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Teacher Preparation: Perceptions of Preparedness for High-Needs Urban Schools A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study examined the dynamics that exists between the perceptions urban teachers' hold of their preparedness for high-needs urban schools, and the realities of such. This study focused on explicit, personal experiences of a select group of novice teachers who work in high-needs urban schools within the City of Albany, NY. The study concluded that teachers are not being effectively prepared for the high-needs urban context. Teacher participants all identified various gaps that existed within their preparation with many being uniform to all teacher participants. It is recommended that teacher preparation programs refine program curriculum as outlined to include consideration of the high-needs urban context that so many of its teachers will undoubtedly serve in. It is recommended that reparation programs adopt a residency model to their programs. Accurate experiences for teacher candidates is necessary before entering the profession. It is recommended that elementary and secondary schools make considerations to include a variety of topics in their professional development sessions for new hires and all others. An understanding of the context encompassing what it means to be high-needs, working with children in poverty, and an understanding of social emotional intelligence are deemed most prevalent as teachers need to understand where they are working, understand the students they are working with, and understand themselves and the role they play in student development.

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Teacher Preparation: Perceptions of Preparedness for High-Needs Urban Schools

A Qualitative Study

By

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family. My wife Ehasuyi, without you this would not have come to fruition. Your undying belief in me and unrelenting support of me have kept during this period of growth. You earned this degree right along with me. To my beautiful children, Galen Jr., Audwin, Isabella & Sophia; I thrived in your constant love and devotion of Daddy. My work was driven by a want of success to make you all proud. Thank you for allowing Daddy the time needed to accomplish this feat and for alleviating my guilt the minute I walked through the door. Thank you to my Mom & Dad, Sisters & Brothers for your prayers and constant encouragement and support. We continue to hold each other and you all continued to demonstrate your belief in me throughout this process.

To my friend Don. We knew each other for years before this process but our friendship developed during the past 19 months. You have witnessed the sweat and tears and have encouraged me through it all. Thank you my brother. #ironsharpensiron

To Dr. Paul Miller, colleague, mentor, and friend. God knows why he leads us in the way he does and those who allow themselves to be led are able to realize the purpose behind his divine intervention. I thank God for placing you in my life as it was from that moment that this pursuit began. I thank you for your words, your prayers with and for me, and your never ending belief in my abilities and what you believed to be in store.

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works of the enemy. Your words of encouragement and belief in the significance of my research even when I questioned it, came from an unexpected source, but one that never ran out or relinquished its hold. I thank you as your support and belief in me continually renewed my resolve.

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Dear Lord,

Thank you for choosing this vessel as a representation of what faith in you can allow someone who questioned themselves accomplish. Please let my testimony of your love be an encouragement to others. Please bless all my future work and help me to never lose sight of my mission, "to grow others." In the matchless name of your son Jesus Christ, Amen.

Biographical Sketch

Galen Gomes Sr. was born in Guyana, South America. A proud son to the respected Rev. George and Vaulda Gomes and brother to six loving siblings, he was born into a family of service. A faith-led, service oriented leader, Galen has believed in the work to provide opportunity and care for others and started on that path at the age of 13. The St. John Fisher Ed. D. program has given name to what Galen holds as his life mission; "to grow people."

Galen is currently the dedicated Director of Opportunity Programs at Maria College in Albany, NY. Mr. Gomes attended The University at Albany from 1999 to 2004 and after a personal leave, graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 2007. He attended Boston College from 2011 to 2012 and graduated with a Master of Education in 2012. Mr. Gomes has served his central population of adolescent and young adults in varying capacities such as a counselor, case worker, and mentor, to name a few. Most recently, Mr. Gomes has served as a teacher at Green Tech High Charter School and Family and Community Coordinator at Brighter Choice Charter Elementary School for Boys.

Mr. Gomes came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2014 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mr. Gomes conducted a qualitative study on the perceptions teachers in high-needs urban schools held regarding their preparation for that context upon entering the filed, based on their teacher preparation program under the direction of Dr. Theresa Pulos and Dr. C. Michael Robinson and received the degree in 2016.

Abstract

This study examined the dynamics that exists between the perceptions urban teachers' hold of their preparedness for high-needs urban schools, and the realities of such. This study focused on explicit, personal experiences of a select group of novice teachers who work in high-needs urban schools within the City of Albany, NY.

The study concluded that teachers are not being effectively prepared for the high-needs urban context. Teacher participants all identified various gaps that existed within their preparation with many being uniform to all teacher participants. It is recommended that teacher preparation programs refine program curriculum as outlined to include consideration of the high-needs urban context that so many of its teachers will undoubtedly serve in. It is recommended that reparation programs adopt a residency model to their programs. Accurate experiences for teacher candidates is necessary before entering the profession. It is recommended that elementary and secondary schools make considerations to include a variety of topics in their professional development sessions for new hires and all others. An understanding of the context encompassing what it means to be high-needs, working with children in poverty, and an understanding of social emotional intelligence are deemed most prevalent as teachers need to understand where they are working, understand the students they are working with, and understand themselves and the role they play in student development.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A high school graduation crisis exists in the United States. In 2010, 30%, or 1.3 million students failed to graduate (Swanson, 2010). Urban districts that are heavily populated with minorities whom are historically disadvantaged and educationally underserved provide the majority of non-graduates (Newton, 2008). These students are identified as "at risk" and attend high-needs urban schools. At risk is a term applied to students who have not been adequately served by social service or educational systems and who are at risk of educational failure (Newton, 2008). Need is determined by the district's ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources.

Teacher preparation programs (TPP) provide pre-service teachers (PST) with a strong foundation grounded in content knowledge and trained in application. However, there are many facets of the lived teaching experience that are not included in TPP including, but not limited to, context specific curriculum, student management, and other aspects of professionalism.

PST frequently state that a lack of confidence in their ability, as well as inadequate preparation, has not equipped them to teach in urban schools (Desimone et al., 2013). PST would better serve their students by finding ways to address this inadequacy. "Teacher preparation programs rarely spend ideas and money on coordinating what is learned on campus with what goes on in schools" (Carroll, Featherstone, Featherstone, Feiman-Nemser, & Roosevelt, 2007, p. 210).

One aspect of the inadequacy that exists in preparation programs is PST placement sites. Preparation programs have been randomly selecting placement sites with little direction about what happens in them and little association to university work (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Prior exposure can greatly bolster teacher confidence.

Many researchers have concluded that there are numerous barriers that urban students must overcome to achieve academic success. Teacher quality is one major barrier to success that students of high-needs urban schools (HNUS) often have the reality of experiencing. Schools with 75% or more pupils eligible for free or reduced-price lunch employ 40% more novice teachers than schools on the opposite end of the economic spectrum. Furthermore, schools with 75% minority students can expect to have 50% more novice teachers than schools with nearly all-white enrollment. "Inner city schools need the best, most highly motivated teachers" (Gonzalez & Jenlink, 2002, p. 108). Even when HNUS are effective in obtaining high-quality teachers, the partnerships do not always hold firm. Attracting qualified and skilled teachers to high-need schools can be a difficult task in and of itself; sustaining those teachers presents yet another challenge.

Teachers in high-need schools leave the profession at an even higher rate than even the one-third of teachers who leave the field in general (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). High attrition rate in urban schools may possibly result from teacher preparation programs' insufficient preparation of teachers for diverse classrooms (Siwatu, Frazier, Osaghae, & Starker, 2011). Teacher candidates enter into pre-service programs with various preconceived notions and beliefs that are reflective of their own upbringing and experiences. Preparation programs should be concerned with the notions with which

pre-service teachers enter their professional education and how credential programs go about refining these notions (Winston, 2009). Pre-service teachers need to be placed in teaching situations that reflect realistic classroom conditions and cultural diversity in the classroom. Research advises that teachers are more effective when they are proficient at teaching classrooms made up of diverse students, and these abilities can increase student motivation and learning (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2003). Teachers being prepared today need to possess the awareness, skills, and dispositions appropriate to be successful in today's classrooms. Teachers need to realize a more comprehensive definition of diversity, and they need abilities such as responsive teaching strategies (Fehr & Agnello, 2012). While most pre-service programs do prepare teacher candidates to be accredited professionals, numerous teacher candidates do not obtain the practical preparation they need to manage classrooms and teach students with a range of needs and capabilities.

The reality of high teacher turnover is more present in charter schools. Attrition and school-to-school mobility rates are significantly higher among charter school teachers than traditional public school teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In the pursuit to raise student achievement in low-performing urban schools, researchers often point to the chief importance of recruitment and retention of a high quality teacher workforce. Advocates have proposed charter schools as a means to reform traditional public schools, as well as an approach to close the achievement gap between urban students and their suburban counterparts. Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) stated that the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers is critical.

High rates of turnover make it challenging for schools to attract and develop effective teachers. Thus, low-income and minority students who attend "hard-to-staff schools" are characteristically taught by the least experienced, least effective teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Inexperienced teachers often typify urban public schools (Lee, 2005). During their first years, novice teachers asses the fit of their qualifications and interests to the demands of classroom teaching, which can lead to feelings of incompetence (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005).

Problem Statement

A high percentage of the urban k-12 student population is African American and other students of color who are continually underserved (Swanson, 2010). Many teachers are not effectively prepared to teach in the urban context, which contributes to a high level of teacher turnover and often, low levels of student success (Cook & Engel, 2006). Since the institution of No Child Left Behind, there has been an increased focus on the inequalities which exist within urban education. Elected officials and policy makers have directed efforts by way of policy implementation towards staffing every classroom with highly qualified teachers. Duncan-Andrade (2007) suggests that three major shortcomings exist in their efforts: (a) the core indicators of a highly qualified teacher have not been clearly defined; (b) the significance of the urban social context for this definition has not been clearly established; and (c) effective professional supports, school cultures, pre-service training, and educational policies that reflect knowledge of effective pedagogy in urban contexts has failed to develop. Excluding from consideration how highly qualified teachers are defined in the urban context leaves a whole subset of educational institutions unjustly searching for ways to qualify teachers for a context they

are not being prepared for. This study considered ineffective preparation, lack of prior exposure, and disjointed experiences as contributing factors.

Most teachers come from different backgrounds than the majority of students they will teach in urban schools (AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education, 2005), thus specific and purposeful attention needs to be paid to equipping teaching candidates with the practical skills and knowledge needed to better serve their students. Studies suggest teacher preparation programs may fall short in their goal to train pre-service teachers to work with diverse student populations (Schaffer, Gleich-Bope, & Copich, 2014). Without a concentrated effort to address the characteristics of teaching in an urban school, it is by default that candidate teachers are being prepared for classrooms with students from middle and upper socioeconomic backgrounds (Carter, 2003). Many PSTs are not fully prepared due to the lack of prior exposure to many of the high-needs districts that await them.

Theoretical Rationale

This study applied the experiential learning theoretical (ELT) framework to better understand the relationship between teacher preparation programs and the perceptions teachers hold of what it takes to be an effective educator in the urban context.

John Dewey (1938) expressed that subject matter should not be learned in isolation, and that education should begin with student experience and be contextual. In addition to learning through "traditional" methods, learning may be enhanced through intentional experience (Breunig, 2005). Teacher preparation programs provide student teaching experiences (the context) that serve to fulfill this promise. Teacher candidates purposefully engage with learners in a directed experience and are to use purposeful

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reflection in order to better their practice. As an inaugural philosopher of ELT, Paulo

Freire (2005) argues that knowledge can be a means to interpreting theory (the subject

matter). An essential element of experiential learning is reflection. David Kolb provides

a central reference on ELT. Kolb explored the processes associated with making sense of

concreate experiences, and the different styles of learning that may be involved. The

reflective cycle involves 1. Concrete experience followed by 2. Reflective observation on

experience followed by 3. Forming abstract concepts followed by 4. Testing in new

situations (Smith, 2010). For teacher candidates, immediate after Step 1 in the cycle is

often where the cycle becomes broken. Candidates need to put into play the practice of

reviewing/reflecting on the experience. Journaling could be used as a demonstration of

Step 2 occurring. Step 3 requires teacher candidates to come to a conclusion from the

experience. Demonstration of learning having occurred from the experience is critical to

teacher candidates' ability to have a more desirable result in a similar experience. Step 4,

active implementation is often lost in teacher candidates as candidates are often left with

trying out only what they have learned within their program classroom. If candidates

were able to conduct the first three steps of the cycle during their initial student teaching

experience in which they often simply just observe, they would then have a wealth of

experiences that they have reflected on to experiment with during their second student

teaching experience in which they typically are responsible for being the lead teacher in

the classroom.

     Field experiences have long been an integral aspect of teacher education. The

experiences within high-need urban schools are vastly different than those of their

counterparts, as public education in urban areas is said to be considerably inferior to that

in suburban areas (Wright, 2012). Therefore, it is vital that prospective teachers be immersed in realistic urban environments that will grant them an accurate portrayal of the context.

The field experience provides opportunity for the reflective cycle to take place and have meaning. Kolb (1992) suggest that experiential education programs emphasize the essential elements of ELT, but in actuality leave little time for reflection. Overall, research suggests that traditional field experiences, even in programs designed to be collaborative and inquiry-based, continue to perpetuate the lesson that teaching is a solitary act (Jacobs, 2014). Estes (2004) states that experiential educators claim to value student-centered learning yet in practice the values seem to be teacher-centered.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teacher candidates' pre-service preparation and their lived experience during their first 4 years in-service. The study sought to identify any relationships that may exist between teacher preparation program design and teacher perception of preparedness upon entering the profession. The study examined the self-reported perceptions of teachers pre-service, as well as after beginning their professional teaching experience. A disconnect exists between the campus and high school-based components of preparation programs (Zeichner, 2010). This study sought to investigate the connection of classroom work to field experiences and field experiences to the lived experience.

Research Questions

Research questions are interrogative statements that narrow the statement of purpose to specific questions (Creswell, 2012). The following research questions were

developed to guide this study: What are the perceptions of pre-tenured teachers in their preparedness to teach in diverse high-needs urban public school settings, based on their experiences in their teacher preparation program? What role does the student teacher field experience play in the teacher's perception of preparedness?

Potential Significance of the Study

The goal of the current research is to better understand the realities of teacher preparedness. Specifically, qualitative measures will be utilized to understand the perceptions of preparedness of pre-tenured teachers for the high-needs urban school environment, based on their preparation program. Results can offer insight into the role that teacher preparation programs play in developing future teachers as well as providing insight into the importance of effective field experiences for teachers in the high-needs urban landscape. This research also has the potential to offer insight into policy changes and program development for teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, primary and secondary schools can have a better understanding of the kinds of professional development novice teachers who are entering the urban landscape without proper exposure need. This understanding will help schools realize the levels of competence that they need to build in their new hires and influence induction and mentoring in high-needs schools.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 introduced some dynamics of the high-needs urban school environment. A theoretical framework identified the historical foundations that guide the study. A brief insight into some of the program aspects that currently exist within teacher preparation programs was also realized. Further insight will be provided in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 will provide a selective overview of literature that sheds light on current research in teacher preparation with specific insight into traditional teacher preparation programs, urban teacher preparation programs, and urban teacher residencies. Chapter 3 will detail the methodology for the study. Chapter 4 will divulge the results of the study and Chapter 5 will consist of a discussion and interpretation of the results.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Chapter 2 presents a selective overview of the literature on traditional teacher preparation, context specific preparation, and urban teacher residencies. The literature review identifies the ways in which teacher candidates are being prepared for the high-needs urban school environment. An examination of field experience and urban residencies illuminates best practices in teacher education for preparing teachers for urban schools.

Traditional Teacher Preparation

According to the National Center for Education Information, the teaching force is 84% White female (Feistritzer, 2011, table 1). The percentage of students of color in k-12 is expected to grow from 48% to 52% by 2021 (Gerald & Hussar, 2013).

A focus on multicultural education has become purposeful in 21st century education. Yet, there is little suggestion that teachers are truly aware of what multicultural education actually denotes (Ladson-Billings 2011). Almost all U.S. states include diversity requirements within their teacher certification frameworks, yet the implementation of such frameworks is unclear (Akiba, Cockrell, Han, & Agarwal, 2010).

King and Butler (2015) investigated how well teacher preparation programs (TPP) address issues of diversity and multiculturalism across several southeastern colleges. State-level data were collected during the 2011-2012 school year on 14 southeastern public institutions with state approved TPP. The aim of the study was to identify the

number of programs that offered undergraduate courses on diversity and/or multiculturalism to preservice teachers. A content analysis of course descriptions was conducted to evaluate what type of undergraduate courses were being offered on diversity/multiculturalism for education majors. The primary research question was centered on whether or not teachers are properly prepared by their preparation program to be instructors in racially and culturally diverse classrooms.

Course descriptions for required courses were obtained. Descriptions were analyzed to evaluate whether they aligned with one or more of the eight predetermined descriptors. Findings indicated that only four of the 14 institutions required their undergraduate education majors to have 20% or more of their courses in a class with an explicit diversity/multiculturalism component. Furthermore, results indicate that although preparation programs are offering some method of multicultural education, the content emphasis differs considerably between institutions. Findings suggest that even state approved TPPs are falling short in a diversity/multiculturalism focus. All of the institutions studied failed to thread multicultural content and issues throughout the entire curriculum (King & Butler, 2015). Limitations of the study include geographic location and the fact that all institutions were public institutions. Findings cannot be generalized outside of the study's state.

A recurrent problem in traditional teacher education programs has been the deficiency in connection between campus-based, university-based teacher education courses and field experiences (Zeichner, 2010). Darling-Hammond (2009) refers to this disconnect as the Achilles heel of teacher education. Ball and Forzani (2009) argue that clinical experiences should be the central focus of teacher education.

Traditional teacher preparation and the field experience. Petty, Fichet, & O'Connor (2012) studied the characteristics of successful teachers in high-need high schools (HNHS), and how preparation programs can better prepare teachers to work in HNHS. Within the study, teachers themselves responded that they perceived caring as the most important characteristic of successful teachers at HNHS (Petty et al., 2012). The respondents further perceived that practitioners at HNHS need be compassionate and love kids. Building and maintaining a sincere relationship with students was similarly rated. Respondents further cited classroom management and the ability to adapt and design instructional activities that are "inherently engaging" to the students as important. In response to the question of what teacher preparation programs can do to better prepare teachers to teach in high-needs schools, 67% of respondents indicated a need for more experiences in high-needs school environments and classrooms (Petty et al., 2012). Several suggestions included being required to complete practicum experiences in high-needs classrooms. Teachers felt that students need a realistic understanding of what occurs in schools generally and in high-needs schools specifically (Petty et al., 2012). More real life experience rather than time filling theory and isolated coursework was yet another response. Several respondents perceived preparation programs as "out of touch" (Petty et al., 2012, p. 74). Respondents further voiced a need for early and consistent exposure to high-needs schools. Teacher respondents felt that there was a great need for more "real life" experiences within high-needs schools and communities.

In the historically dominant model of teacher education, candidates are supposed to learn theories at the university level, then go to schools and practice what they have learned (Zeichner, 2010). Proctor, Rentz, and Jackson (2001) conducted a study on the

role of field experiences in preparing teachers for urban schools. This study adds to the research which states simply providing knowledge about the characteristics of different cultures is not effective. More inclusive ways of working with schools and communities is necessary for colleges and universities to fulfil their mission in the education of teachers (Zeichner, 2010).

Proctor et al. studied two different groups of teacher education students engaged in field experiences in urban schools. The 35 participants in the study were enrolled in a teacher education program at a private religiously affiliated university in the Southwest. Students were enrolled in a dual certification program in special education and elementary education with practicum experiences. The study reported on students engaged in the first two levels of field experiences. Field experiences conducted in multicultural settings, are part of the specialized coursework for four semesters prior to student teaching.

Groups are referred to as "level one" and "level two" (Proctor et al., 2001). Level one included 13 students enrolled in Introduction to Teaching Special Education. Participants were introduced to special education through tutoring elementary charter school pupils with mild learning behavior problems. All the pupils were either African American or Hispanic. Participants received demonstrations and guided practice on a five-step model of tutorial instruction, a motivation strategy, and basic techniques of behavior modifications. Once in the charter school, one pupil was assigned to two university students. Students took turns observing and writing feedback. The course instructor and a graduate assistant also gave students written and verbal feedback.

Level two consisted of 22 students enrolled in a four course block. Level two is the next step in the sequence of special education courses. Level two students were placed in an elementary magnet school. The university students participated in two weeks of daily preparation. The students taught a small homogeneous group of students. The pupils in the reading groups for Level two consisted of 49% African American, 33% Hispanic, 14% Anglo, and 4% Native American pupils. All pupils were identified as special education students. Altogether, the university students were engulfed in over 120 hours at the school during the semester supervised by the course instructor and two certified special education teachers from the school.

The subjects in the study were sophomore or junior level students in the special education preparation program. The participants included 31 Anglo females and one Anglo male, one African American female, and one Hispanic male. Participants completed a 13 item open-ended survey focused on their experiences with diverse learners in urban schools.

The results of the study indicate that the field experiences resulted in positive attributes toward teaching in urban schools (Proctor et al., 2001). Participants recounted feelings of enthusiasm in the children and appreciation for the help they receive from teachers. The need to be someone that the students saw care in registered for participants. The diversity of the students was an area enjoyed by 41% of participants. One limitation of the study is that neither of the two field experiences included specific instruction in multicultural studies. The lack of specific preparation for the urban setting was voiced by students.

Many classrooms are comprised of traditional teachers and nontraditional students. Demographic changes in today's classrooms are profound. The trend toward U.S. K-12 schools becoming increasingly diverse is anticipated to continue into the 21st century (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). The field of education has realized the benefits of restructuring to meet the needs of today's students. Wink (2011) states, "The past is past; it is not necessarily bad, but it is past… We cannot continue to use old answers for new questions" (Sobel, Gutierrez, Zion, and Blanchett, 2011, p. 107).

One reality of today's schools is that although the student body is growing more and more diverse, the teaching population remains consistent. The majority of teachers will still be White (81.9%), monolingual, middle-class women (76.3%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012, table 209.10). TPPs are not providing authentic student teaching experiences in schools with diverse, low-income students (Wader, 2015).

Context Specific Preparation

Within education there exists ongoing discussion about urban education with much of the discussion centered on the need for reform of urban education. Carter (2003) suggests that proponents of context specific preparation (CSP) believe that teacher preparation programs in the United States need to do a better job of preparing their candidates to be successful within the urban context. Without a concentrated effort to address the characteristics of teaching in an urban school it is by default that teacher candidates are being prepared for classrooms with students from middle and upper socioeconomic backgrounds.

An important aspect of urban context teacher preparation is teaching for social justice. Many TPPs state that they have a focus in using social justice frameworks to

prepare teachers, particularly those focused on preparing teachers for urban schools. However, there is a lack of clarity and consistency on what teaching for social justice means and looks like (Whipp, 2013).

Whipp (2013) conducted an explanatory study aimed at generating factors that contribute to a teacher's definition and enactment of socially just teaching. The study involved 12 graduates from a single justice-orientated preparation program who had concluded 1 year of teaching in an urban school. The schools were classified as schools where at least 50% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Seventy percent of the sample were female and 92% White. Sixty-seven percent grew up in suburbs or small towns and 50% attended parochial schools. Participants were interviewed on how they perceived their various experiences before, during, and after their programs. Participants engaged in two 60-minute semi structured interviews, one completed at the end of student teaching and the other at the end of the first year of teaching. Participants also completed a demographic survey, and student teaching narrative evaluations by two of their supervisors also served as primary data. Participants answered four questions. Questions 3 and 4 spoke to influencing factors and like relationships among the teachers' orientations towards social justice. Findings revealed that various similarities existed throughout participant responses to the aforementioned focus questions. Eight of the teachers whose own teaching included culturally responsive practices cited their pre-service program's social justice theme, specific coursework content, and instructors that challenged their thinking about students and schools. Teachers moreover reported that views were reinforced by purposeful field experiences attending to different socioeconomic classes. Teachers further cited creative and

impactful cooperating teachers as influential to their teaching. These same eight teachers

all reported various levels of support in their first year of teaching and cited collaboration

in lesson planning and team teaching as two such supports.

One limitation of this study is its sampling, both in number as well as

geographically. Study was constructed around only twelve teachers from a single teacher

preparation program. Therefore, generalizations to larger populations cannot be made.

Secondly, the primary data source was self-reports in which bias could exist.

Furthermore, there was no mention of how the teachings of these twelve teachers were

impacting student learning. Findings represent that there is effective work occurring in

TPPs that help teachers teach in a more socially just manner, and that they can be

replicated as best practices in teacher preparation of teachers going into urban school

districts (Whipp, 2013).

Context specific preparation and the field experience. The field experience is

believed by many to be the singular most important aspect of teacher preparation, and

even more so in consideration of urban teacher preparation (Greenberg, Pomerance, &

Walsh, 2011). Though there are quality teacher preparation programs in the United

States, many fail to provide effective field experiences which may contribute to the poor

success rate of teachers in high-need schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Best practices for preparing teachers for urban schools consist of carefully intended field

experiences in teaching environments consisting of culturally diverse students (Gomez,

1996). Teaching candidates need field experiences that will expose them to some of the

practical classroom environments that exists in urban schools.

A disconnect exists between the campus and school-based components of preparation programs. The clinical side of teacher preparation consists of loosely selected placements with little guidance about what happens in them and their connections to university work (Darling-Hammond, 2009).

Lee, Eckrich, Lackley, and Showalter (2010) examined the influence of urban education course work and field experiences on pre-service teachers' intentions, perceptions, and attitudes towards urban teaching in a large Midwestern urban school district. University faculty were offered a summer grant opportunity to redesign a course they regularly taught or will teach to reflect better preparation of teacher candidates for urban and high-need settings. (Lee et al., 2010). Data from the second year of this Urban Teacher Preparation (UTP) Course Development Grant (CDG) program were examined.

The study sought to reveal the impact of the redesigned courses and their embedded field experiences on pre-service teachers' perceptions of urban education and their intention to teach in an urban setting (Lee et al., 2010). Students participated in 10 redesigned courses. A total of 491 students enrolled in the courses of which 424 participated in the research. Findings reported below are based on 153 completed cases.

Demographics included 137 participants who identified as White, five as Black, six as Latino, and five that did not identify race/ethnicity. Of the 153 participants, 132 expressed plans to begin working as a teacher upon graduation. At the commencement of the study, 103 respondents indicated having little or no experience in an urban school setting. As part of the CDG project, 89 students participated in the clinical urban experience. Students completed a survey during the first weeks of the fall 2007 and spring 2008 semesters and then again at the end of each respective semester.

Measurement scales included in the study were The Urban Teaching Intentions (UTI) scale; The Urban Education Perceptions (UEP) scale; The Teacher Multicultural Attitudes Scale (TMAS); and The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES).

A paired-samples *t*-test revealed a statistically significant escalation in urban teaching intentions from the pre-course survey (Lee et al., 2010). Participants' respective high school setting materialized as a significant predictor of urban teaching intentions. Findings indicate that the students who had or developed more positive perceptions of urban education presented more intent to teach in an urban setting (Lee et al., 2010). Study supports that valuing diversity should be an embedded construct for teacher preparation and that urban field experiences are instrumental in developing that value.

Ruanda Garth McCullough and Ann Marie Ryan (2014), examined a programmatic shift at Loyola University Chicago. Loyola University Chicago took a critically reflective approach to engaging teacher candidates with the communities in which their urban schools exists. The university revised their secondary education degree program to better prepare candidates for work in the region's urban communities. The revised program included a new course designed to broaden how the university prepares teachers to engage in urban communities. All students are required to take the course. The course, Teaching and Learning in Urban Communities, focused on the extent and ways that teaching and learning in urban communities has an impact on candidates understanding of social justice, the relationship between their identity and pedagogical practices, and urban communities as educational resources. One of the essential elements of the course is students' exploring school-community relationships through a field experience with a community organization. This type of field experience takes the

candidates out of the classroom of their university and the school placement site and supplants them in a community based organization.

The main focus of McCullough and Ryan (2014) in examining this new course was its community based field experience. Study was conducted from fall 2008 through fall 2009. Study participants included 21 students, 20 of whom were female. Of the 21 participants, 18 identified as European American. Two participants identified as multiracial and one other as African American. Two-thirds of the students in the course were pre-service. McCullough and Ryan incorporated only responses from the pre-service candidates for the study. Participant written assignments were coded in themes that included definitions of social justice, self-perceptions as change agents, personal identities' influence on pedagogical practices, perceptions of urban communities as an asset to teaching, and perceptions of teaching in urban communities.

All students completed 20 hours of fieldwork with a community organization in the Chicago area. Students prepared a reflection on their field experiences addressing the knowledge and skills utilized during their field experience, social justice issues raised, urban communities as educational resources, and how they might use these resources in their teaching to enhance student learning. The course's final project required students to conduct a community based research project of the community in which they were placed.

Student writings demonstrated their understanding of themselves and that the role they could play as change agents for social justice in the classroom changed (McCullough & Ryan, 2014). Furthermore, preservice teachers indicated understanding of the realities of the urban context, resilience, and social justice form the students'

perspective. In regards to confronting pre-existing beliefs, findings from student reflections demonstrated that their community-based fieldwork provided opportunities to put their beliefs into practice and to raise awareness of what it will take to be effective in the classroom. Candidates' work in urban communities made them challenge their beliefs about others in a way that reading from a text or class discussion could not (McCullough & Ryan, 2014).

Candidate reflections demonstrated an understanding that their students' life circumstances are vital to relationship building and to instituting realistic classroom procedures and behavior management policies. Classroom procedures and behavioral management are pertinent to maximizing classroom learning. The fieldwork granted candidates a glimpse of students' out-of-school lives (McCullough & Ryan, 2014). Candidates learned the value of mutually respectful relationships with their students and the community in building mutually beneficial relationships. Candidate reflections overwhelmingly demonstrated a realization of the invaluable resources that community organizations provided, due to fieldwork placements. Furthermore, candidate reflections demonstrated a realization of themselves as members of the communities in which they work. Often teachers are removed from the communities in which they serve and thus do not realize the potential roles they can play through partnerships.

Substantial evidence was found that demonstrated the restructuring of the program and implementation of the Teaching and Learning in Urban Communities course considerably informed and affected candidates' approach to future teaching. McCullough and Ryan argue that due to their fieldwork experiences, candidates emerged with a more realistic viewpoint of urban teaching as well as an intensified sense of

resilience and self-efficacy regarding their ability to act as change agents and to utilize

resources in challenging educational settings (McCullough & Ryan, 2014). One

limitation of the study is that 20 of the 21 participants were female. Although the

majority of today's teachers are female, there is no real account of the male influence in

the study. Another limitation is that 18 of the 21 participants were European American.

This lack of diversity further limits the ability of the findings to be generalized.

Another component of CSP is employing a community based model (CBM).

Opportunities for candidates to be carefully guided through community based field

experiences and to use their knowledge about the communities, is a critical element in

teacher preparation (Sobel et al., 2011). Singer, Catapano and Huisman (2010)

conducted surveys of faculty and both pre-service and new teachers from a Midwestern

university that employed a CBM. Singer et al., (2010) wished to study the sustainability

of the CBM of teacher preparation with the following two guiding questions: a) did new

teachers feel as though the CBM met their needs to be placed in hard to staff schools?

and b) how and to what degree did university faculty alter their curriculum to prepare

teachers for urban schools?

The CBM "provided pre-service teachers with opportunities to learn about the

communities where they would be teaching, while placing them for extended field

experiences in the urban schools" (Singer et al., 2010, p. 122). The surveys employed by

Singer et al. explored faculty perception on their personal role and the university's role in

preparing pre-service teachers to teach in urban schools. A survey was also conducted

amongst pre-service teachers who were currently enrolled in the elementary and early

childhood programs at the university. The teachers participated in the CBM and were in

a traditional 4-year undergraduate program. Lastly, new teachers that were currently working in urban schools that were recent graduates of the university were also surveyed.

Fifty-one faculty members completed eight open-ended questions online. Of the 51 faculty, 33.3% were adjuncts, 15.7% were full time lecturers, 33.4% were professors of varying levels, and 7.8% were graduate students. Twenty-three students responded to the eight question pre-service teacher electronic survey. All 23 students completed the first semester of their internship in one or two partnership elementary schools in the urban school district. Eighteen of the 23 were pre-service teachers who completed both semesters of their internship in the urban school district. Survey questions explored their opinions on the university's role in preparing pre-service teachers to teach in urban schools.

Key differences were made apparent by the survey responses regarding the perceived role of the university in preparing new teachers for urban schools. All three of the groups surveyed addressed similar concerns that fell into four categories: teacher education curriculum and field experiences are reported below.

Amongst the university faculty the teacher education curriculum's focus was on subject-specific content. Faculty goal was to increase skill in the content area (Singer et al., 2010, p. 24). Furthermore, the faculty was concerned with how the university coursework fulfilled state certification requirement. Survey responses indicated that few faculty members altered how or what they taught candidates even though 40% of the teachers were accepting jobs in urban schools. Thus, findings demonstrate a gap in the use of data to drive program instruction to address the needs of the significant number of pre-service teachers whom would be transitioning into urban schools.

Response from pre-service teachers revealed a want for courses addressing what they saw as pressing concerns. Knowing how schools operate, how children learn and develop, as well as lesson planning and differentiated instruction were all cited (Singer et al., 2010). Twenty-five percent of respondents cited classroom management as an area of need and wished it a regular course in the curriculum.

In regards to field experience, all groups identified this "real-world" experience as a key component of pre-service education. However, how the different groups defined the term exhibited real disparity. Faculty perceived "real-world" to be addressed through observation hours in foundation courses and internship. Pre-service teachers reported that mere presence in a school was not enough (Singer et al., 2010). Respondent faculty also did not report the location of the field experience to be important. Some faculty did not supervise the filed experiences of their candidates nor planned to do so in the future. Pre-service teachers responded overwhelmingly that "some of the best, most relevant instruction occurred at their school site where their university instructors could help to guide them . . ." (Singer et al., 2010, p. 125).

All participants in the study were considered "highly qualified" on the grounds that they all had completed an accredited teacher education program and passed the PRAXIS II exam. Yet, not all new teachers felt qualified to teach all children, especially those in urban schools, which one could argue should be the goal of all teacher preparation programs. There were some students who responded that they did feel highly qualified to work with students in urban schools. Of these teachers, an overwhelming 94% felt that their year-long internship in an urban school best prepared them to be successful in meeting the needs and challenges of urban schools. Findings from the

university faculty survey exposed that 50% of the faculty felt that the faculty were not doing a good job of preparing pre-service teachers for urban schools (Singer et al., 2010). Some faculty felt it was not their responsibility to.

The teaching candidate pool is comprised mostly of White, middle-class females who can only be sympathetic to issues of cultural diversity and social justice. Yet, these teachers have little experience with the urban population. Secondly, the faculty of many preparation schools emulate the make-up of the faculty in this study and the candidates they teach. The faculty have had little experience working in urban schools themselves. "Universities must focus on faculty professional development" (Singer et al., 2010, p. 127). Faculty survey respondents admittedly reported the need to learn more about the distinctive needs of urban schools.

Urban Teacher Residencies

According to The Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ), many traditional university-based programs are challenged in attracting high academic achievers and teacher candidates of color; too few opportunities exists for prospective teachers to be taught by exemplary classroom teachers; they offer limited resources and structures to provide induction support for their graduates in a systematic way once they begin teaching; and have a lack of accountability for the effectiveness of their graduates (Berry, Montgomery, & Snyder, 2008). Statistics on alternative certification routes find that only 60% of alternatively certified recruits rate their preparation in managing classrooms as excellent or good; only 38% of alternatively certified recruits rated their preparation in helping struggling students as excellent or good; and only 49% of alternatively certified

recruits rated their preparation in providing individualized instruction to students as excellent or good (Berry et al., 2008, p. 2)

To address the need for better quality education in urban education, Urban Teacher Residencies (UTR) have become increasingly appealing. Pre-service resident urban teacher preparation programs are designed to "recruit, prepare, and retain bright and capable teachers for high-needs urbans schools (Berry et al., 2008, p. 1).

Hammerness and Axelrod conducted a case study in which they examined the development of context-specific teacher preparation at the Bard Urban Teacher Residency Program. The study was designed to shed light about the nature and quality of the opportunities to learn about teaching in New York in the program.

During 2010-2011, Hammerness and Axelrod (2013) interviewed 16 program candidates midway through the academic year as well as at the end of the academic year. A random selection process was enacted to represent three disciplines for which Bard prepares teachers; five English, six history, and five mathematics. Again during 2011-2012, 14 candidates were randomly selected for interviews. The first interview focused upon teacher educational backgrounds in terms of disciplinary preparation as well as any experience they might have had in New York City schools or other urban settings. The second interview focused upon their perceptions of opportunities to learn about teaching in New York City schools in the program. Interviews, surveys, and observations of graduates were all employed.

Hammerness and Axelrod (2013) proposed a four layer interrelated context diagram to report their study findings. The classroom context is used to examine candidate's opportunities to learn about features that characterize the particular

classrooms in which graduates are teaching in New York City. One major theme that emerged was candidates feeling strongly that Bard had indeed prepared them to take into perspective that every individual child is unique, but also to understand ways that race, gender, ethnicity, and personal experience shape student lives. A review of the program syllabus suggested that students have a number of opportunities to learn not only about the previous identifying factors, but also specifically about the schooling experiences of students of color.

One theme that surfaced from the analyzing the Bard program syllabi and materials was that not all candidates had opportunities to learn the specific neighborhoods and communities within New York City in which they would be teaching. A second theme that was identified from the analysis was that students had few opportunities to learn about the local cultural or other community resources available to their students or themselves in their schools. Thirdly, graduates reported feeling prepared in many areas, principally with respect to teaching their subject area and pinpointing big ideas in the discipline.

There has been a push in education for highly qualified science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) teachers. The Teaching Residency Program for Critical Shortage Areas (TRP-CSA) was created to help urban school districts recruit and retain highly qualified STEM teachers. Garza, Duchaine, and Reynosa (2013) examined the residency program to gain an understanding of the aspects that may have impeded and contributed to the development of aspiring teachers. The study was conducted in a large urban school district in the Southwestern United States.

Participants in the study included two cohorts of teacher residents that were recruited and prepared in different school years. The first cohort included 12 women and five men aged 22 to 37. The group included six Hispanic, three Black, and eight White participants. The second cohort included four women and five men aged 23 to 59. The group included one Hispanic, one Black, and seven White participants. Three high schools and two middle schools identified as high need schools by the partner district were selected for the participants' residency.

There were three guiding questions for the study: a) how does TRP-CSA meet the need for preparing STEM teachers for high-needs schools? b) what are the challenges in preparing STEM teachers through a residency program? c) what are the critical aspects of a residency program for preparing STEM teachers for high-need schools? One theme that materialized from the data analysis was curriculum design (Garza et al., 2013). One data source was online surveys administered to participants at the end of the summer, fall, and spring semesters over 2 years. Aspects of the residency program were evaluated using a combination of multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale items, and open-ended questions. A second data source included recorded focus group interviews at the end of the spring and summer sessions.

Students reported that the alignment and sequence of coursework was a major concern, as course content changes affected teacher residents' graduate program requirements. Evidence suggested that course integration failed to meet its goal because residents expected a more concise delivery of their coursework (Garza et al., 2013). Students reported wanting a comprehensive exam that reflects curriculum of the specific program. Findings suggest that pre-service teachers may need a blend of frequent and

extended coursework learning to understand the benefits for their development and success in the classroom. Findings also revealed that there were varying differences in the way instructors related course content to the residents' actual experiences in the schools. Study is limited by the number of participants. The number of participants was relatively small considering that they attended a large public university. Furthermore, data is from two different cohorts. Due to the small sample size generalizations are difficult to be made from the data.

Helfeldt, Capraro, Capraro, Foster, and Carter (2009) conducted a study of a land grant university's partnership with six urban area schools full-time teaching internship program in Texas. The partnership was established as a planned response to the teacher retention and quality issues experienced by many urban schools. Program interns had completed their teacher education coursework and their baccalaureate degrees. Interns also passed the state certification tests. Each participant selected served as the sole teacher in the classroom from the very first day of school and was responsible for all regular teaching responsibilities. Interns were assessed by district administrators using the same protocol employed with all other first year teachers. Interns were paid by the district using the district salary schedule, minus $8,000. The withheld $8,000 was used to allow districts to have replacement teachers for the program approved mentor. With this design no additional costs to the school districts were had (Helfeldt et al., 2009).

Eight interns, 34 females and four males, were used in the study. Thirty-five of the interns were Caucasian, two were African American, and one was of Hispanic origin. These demographics closely reflected the demographics of undergrad students enrolled in the elementary and middle level teacher education programs of the institution (Helfeldt et

al., 2009, p. 5). Program mentors possessed a graduate degree and at least 5 full years of highly successful teaching experience in the district. Eight mentors participated in the study, having achieved between 6 and 30 years of teaching experience. Mentors were responsible for providing full-time intensive guidance and support to all interns.

There were six school districts involved in the study. Five of the districts were situated within two of the largest urban metropolitan areas of the United States (Helfeldt et al., 2009, p. 7). Hispanic students involved in the 22 school study accounted for 48.63% of the study population. African American students accounted for 25.33%, and Anglo students accounted for 19.91%.

The Teaching Intern Professional Development (TIPD) Scale was administered to both elementary and middle school interns at the beginning and end of the school year. The TIPD Scale measured levels of interns' readiness to teach, self-efficacy, and confidence related to factors included in the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium standards.

In relation to retention, the TIPD Scale responses were highly correlated. High levels of professional development were directly associated with retention. Post internship, 100% of interns returned to teaching compared to 80% of first year teachers across the entire state of Texas who did not receive formalized mentoring. In relation to readiness, self-efficacy, and confidence, there was a notable increase when comparing pre and posttest means.

Results indicate that the full-time mentored internship is an effective means of successfully inducting and retaining interns as teachers in "high need" urban area schools. A perfect 100% of the interns were offered contracts with 84% electing to

remain in their same schools for the second year of teaching (Helfeldt et al., 2009). This 16% drop off is far less than the 30% of urban teacher drop off nationwide (Ingersoll, 2002). This number constitutes a high and noteworthy level of success of full-time urban teacher mentoring on teacher retention and job satisfaction.

Some urban residency programs utilize distributed mentoring. In this model, expert faculty and peer mentors contribute insight towards an array of resident development including promotion of engaged evidence-based pedagogy, classroom community building, etc. (Leon, 2014).

Leon (2014) conducted a study to examine the contributions of expert and peer mentors. The study provides understanding concerning how expert and peer mentors conjointly fortify and/or uniquely heighten knowledge and skills attained by novice urban teachers. Study included 25 preservice teachers with no previous teaching experience, who participated in a residency program within a network of high-needs urban turnaround high schools in a large Midwestern city. Forty percent of participants were male and 60% were female. Fifty-six percent of participants were White, 24% were African American, 12% were Asian, and 8% were Hispanic.

Preservice teachers receive three types of expert mentoring during their residency year: mentor teacher coaching, mentor resident coaching, and university faculty mentoring. The program employs a cohort model and residents remain together through both the preservice residency as well as the post-residency first year beginning teacher sequences. Data were collected from preservice residents while they were enrolled in the university faculty mentor's introductory educational psychology course. Residents were randomly assigned one week in which they were to post a case study that consisted of a

real world situation they encountered at their residency high school placement. Residents were also responsible for responding to peer postings. Preservice residents and their expert mentor were charged to discuss, critique, and augment case studies in light of theory, scholarly research, and experiential situational knowledge (Leon, 2014).

A phenomenological approach was used in data analysis. A qualitative analysis emerged three primary themes: fostering student learning; building positive school climate; and navigating the school as system (Leon, 2014). Results of the study suggest that distributed expert/peer mentoring is effective in providing confirmatory, additive, and complementary knowledge and skills to preservice resident teachers working in high-needs turnaround urban high schools.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 provided current research on traditional teacher and urban teacher preparation. Various studies and research support the need for pre-service programs to provide candidates with exposure to some of the practical classroom environments that exists in urban schools. Chapter 3 will provide the methodology for the proposed study. The methodology will outline the timeline and necessary steps in conducting the study as well as the analysis of the study data. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study and Chapter 5 will consist of a discussion and interpretation of study findings.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the methodology that guided this study. The context of the study will be explored and the data collection and analysis methods explained. This study identified connections and potential gaps between teacher preparation program instruction/experience and the pre-tenured teachers lived experience. The study identified relationships that exist between TPP design and teacher perception of preparedness, with a reflection on the lived experience upon entering the profession. Some teachers express experiencing "culture shock" when they begin teaching at urban schools without prior exposure (S. Curtis, T. Griffin, & K. Zalucki, personal communication, Fall, 2014). The study examined the self-reported perceptions of preparedness of teachers and its relationship to their lived experience in the classroom during their novice teaching years.

This study examined responses based on the following research questions: How do the perceptions pre-tenured teachers hold of their preparedness to teach in diverse high-needs urban public school settings based on their teacher preparation program, differ from their experiences as teachers? What role does the student teacher field experience play in the teacher's perception of preparedness?

The type of research undertaken by this study is defined as qualitative. Denzin and Lincoln define qualitative research as involving ". . . an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world… qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings,

attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). The intent of the study was to present the voice of the teacher participants, thus a qualitative methodology was ideal. The first portion of the study consisted of identifying participants using an initial written survey. Qualified participants then took part in the interview portion of the study. The study took place in one geographical area thus imposing a limitation on the generalizability of the findings. However, since the design of the study is to garner responses based upon a specific identified cultural context, this limitation does not cause concern.

Research Context

This research utilized high-needs urban charter schools in part due to the researcher's professional experience being grounded in charter schools, thus being of significance to the researcher. Furthermore, charter schools are often unobstructed from many of the constrictions faced by traditional public schools, permitting them greater flexibility to recruit and retain a qualitatively different teacher workforce (Center for Education Reform n.d).

The researcher employed qualitative practices to gain insight from pre-tenured teachers (PTT) in diverse high-needs urban charter schools in Albany, New York. According to the Albany Business Review, the Albany City School District (ACSD) currently ranks 84th out of 84 school districts in New York's capital district. Rankings take student ability to meet or exceed state standards as well as Regents exam scores into account. A category that measures graduation rates, the percentage of graduates who plan to attend college, and the percentage of students who graduated with advanced Regents diplomas also plays a factor (Rogers, 2015). The ACSD enrolls over 8,000

students in PK-12 (Rogers, 2015). ACSD is considered a high-needs district and currently has three schools listed as priority/failing schools with two of the three identified as failing for at least 10 years (*The State of New York*, 2015).

Research Participants

The study population was drawn from pre-tenured teachers who graduated from a degree granting U.S. institution of higher education teacher preparation program within the last 4 years, and who are currently teaching fulltime within the Albany City School District. The study included 7 elementary or secondary teachers who were currently teaching at high-needs charter schools within the City of Albany.

Recently graduated pre-tenured teachers were selected due to their ability to better reflect on the impact their preparation program had on their lived experience. New York State currently defines pre-tenured as teachers having served a 4-year probationary period (Changes to New York, 2015). Teacher participant schools were asked to take part in a mutually beneficial relationship that was created through the research process. High-needs schools would have a better understanding of the deficiencies their teachers are entering the field with and better orchestrate areas of professional development needed for pre-tenured teachers and their identified sense of preparedness. The researcher, on the other hand, gained valuable data to further develop the inquiry. The researcher requested meetings with charter school building leaders and asked that they identify the number of pre-tenured teachers currently employed and to grant permission to email the various teachers in seeking study participants. Upon being granted permission, the initial survey questionnaire was distributed to the identified teachers along with a letter of

introduction and statement of purpose. A preferred method of contact was included in the questionnaire.

Purposive sampling was employed. Purposive sampling places participants in groups relevant to the criteria that fits the research question. The initial sample comprised of male and female teachers of varying demographically identifiable factors. Participants of varying demographics were sought in order to have representation of various groups in consideration of what each individual brings to the teacher preparation experience. To increase reliability, the sample excluded career changers in order to discount prior "real world" work experience from impacting reflections.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Three data gathering techniques were employed: (a) Qualtrics survey, (b) semi-structured interviews, and (c) field notes. The three forms of data collection were intertwined and developed to assist in exploring the pre-tenured teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach in high-needs urban schools based on their preparation program.

Qualtrics survey. The Qualtrics survey/Demographic Profile Questionnaire (DPQ) consisted of preliminary questions that were used to screen for potential study participants. The Qualtrics survey program was offered as a free data collection tool by the researcher's institution. The user created DPQ was employed to obtain participant demographics to ensure study criteria was satisfied. DPQ were distributed to email addresses provided by respondents in response to the call for participants. The researcher received email notification from Qualtrics each time a participant to whom the questionnaire was distributed commenced and completed. Questions identifying

respondent demographics such as age, race/ethnicity, level of education, etc. were included in the questionnaire.

Semi-structured interviews. Further investigation into the pre-tenured teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach based on their preparation program was had through the use of individual semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured format poses questions that are phrased to allow participants to tell their story in their own way. The interview questions being open-ended allowed for honest expression of participant experiences.

All interviews were held at a locale of the participant's choosing to better ensure the participant's comfort. The researcher conducted interviews at the time of participants' delegation in order to lessen the likelihood of participation being a hindrance on participants' daily schedule. Interviews averaged 40 minutes in length. Conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews, instead of other qualitative procedures was desirable since, face-to-face interviewing may be appropriate where depth of meaning is important and the research is primarily focused in gaining insight and understanding (Ritchie & Lewis 2003, p. 138). To be seen as a participant in the interview having a natural explorative conversation, the use of an unstructured practice was deemed inadequate. A structured interview was seen as too controlling and more like an inquiry form, therefore a structured practice of interviewing was similarly ruled out. The interview sessions opened with an unrelated "icebreaker" type question in effort to ease participants into the interview and again provide a sense of comfort. The open-ended format allowed for rich discussion to be had from participant responses.

Interviews were recorded using an interview application on the researcher's

mobile device and then uploaded into the researcher's Dropbox to ensure successful data

collection. Dropbox is a data storage application with a "cloud" feature that permits data

accessibility remotely. Dropbox allowed for the convenient dissemination of recorded

data. All interviews were individually transcribed within a 3-day period by a professional

transcriptionist.

   Field notes. Field notes were comprised of handwritten observations collected

during the various methods of data collection. The notes offered opportunity for

immediate feedback leading to improvement of the process. Following each interview

field notes were reviewed and appropriate amendments to questions were made where

necessary. Field notes gave insight into questions that were confusing to participants as

well as new questions that arose as a result of participant responses. The need for further

probing where crucial was also noted. Field notes provided clarification during times of

questionable interpretations presented in transcripts. Field notes also allowed researcher

bias to stay at bay by recording thoughts on paper. Those thoughts proved valuable

during the writing of Chapter 5.

Data Analysis

   Data analysis continued throughout the data collection process. Purposeful

processing of the information worked to ensure that appropriate coding of the information

occurred and alignment with the research question was has. Data was organized through

hard copies using transcripts and index cards, as well as electronically through the

creation of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Table list included a pseudonym followed by

all the answers to the DPQ except participants' "high-needs" definition. Hard copies of

files were kept in a binder and separated by participant. Electronic data was stored on the researcher's personal computer as well as on two separate flash drives.

To aid in the processing of the data and improve understanding, the researcher established codes and themes created from reoccurring language and quotes specified by participants. Codes were established based on the experiential learning reflective cycle to communicate categories that interconnect with the research questions.

Summary

Chapter 3 reviewed the methodology of the study which aims to reveal pre-tenured teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach in high-needs urban schools, based on their preparation program. This study is intended to add to the body of research that currently exists regarding the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in preparing teachers for the high-needs urban context. The researcher hopes to achieve a level of transferability with research findings in order to study the phenomenon in other high-needs urban school contexts. The information was transcribed and coded. This process helped the researcher in organizing the data for reporting the results in Chapter 4 and writing implications in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

Research Questions

In this chapter, the findings of the study are reported, which are derivative from the guiding research questions: How do the perceptions pre-tenured teachers hold of their preparedness to teach in diverse high-needs urban public school settings based on their teacher preparation program, differ from their experiences as teachers? What role does the student teacher field experience play in the teacher's perception of preparedness? Several themes are identified in this chapter and are described in terms of context rational; understanding the high-needs context; practical and applicable preparation versus impractical and disjointed, regarding the field experience; and the realities of the field in identifying where teachers felt the most unprepared. The chapter concludes with a discussion surrounding teacher participants' suggestions for improvement. Ultimately, suggestions for improved preparation were offered by all participants. All names used are pseudonyms so as to protect the identity of teacher participants.

Data Analysis and Findings

The first research question asked: How do the perceptions pre-tenured teachers hold of their preparedness to teach in diverse high-needs urban public school settings based on their teacher preparation program, differ from their experiences as teachers? Throughout the findings it was made apparent that with the exception of one, all participants felt overwhelmingly unprepared for the high-needs urban landscape. All participants expressed lack of preparation in one form or another. Curricular (three of

seven), classroom and behavior management (five of seven), and an understanding of the context itself (seven of seven) were all identified as areas of lack.

The second research question asked: What role does the student teacher field experience play in the teacher's perception of preparedness? The findings clearly identified that those teachers who had at least one field experience within the urban context felt exceedingly more prepared than their counterparts. A group consensus was that every teacher candidate would benefit from an urban field experience regardless of where they actually ended up teaching upon entering the profession. Findings also identified that a need exists for programs to reevaluate how to identify cooperating teachers. Multiple teacher participants recounted their own experiences or those of their cohort members as less than ideal and in some cases did the opposite of what is intended through the designed cooperative relationship.

Difference Makers versus Opportunity Takers

Purposeful attention was paid to the question *Why urban?* In the second question of the interview, teacher participants were asked to make known their rationale behind working in a high-needs urban school. The responses generated established two groups which encompassed all participants: Difference Makers versus Opportunity Takers. Of the seven teacher participants, two made mention of actual intention to work within the context. Both Gretchen and Cynthia specifically stated that they wanted to make a difference. Gretchen further noted that she felt a strong connection to the students during one of her field experiences in which she was placed in a high-needs urban school and it made her feel like she was making a difference, substantiating it by stating "that's why I went into teaching." Cynthia went on to state that she knows it takes a special teacher to

really make a difference within the context and that due to her genuine care she felt that she had the character traits to do so.

The remaining five teachers entered into the context by default due to the opportunity being presented to them and are classified as opportunity takers. Naiomi spoke freely and stated that it "was just purely a position." Naiomi continued in saying that "it was very hard to get a teaching position and it was available, so I took it." Naiomi felt that the opportunity would give her the experience she needed and that it was "a good stepping stone." Caitlin stated that she never saw herself teaching in an inner city school or in an urban school at all. "I always thought I was going to be in a suburban or rural school." As a default, Caitlin came to teach within the context because the school were the only ones that hired her straight out of school. Violet stated simply, "the job availability." Teachers entering the high-needs urban context by default, paired with their lack of preparation for the context, could only provide an already struggling system with teachers who are prepared for just that, to struggle.

Working Definition of High-needs

Clueless and biased versus partial understanding. Completely, teacher participants demonstrated that the definition of high-needs was all based on the student dynamic, which establishes that participants were oblivious to the role that teachers play in a school's classification as high-needs. Only 29% of teacher participants made accurate mention of the well-known socioeconomics as a contributing factor. Saleema stated that the "school has 99% free reduced funds," further supporting her statement by saying that is always a thing she was told. The very school Saleema works at does not have a free and reduced lunch population of 99%. Either Saleema is oblivious to the fact

that that number is absurdly high for which to classify all high-needs schools, or by her definition, she does not work at a high-needs school.

Over 70% of the teacher participants defined high-needs using naïve and or biased factors. Caitlin, Gretchen, Saleema, Shontel, and Naiomi all included student family dynamics within their definitions citing such factors as parents working more than one job or long hours and even the inclusion of single-family households being categorized as a disadvantage and defining a school as high-needs. One participant even declared that students are unmotivated to be educated and may not hear the positive at home all the time, and that they might feel that they are better off doing something on the street because you are trying to make money because you are trying to take care of kids. These statements are prime examples of biases that were never refined.

Over 42% of teacher participants associated student behavior and emotional needs in their definition of what it means to be a high-needs school. This is an important finding due to nearly half of the participants' association to the impact they believe emotions to have on student performance. While social emotional measures are not currently included in the definition, the responses teacher participants made could represent a shift or at least a need for consideration of the factors.

Preparation: Preparation as an Oxymoron

Misaligned coursework. Throughout the study, teacher participants often made mention of how the coursework they received fell short of preparing them for the context. Various teacher participants made mention that there was a lot of theory within their individual programs, but very little application. Any application that was provided did little to take into consideration the high-needs urban context. Caitlin recalled one

behavior class but would discredit it by stating that she felt it was not actually aligned to behavior management. "People are always saying if you have a well-behaved class you can do a lot more teaching; but I feel that by only having one class you're saying that it is not as important compared to everything else" (Wagner, 2016, p. 7). Naiomi felt that her program was fine for preparing her for students from varying cultures and backgrounds but not in consideration of a classroom being contextually situated within a school comprised of that variance on a larger scale. Naiomi reflected on a workshop that touched upon poverty and homelessness but would conclude by complaining that it was the only one and not even a class but a one day workshop. She credited that workshop as one of the most helpful aspects of her program regarding preparing her for her current context because, "that brought you to a different side of education that isn't teaching and curriculum; it's getting down to the child" (Lovell, 2016, p. 3). According to Naiomi, even when speaking with her other teacher friends, there are a lot of classes that could have been omitted from their programs and they would be no worse off. Naiomi stated that they should have been replaced specifically with classes on behavior management, classroom management, talking to parents, and cultural background. An important point of emphasis to Naiomi's recommendations is that such curriculum would benefit teachers in any context and are important skills for ever teacher to have.

The art of teaching. Any teacher will tell you that honing strong classroom management techniques go hand in hand with behavior management. These are two of the intangible yet visible aspects of teaching. The two must coexist to foster an ideal learning environment. Various teacher participants made mention that their feeling of unpreparedness was due to the lack of instruction that left them with an absence of

command of their classroom management or behavior management. Naiomi expressed

that she never took a course that was geared towards classroom or behavior management.

She further expressed that due to this lack of preparation, even though she understood

how to teach and what to teach, she never knew how to handle the classroom

appropriately. Violet would echo Naiomi's sentiments stating that her preparation

program was not very focused on classroom management specifically and due to this

omission in her preparation she felt she just was not prepared to bring her content to the

context. Violet further stated that with the general sense of classroom management

preparation she was given she did not come into this environment with the understanding

of what it was. A lack of preparation regarding classroom and behavior management can

create anxious educators. Violet mentioned that she was intimidated and would panic

and be so nervous that she would literally get stomach aches. Gretchen mentioned that

her program taught her how to be a teacher, but not necessarily for high-needs; it was

more of a foundation that seemingly covered the basics that were deemed to prepare one

for any context. Naiomi put it succinctly; regarding the contextual preparation, "when it

comes to what teachers deal with, day in and day out, it totally dropped the ball." Such a

definitive response speaks volumes to the need for the gaps in classroom and behavior

management to be met.

The Practicum Experience: Applicable versus Inapplicable

      A practical practicum. Teacher preparation programs often include a practicum

of sorts. A fulltime practicum is designed to give teacher candidates a supervised field

study that gives them practical application of the curriculum within their program.

Three teacher participants felt that there was real relevance to their practicum experience. All three credited their experience with being the one portion of their teacher preparation that actually prepared them for the context. One constant amongst the three teacher participants was that all three were placed within a high-needs urban school. Gretchen and Saleema both experienced student teaching in a suburban and urban school and believe their placement to have been purposeful with the goal of them experiencing varying contexts on the spectrum. While all three reported that they credit their initial successes as teachers in a high-needs urban school to their practicum experience, all three also had complaints about their practicum experiences.

An impractical practicum. A theme that became apparent from the data is that all teacher participants felt that in one way or another the practicum experience was disjointed and/or inapplicable to their current high-needs context and that their practicum experiences did nothing to prepare them for their current classroom contexts. Although Gretchen stated that her practicum experience was purposeful, she would go on to say that her experiences were nothing compared to what high-needs looks like to her now. She mentioned that what she saw as behavioral management was entirely all based on special education. Saleema stated that her student teaching and field experiences were all conducted with students who came from farms. For Saleema, stepping foot into a high-needs urban school was a completely different experience that she was not prepared for. Violet complained that her practicum experience was not beneficial. She stated that her placement was poorly done and haphazard. The experience being disjointed was painfully obvious as her first placement actually had her in a classroom that was outside of her content area. Violet would continue that her student teaching was only one

semester and that it occurred the spring semester before she graduated. Naiomi felt that her experience was very broad and general and because of this, not very helpful. Without a focus, Naiomi felt there was a lot that should have been targeted that was not. Teacher participants all reported a desire for specificity now that they are within their context.

CT influence. A cooperating teacher (CT) is a teacher who has accepted the responsibility of working with a teacher candidate through engaging in regular dialogue causing true and accurate reflection of the candidate's teaching practice. CTs are supposed to foster relationships with their candidates that cause reflection, evaluation, and improvement of their teaching. The data from the teacher participants showed that although they all perceived and understood the value of a CT, the reality was often a hit or miss. Responses suggests that teacher candidates' experiences with CTs were not the most favorable.

Cynthia stated that she learned more of what not to do from one of her CTs than what to do. She furthered that the teacher was mean and didn't understand her students. "It really showed me why I wanted to do what I was doing. To be different than that." Cynthia questions why new teachers wouldn't be placed with the best teachers. According to Cynthia, there were a lot of complaints of feeling devalued by CTs in her program. CTs are also teacher mentors. Ideally, mentors constructively criticize their mentees but should always seek ways to better their mentees craft viewing it as a professional responsibility to do their part in the preparation of the newest additions to their own profession.

Violet stated that her experience with her CT was very emotional. She went on to say that she was often belittled and that she left her student teaching position with her CT

telling her she was not cut out for teaching. Questions arose from Violet such as, did you not prepare me? Is it because my placement was poor? Both questions that were never answered. Violet also mentioned that within her program other student teachers had separate horrible experiences with some being left alone to teach with no guidance. She feels that you cannot let just anyone be a CT, citing that there is "definitely no structure for placing teachers." Teacher candidates spend upwards of 40 hours a week over the course of a semester with a CT; that's 600 plus hours of first rate contact that reportedly were wasted on several of these teacher participants. If all prospective teachers spent that volume of hours actually being prepared for their craft and specifically the high-needs urban context, there should be reportedly less reports of feelings of deficiency once entering the profession.

Naiomi felt that her CT took advantage of having a student teacher in the classroom. Within a practicum a student teacher is supposed to be slowly introduced into the regular flow of the classroom until they eventually take over completely with the guidance of their CT. Naiomi expressed that by her third day she was teaching all day every day with little guidance of what curriculum to use or how to teach it. "She was just like here, do it, and took advantage of the fact that I was there and really slacked off." A baptism by fire only works if all parties involved know they are being submerged. This is not a practice that should be employed with teacher trainees who at that very instance are being made responsible for a semesters worth of education for our youth. There exists no learning curve with such an abrupt entrance into a full-time role that can be deemed acceptable. The time that a student teacher takes to become comfortable within themselves as a teacher and with their craft is not a time for experimentation with our

youth. The time lost can never be regained and any damage done to the psyche of the student teacher as well as the students they are placed in front of could be long-lasting and perhaps irreversible.

The Realities of the Field: Most Unprepared For

When a new teacher enters the field reality sets in. The first day as a new teacher can set the tone for the entire school year. Considering that these are new teachers with limited experience, it is important that they are as prepared as possible for whatever context they are entering. Teacher participants noted classroom and behavior management as two areas where they were the most unprepared. Saleema has been teaching at the same elementary school for 4 years and states that she still does not feel fully comfortable in her environment. She continues by saying that she has trouble finding the balance of addressing individual students without taking too much time away from the entire class. Caitlin expressed frustration in reaching a stalemate regarding student behavior. She expressed reaching a point where she used everything that she knew yet the child is still not doing what they are supposed to. Caitlin exclaimed, "You don't know what to do with that boy. I still don't know what to do with that boy."

Many of the teacher participants mentioned student emotional needs as an area where they lacked preparation. Teachers expressed genuine concern and a desire to be more effective in this regard. Gretchen says that knowing that a behavior is there and using classroom management skills is not always going to work. "They didn't tell you that you need to see what is going on and why is that behavior happening… and what can you do to help that student get through that behavior." Several teacher participants tied the emotional needs to student home situations. Homelessness, death of brothers and

sisters, and parent imprisonment were all cited. Violet expressed that as she learned about the children's lives she came to translate it to how they talked to or dealt with her. Naiomi believes that it is very important to understand where they are coming from so that you help them better cope while they don't have the coping skills or strategies themselves.

An understanding of social justice. An area of unpreparedness that surfaced from the data is the teacher lack of understanding of social justice and teaching with a social justice mindset. When asked about how they implement social justice within their classrooms and in their own teaching, one teacher participant responded by asking me what I meant by Social Justice. It exposed an area of concern regarding teacher preparation programs as participant after participant demonstrated that preparation programs did not make the grade in even helping teachers understand social justice, let alone how to incorporate it in their teaching. One response stated that their program was "all about social justice. It's absolutely insane," yet followed that statement with "I can't say I have an understanding of those kind of things." Cynthia stated that she took a course around social justice issues but that she honestly does not remember anything from the course. She credited her teaching experience with an understanding of social justice more than her preparation program. Only one of the teacher participants could surmise a comprehensible definition of what it means to teach for social justice. Violet demonstrated an understanding of why it might be important; "It's necessary because it truly makes me more understanding and allows me to teach to their needs, not just to the general ideas of their needs" (Maroon, 2016, p. 15).

Suggestions for Improvement

Teacher participants were asked to provide recommendations regarding areas of improvement for teacher preparation programs. Four themes arose from the data: parent/teacher dynamics, classroom and behavior management, the field experience, and preparation program curriculum.

Parent/teacher dynamics. The data showed that an intimidation factor exists for new teachers regarding the parent/teacher relationship dynamics. Multiple teacher participants made mention of the struggles they faced in engaging with parents. Caitlin expressed that you're told that parents could be negative towards school, but no one tells you how to deal with it. She mentioned that she did not know what kind of language to use. In particular, Caitlin felt unsure about relatability and speaking with authority being a younger teacher with older parents, as well as how to get reluctant parents or even parents who just don not know how to be, involved in their child's education. Caitlin really believes that the teacher/parent relationship should be an area of concern for preparation programs that new teachers could really benefit from.

Classroom and behavior management. Being that teacher participants mentioned classroom and behavior management as two areas that they were most unprepared for, it only makes sense that they also listed the two as areas of improvement for preparation programs. Respondents all shared similar thoughts regarding a desire to see less emphasis on classroom routines, such as how to place desks and creating different curriculums and lessons, and more highlighting of how to deal with explosive behaviors and creating behavioral plans. Saleema went so far as to say that if behavior is not under control you cannot get through the curriculum so that should be a focus. A classroom that does not have sound behavior management is unconducive to learning.

Not only does it limit the opportunities for the child that is experiencing the behavioral issue, but if not corrected efficiently, limits the opportunity for the entire class.

Field experience. Respondents had a lot to say regarding the need for improvement in how field experiences are conducted. Each teacher participant stated soundly that all teachers should have a field experience that involves high need urban schools, echoing the sentiment that if you can go into that context you can go pretty much anywhere. Teachers should get the experience so that they can make informed decisions regarding where they apply and accept work. Naiomi believes that it should be mandatory for everyone to have an experience in the urban context because you never know where you are going to end up. Furthermore, Violet believes it would help you understand culturally, teach better and have better management. Gretchen stated that she does not know if she would ever have thought to teach in an urban school without her student field experience within the urban context, and now it is the only place she sees herself teaching. Saleema believes that having more diversity within field experiences would help prospective teachers be better prepared. Due to her field experiences being suburban and rural, she thought that was what every school was like. Saleema felt that if she had that experience she would have been more prepared.

Violet added that teacher candidates should spend a year in one context and a year in urban in a safe environment where they can receive true mentorship from full-time teachers. Naiomi thinks it should be half a semester in one and half a semester in the other. Furthermore, she believes it should be done earlier instead of waiting until the end of your program. Adding that too many people go into teaching because they want to become a teacher and they get to that practicum and realize that they do not want to be a

teacher anymore stating that "it's very overwhelming and daunting. Sitting in a classroom, learning about teaching and then actually teaching are two very different things." Yet still, Naiomi believes that the placement should occur in your second year. She furthered that it does not have to be a full practicum but something where it really lets the person know, "am I cut out to be a teacher, if not, it's not too late to go change my major and I have not wasted $80,000 of my education." Cynthia believes that not only should they do a better job of preparing teachers for the needs of students in an urban setting, but they should also do a better job selecting teacher mentors. Likewise, Violet believes that in choosing cooperating teachers programs should be very specific because "that can make or break you as well." She believes that prospective teachers need to learn the most they can in that short amount of time, thus you do not need a cooperating teacher who is not going to cooperate with you. Teacher candidates are typically on a strict timeline and desire to gain as much as they can from their CTs.

Curricular needs. All teacher participants made mention that the curriculum within teacher preparation programs needs to change to include consideration for the high-needs urban context. Respondents stated that simple things like more background knowledge about high-needs schools could make someone consider teaching in the context through an understanding of supporting that community. Multiples calls for a course on understanding the contexts were had.

Literature and conversation regarding children within the context were deemed as a necessary powerful addition. One respondent answered that she could not recall reading anything about children in poverty until she started teaching children in poverty. Some perspective could have been lent on what she was doing. "And even though I feel

like I'm already sensitive, perspective could have made me even a little more culturally responsive to those students." Teachers need to be given every opportunity possible to be successful. By virtue of not considering context, preparation programs are preparing teachers to fail in the high need urban landscape.

Summary of Results

Whether they entered the context purposefully or by default, teacher participant responses clearly demonstrated that overwhelmingly teachers did not feel prepared for the high-needs urban context upon entering the field. Furthermore, several teachers recognized that their lack of preparation set them back in their practice and that their students suffered because of it. All teachers came to realize the opportunity they had to impact their students and all desired to be the best they could be regarding their craft, but felt shorthanded in their teacher training that left them unprepared. Teacher participants presented a sense of care not only for their craft but for their students and families as well.

The following and final chapter of this study will provide a discussion and interpretation of the results detailed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the findings as well as study limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Chapter 5 includes study implications guided by the research questions: What are the perceptions of pre-tenured teachers in their preparedness to teach in diverse high-needs urban public school settings, based on their experiences in their teacher preparation program? What role does the student teacher field experience play in the teacher's perception of preparedness? Additionally, this chapter will address the study's limitations. Recommendations will be made based on the study implications, in order to offer insight into policy changes and program development for teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, recommendations for primary and secondary schools will be made to provide them with a better understanding of the kinds of professional development novice teachers who are entering the urban landscape without proper exposure need. This understanding will help schools understand the levels of competence that they need to build in their new hires and influence induction and mentoring in high-needs schools.

The objectives of this study were successfully met as identified connections and potential gaps between teacher preparation program instruction/experience and pre-tenured teachers lived experience were had, along with participant recommendation for changes to preparation programs that they deem as beneficial to creating a more accurate experience. This research provides qualitative insight into teacher preparation and its effect on a specific population. This study focused on explicit, personal experiences of a

select group of novice teachers who work in high-needs urban schools within the City of Albany.

Implications of Findings

The findings of the research are discussed based on three themes: an understanding the context, exposure, and preparation program curriculum.

Understanding the context. Teacher participant rationale for teaching in the high-needs urban context demonstrates that the teachers did not have a true understanding of the field they were about to enter. Even the "difference makers," while having a purpose filled attitude, did not have a strong understanding of the context. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, issues of bias abound in the research findings. Responses demonstrated that preparation programs perhaps failed to meet the goal of causing prospective teachers to interrogate themselves and come to terms with the biases that they brought to their programs. Teacher participants have all been in the field 3 to 4 years and still expressed their beliefs as recorded. In considering the defining of high-needs, several responses presented clear biases as they were either completely irrelevant or downright false, borderline stereotypical responses without merit. One teacher participant mentioned mom working the late shift in her definition. Why is a mom working the late shift tied to the inner city? One can work the late shift in any context where a late shift is available. The same teacher participant stated that mom and dad might not be around all the time and that this is a family disadvantage. How does this become a "disadvantage" for urban youth as again, this dynamic could occur in any context? How does an elementary school teacher reconcile student lack of motivation to learn with the student feeling like they can be better off doing something on the street in

order to make money due to them trying to take care of kids? The presentation of such bias and why it exists in an elementary school teacher at such a sounding level, post preparation, needs to be addressed. Being that these teachers have never taught in any other context in-service, it is troubling that such startlingly biased statements said to be specific to urban youth can be made. Again, preparation programs need to cause their students to interrogate and come to terms with their internal biases and then to aid them in the reconciliation of those biases. Programs can incorporate experiences in the communities as well as in the schools in varying capacities to encourage prospective teachers to see the context through different lenses.

The most telling part of the study regarding understanding what it means to be a high-needs school is the fact that all teacher participants were oblivious to the role that teachers play in a school being defined as high-needs. A major part of the equation in a school being defined as high-needs is teacher positions being unfilled, a high percentage of out-of-field teachers exists, a high teacher turnover rate, and a high percentage of teachers who are not certified or licensed (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Teacher participants were never made to understand what a high-needs school is in their preparation program so it is not surprising that they have removed the "I" from the equation. Teachers within the high-needs context witness the aforementioned identities within the schools that they work but do not make the association between their colleagues and the relation to high-needs classification.

It is known that there exists a large population of children living in poverty in high-needs urban schools (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). There is a great deal of research that discerns a need for teachers to be trained to teach and work with children in

poverty on varying levels, from language use to attitudes toward school (Samson & Collins, 2012, Yu & Cantor, 2013). Cynthia suggested that even something as rudimentary as literature on the subject would have been helpful. Cynthia stated that she did not recall having been exposed to literature or being reflective in writing regarding children in poverty until she started teaching children in poverty. It brings to question what damage, if any, does it cause for the students to have a teacher who does not understand the population teaching them? Poverty is something that again is not unique to the high-needs urban context. Programs should incorporate an understanding of teaching children in poverty into preparation program curriculum as it would prepare every teacher for such work regardless of the context they eventually teach in. Teachers should understand the specific needs of their students and be socially just in their teaching. A more polished understanding of what it means to teach to student needs is necessary, and a foundation in social justice would provide teachers with a beginning sense of how to teach with a social justice mindset. Teachers who understand and embrace their entire role are extremely valuable. A more inclusive preparation would turn teachers holding such desires into impactful educators.

     Exposure. In response to the question of what teacher preparation programs can do to better prepare teachers to teach in high-needs schools, all teacher participants indicated a need for more experiences in high-needs school environments, which aligns with the Petty et al. (2012) study, in which 67% of respondents indicated a need for more experiences in high-needs school environments and classrooms. Similarly, several suggestions included being required to complete practicum experiences in high-needs classrooms. Teacher participants believe that there is a need to experience multiple

contexts but all concluded that at least one of the contexts experienced needs to be high-needs urban. Teacher participants presented a longing for more applicable real world experiences rather than filling time with theory and isolated coursework. Also similar to the aforementioned study, teacher participants articulated a need for early and consistent exposure to high-needs schools.

The student teaching experience is designed to prepare teachers by providing them with experiences that align with actual experiences they will meet in the field. As the study findings demonstrated, teacher participants saw limited correlation between their student teaching experiences and the realities of the field.

Teacher participants spoke about the field experience as a defining moment in determining if they really want to be a teacher. Field experiences often follow coursework and the full time experience occurs at the end of teacher prep programs. Based on teacher participant response, preparation programs should perhaps alter field experiences to occur early in the program in order to give students early exposure, and possibly to save teachers from going through an entire program only to realize that teaching is not truly something they want to do and that they just wasted 2-4 years of their life. Several teacher participants suggested that pre-service teachers should spend a full year in an urban school in order to fully grasp the contexts and be able to make sound decisions once in-service. As teacher participants offered, the experiences had in high-needs urban schools will make teacher candidates a better teacher no matter the context they eventually end up teaching in. The cultural understanding alone that pre-service teachers would come away with would help them to understand the need for culturally relevant teaching in any content.

Siwatu, Frazier, Osaghae, & Starker (2011) describe self-efficacy building activities that can be used in preparing teachers who are efficacious in their ability to reach African American students. The following activities would also deem relevant to the high-needs urban context as again, a majority of the context is made up of African Americans and other students of color. Specifically, the activities align with what the intended result of field experiences should be:

- Provide multiple opportunities to engage in the practice of culturally responsive teaching

- Situate field experiences in classrooms with African American students and other students of color

- Carefully structure pre-service teachers' clinical experiences

- Provide prospective teachers with opportunities to engage in authentic learning activities

- Provide opportunities to observe, examine, and analyze the practice of culturally responsive teaching

- Encourage teachers to attribute classroom events and outcomes to controllable causes

- Provide novice teachers with gradual and scaffolded induction experiences

Preparation program curriculum. Teacher participants repeatedly demonstrated that they found little relevance to their practice in their preparation program coursework. All participants mentioned a need for curriculum on classroom and behavioral management. Again, these two skills are not something that is unique to high-needs urban schools as all teachers benefit from such training. However, one could argue that

given the other factors that come into play in a high-needs environment, specific attention needs to be had for teachers who will eventually work within the context.

Classroom and behavior management can go hand-in-hand. Caitlin gave a very reflective response regarding a lack of preparation concerning classroom and specifically behavior management and the need for its incorporation into preparation program curriculum.

> You sort of figure it out on your own, but then you are taking 3 years to figure it out and then at the back of my mind I'm thinking, crap, I just wasted 3 years. . . I took three years to figure out what to do so then the 3 years of kids I just taught, I could have taught better. Or could have made better choices if I had known earlier.

This is a teacher who truly seemed to care not only about her craft, but also about her rapport and her potential to be impactful. If teachers like Caitlin are giving the preparation they seek and desire, they could become highly effective educators. Preparation programs should consider what the lack of relevant curriculum does in not only the teacher's craft, but in the lives of the young people that they will be responsible for. More relevant and applicable curriculum needs to be included in preparation programs that will allow teachers to enter the field with a sense of confidence to make an immediate impact.

Most teacher participants tied behavior together with emotions. This is telling as nowhere in the current definition of high-needs is there mention of emotions. Although issues of children's well-being and social-emotional competence (SEC) are a low priority in teacher preparation programs, researchers and practitioners alike are beginning to

recognize the important role of teachers and other school personnel in actively teaching, modeling, and practicing these competencies in the classroom in both group and individualized sessions (Waajid, Gardner, & Owen, 2013). Moreover, the mention of emotions was unanticipated but well represented in teacher participant responses. The concept of emotional intelligence emerging within the confines of the study organically, presents an urgent relevancy, thus further inquiry needs to be had regarding SEC.

There are various skills necessary to be an effective teacher. Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a necessary skill that needs to be fostered in pre-service teachers. In order for teachers to be able to effectively practice these competencies, they must first have an understanding of their own use of it. EI would serve teachers in every context. Due to the inclusion of emotions by the majority of teacher participants, attention needs to be paid to the impact of emotions on student performance and the role of emotional intelligence in the student/teacher dynamic.

Ogrenir (2008) examined the relationship between EI and teacher effectiveness beliefs of kindergarten and elementary education pre-service teachers. There have been established links between teacher emotional intelligence and student misconduct in the classroom. Teachers need to be in tune with their own emotions and demonstrate high levels of social-emotional intelligence (SEI). A deficiency in SEI could explain distance between student and teacher. Adolescents are at a place where they are still learning who they are and where they fit, not just in society as a whole, but even within their classrooms. Teachers should be at a place where they not only have an understanding of their own SEI but they should also be able to recognize and help regulate SEI in their students. An understanding of SEI could positively impact the behavioral management

techniques of teachers. Nizielski, Hallum, Lopes, and Schutz (2012) examined the relationship between teacher perceived EI and student misconduct. The authors linked EI more closely to student behavior in the classroom than to students' academic achievement.

Social-emotional intelligence is an important trait that every teacher should have a strong understanding of in order to be successful in the classroom. Since everyone does not have an innate ability to social emotionally regulate, it is a deficit that teacher preparation programs should address in their curriculum. Waajid, Garner, and Owen (2013) examined whether social emotional learning (SEL) content could be successfully fused into an undergraduate curriculum and instructional course. Although issues of children's well-being and social-emotional competence are a low priority in teacher preparation programs, researchers and practitioners alike are beginning to recognize the important role of teachers and other school personnel in actively teaching, modeling, and practicing these competencies in the classroom in both group and individualized sessions (Waajid et al., 2013, p. 33). In order for teachers to be able to effectively practice these competencies, they must first have an understanding of their own use and practice of it. Children's SEL is directly influenced by the teacher's own emotional competence as well as pedagogical skills (p. 33), thus, teachers having an understanding of their own competence is vital to creation of a successful identity in students. The overall findings revealed that SEL concepts can be successfully infused into undergraduate coursework on curriculum and instruction. With a change in preparation program curriculum introducing teacher candidates to SEI through the study of SEL, in-service continuing development would focus on the practicing of these competencies.

Limitations

This study was small in number and within a limited geographic setting. Another limitation of this study was that all teacher participants were Caucasian women which does not account for the male perspective or that of varying ethnicities. This study employed self-reporting. Although self-reporting can be filled with bias and issues of internal reliability, the intent of the study was to measure teacher perceptions so self-reporting was appropriate. Lastly, a limitation is that the study was conducted using charter schools which cannot represent all high-need institutions.

Recommendations

It is recommended that teacher preparation programs refine program curriculum to include consideration of the high-needs urban context that so many of its teachers will undoubtedly serve in. An urban residency model is recommended for preparation program field experiences. Candidates would have the opportunities to learn the specific neighborhoods and communities of the schools in which they would be student teaching. Candidates would also have opportunities to learn about the local cultural or other community resources available to their students and themselves. Teachers need to understand the culture and to see themselves as important parts of the communities in which they teach.

It is recommended that candidates begin their full time student teaching earlier in their program and that one full year be dedicated to the urban context and one full year to a second context of choice, or by placement. The responses of the teacher participants deem real consideration to this recommendation as various teacher participants commented that they felt enough time was not spent in this segment of their preparation

which they all believed to have been the most important and influential portion of their preparation. At the conclusion of both field experiences students should be made to produce some form of a research and experience based report evidencing an understanding of how context and not simply content is critical to teacher success.

Professional development is supposed to constitute a sense of continuing education for teachers in-service. When teachers enter the high-needs urban context without certain prerequisites for the field, elementary and secondary schools have to implement professional development trainings to try and close the gap in the preparation. Preparation programs are doing elementary and secondary schools a disservice in not preparing teachers for the realities of the field. Based on the results from this study, schools need include a variety of topics in their professional development sessions. An understanding of the context encompassing what it means to be high-needs, working with children in poverty, and regulation of social emotional intelligence are deemed most prevalent as teachers need to understand where they are working, understand the students they are working with, and understand themselves and the role they play in student development.

Being that all teacher participants are currently employed at charter schools, future research would do good to decipher the specific niche of high-needs charter schools in considering a sense of preparation in teachers. A review of literature specific to charter schools would be necessary. In the same manner in which a differentiation in school context is important, a differentiation in school governance within each context should be taken into account as well. Charter schools are unique in operation as they tend to develop their professional development curriculum with many of the concerns of

its teachers in mind. Yet still, high-needs charter schools often experience even higher teacher turnover and often enroll more "at risk" students than other schools.

Future research should also consider the attitudes and mindsets of the professors teaching in teacher preparation programs. Specifically, what did the training of those teachers look like and how much consideration of the "other" was had within their own preparation. Are these professors properly equipped with the background and current knowledge necessary to prepare effective teachers for today's schools? Furthermore, future research should consider the teachers who had similar experiences to the participants within this study, but yet went on to be tremendously effective teachers. There is a plethora of studies producing mounds of data on the grit or tenacity of students coming from less than ideal backgrounds who somehow manage to overcome the varying obstacles within their paths. The same can be studied within the population of teachers who experienced poor preparation for the context yet have found success in the field.

Conclusion

This study has provided a snapshot of the sense of preparedness teachers hold when entering the high-needs urban context.   Upon completion of the research, it was realized that it was underestimated just how unprepared teachers felt for the high-needs urban landscape . Many of the gaps teacher participants identified are all areas that prevent them from entering the field and context ready to be immediately successful and impactful. The needs of the students are supposed to come first in any school. With teachers entering the context grossly unprepared, in some instances elementary and secondary schools are being forced to place the students secondary to the need for developing teacher competencies.

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