pay. Instead, many reported that it was due to the additional urban experience that they wanted to participate. SITC program requirements were minimal (answering pre and post surveys, answering weekly journal questions, and additional responsibilities agreed upon with the cooperating teacher) when compared to course requirements. This may also have had an impact on candidates' willingness to participate but was not investigated at this time. It also would have been interesting to compare applications for a *Summer in the Suburbs* program in regards to the candidate population and characteristics.

In conclusion, if institutions of higher education are interested in better preparing teacher candidates for positions in urban high-need schools, they need to assess their proficiency in several areas. First, a careful analysis of the program should reflect best practice in preparing teacher candidates to work with students of diverse backgrounds. Secondly, given the findings reported, they should consider recruiting teacher candidates who are willing and interested in working with diverse learners. Also, be sure to include extensive exposure to urban settings. Finally, a necessity would be to identify areas in the teacher preparation program that allow teacher candidates to address issues involving their own attitudes and perceptions regarding all types of diversity.

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