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Preparation for Teaching in Urban Schools: Perceptions of the Impact of Traditional Preparation Programs

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PREPARATION FOR TEACHING IN URBAN SCHOOLS:
PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF TRADITIONAL
PREPARATION PROGRAMS

by

Crystal Timmons

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DEDICATION

To my beautiful daughters, Amber and Lauren, I hope you will remember this journey and never forget that all things are possible.

To my parents, Billy D. McLamb and Joseph and Sonja Phoenix, you have made countless sacrifices for me throughout the years and you are dearly loved and appreciated. I could not have made this dream a reality without your support.

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Dr. Osborne-Lampkin, I can only explain your support and guidance throughout this journey in language only true Seminoles of Florida State University can understand: In the middle of a Florida/ Florida State game a new coach entered the field in her first appearance. Florida State was behind by a field goal. The playbook the new coach was given lacked clarity and direction; however, throughout the third quarter she provided the team with strategies to make the necessary adjustments. In the final minutes of the game the 'Nole fans were on their feet and the echo of the war chant filled Bobby Bowden stadium. The ball sailed to the end zone…………...TOUCHDOWN, FLORIDA STATE!

Twenty years later and we are still on the same team! I appreciate everything you have done to secure this victory. May He continue to bless you and your family by allowing everything you touch to turn to gold (and garnet).

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ABSTRACT

During 2 decades of debate about teacher preparation education practitioners and

policymakers have called for a more skilled professional teaching force (Darling-

Hammond, 2010). Of particular concern has been poverty's impact on education --

specifically in struggling urban schools -- prompting legislation such as the No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB), which shifted funding formulas in an effort to directly target poor

students and struggling schools (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

The major purpose of this study was to explore novice teachers' (teachers in their

second to fourth year of teaching) perceptions of their preparedness to teach in urban

schools following completion of a traditional 4-year undergraduate teacher preparation

program. Several issues influenced their perceptions: prior experiences and attitudes

regarding diversity, coursework, and field experiences.

The theoretical frameworks of Vygotsky's (1962) social cognition learning

model, Piaget's theory of psychological constructivism (1952), and Moustaka's heuristic

research (1994) framed this research study. Using a qualitative method, focus groups and

interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, and

perceptions of novice teachers towards the effectiveness of traditional teacher preparation

programs.

Pattern coding guided the identification and coding of themes in the data. This

generated themes regarding attitudes, beliefs, race, social class, and parental involvement.

Recommendations for teacher education included modifying field experiences, extensive

training of directing teachers, matching preservice teachers with strong mentors, and including content in preparation programs focused on parental involvement. Recognizing the perceptions of novice teachers may assist in influencing schools of education to strengthen current programs to better prepare teacher candidates to work with students of diverse backgrounds.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The need to effectively prepare teachers to serve diverse student populations in public schools, particularly schools serving economically disenfranchised communities and communities of color, has been the subject of much research (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Darling Hammond, 2003; Milner, 2003; Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002; Obidah & Howard, 2005). Most recently, Gay (2010) argued that the changes needed in the current ideology of teacher education demand a powerful obligation to cultural diversity, which to date not been implemented in teacher education reform.

There is a growing consensus among educational scholars, leaders, and practitioners that teacher education programs are not adequately preparing prospective teachers to teach children who live in poverty (Duncan, 2009; Gordon, 2000; Yeo & Kanpol, 2002). Poverty has a devastating impact on children, and it is particularly evident in rural and urban areas. Due to the various barriers associated with poverty – parents who are very young, single, or have attained only limited education; abuse and neglect; dangerous neighborhoods; homelessness; mobility; exposure to inadequate or inappropriate educational experiences – academic failure is a primary threat to children in poverty (Pellino, 2006). As many of these challenges can potentially influence student learning, it is not surprising that teacher preparation programs experience difficulties in

preparing teachers for meeting the needs of children who disproportionately attend low socioeconomic and low-performing schools.

Erskine-Cullen and Sinclair (1996) stated, "successful teaching in these low-socioeconomic, urban, multicultural schools is different from teaching in suburban settings which have a more homogenous student population, more parental support, and more stable student populations" (p. 5). Wright (1981) concluded that dedicated teachers are needed in urban schools, teachers who believe in every student's ability to learn and who can both understand and respect the children's differences due to their economic status.

The current teaching force is comprised predominately of White females, many of whom have had virtually no experience or contact with people from different racial, ethnic, or economic backgrounds (Gay, 2010). Empirical evidence suggests that teachers often find it difficult, if not impossible, to connect with students who are culturally different from themselves (Grant & Gillette, 2006; Schultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996).

In the last two decades, efforts have been made to address this disconnect. These efforts have ranged from research examining the phenomena to programs developed to meet federal, state, and local policy mandates. Recently, researchers have written about the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of practicing teachers with regard to student diversity (Banks & Banks, 2004; E. Brown, 2004; Good & Brophy, 2003; Oakes, 2005; Raths & McAninch, 2003). Fewer studies have examined teacher candidates' beliefs concerning racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity (E. Brown, 2004; E. L. Brown, 2004; Case & Hemmings, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2000; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000).

Policy initiatives have also been enacted to address this issue at national, state, and local levels. Among these policies is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. NCLB, designed to strengthen student academic achievement, has been instrumental in the revision of state statutes concerning teacher preparation and has heightened awareness of the need for continuous professional development and training in local districts and schools.

Still, teacher education programs have remained under scrutiny (Gay, 2010; Talbert-Johnson, 2006). These programs have been "criticized for being over theoretical, having little connection to practice, offering fragmented and incoherent courses, and lacking in a clear, shared, conception of teaching among faculty" (Talbert-Johnson, 2006, p. 147). Over the years, universities have made efforts to address these issues. Universities that prepare teachers for urban settings share the responsibility with public schools to enhance conditions for teaching and learning (Zimpher, Fallon, Szymanski, & Vogel, 2002). Given that responsibility, universities have continued to enhance program components.

About 25 years ago, empirical evidence demonstrated that there were more effective practices that could be used to prepare teacher candidates to provide instruction to diverse student populations. Although many researchers have addressed this growing concern, teacher preparation programs seem to lack the essential components needed to break new ground when preparing educators specifically to teach children who live in poverty. Due to the sociocultural and economic differences between teacher candidates and students who live in poverty, preservice preparation must devote special attention to readying teachers to work with diverse students in urban settings.

Background

It is imperative that all who enter the teaching field are equipped to teach an extremely diverse student population. Wherever such diversity is found – whether in economics, linguistics, race, gender, or ethnicity -- teachers must be prepared to serve all students. However, teachers often find it difficult, if not impossible, to relate to students who are culturally different from themselves. Sleeter (2001) acknowledged that the majority of teacher candidates prefer to teach in an area similar to the one in which they were raised, and few express any desire to teach in urban areas or in schools populated by large numbers of poor or diverse students (Goodlad, 1990; Haberman, 1987; Wolffe, 1996; Zeichner, 1996; Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992).

Given this reality, it is imperative that preservice programs for teachers provide special attention to preparing teachers to work with diverse students in urban settings. The present study explored novice teachers' points of view as to the extent to which their preparation program equipped them to educate diverse students in urban schools.

Statement of the Problem

The result of poverty's connection with education is multi-faceted. Nearly half of all children who live in poverty attend urban schools (Michigan State University, 2004). A significant part of novice teachers' difficulty in connecting with children who live in poverty stems from their lack of knowledge about and/or experience in working in urban settings (Sleeter, 2001). Moreover, these teachers have had little to no experience working with students from urban environments.

To increase effectiveness, teacher preparation programs should include information about the culture of poverty and provide experiences that will enable teachers

to be sensitive to the vast array of needs that children in poverty bring to the classroom (Pellino, 2006). The intricacies of poverty-related issues make teacher awareness, preparation, and planning absolutely critical. As teachers model appropriate behaviors and provide emotional support and other forms of scaffolding, they can help students to use and further develop their strengths, skills, and knowledge. According to Weiner (1993),

> Urban teachers confront the greatest diversity of student needs, but the conditions in urban schools severely limit individualization, so the special demand made of urban teacher preparation is to educate teachers who can deal with students as individuals and human beings in settings that depersonalize learning, making students and teachers anonymous and powerless. (p. 110)

Given the significant disadvantages many urban students face, earlier studies by Rushton (2001) and Sconzert, Iazzeto, and Purkey (2000) illustrated the continued need for more information on which elements of current teacher preparation programs successfully prepare teachers to teach in urban settings and which elements are not effective in this endeavor. Empirical research that draws specifically from the experiences of novice educators teaching in urban environments can serve to strengthen the case for continued improvements in teacher preparation programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore novice teachers' (teachers in their first 2 to 4 years of teaching) perceptions of their preparedness to teach in urban schools following completion of traditional 4-year undergraduate teacher preparation programs.

In addition, the study examined national, state, and local efforts to reform teacher preparation programs specific to urban schools.

Research Questions

To examine the extent to which novice teachers believed their teacher preparation programs adequately prepared them to teach in urban settings, the following questions were addressed:

1. What did novice educators currently teaching in urban elementary schools view as effective components (e.g., coursework, field experiences) of their teacher preparation programs, specifically in relation to teaching in an urban environment?

2. What did novice educators currently teaching in urban elementary schools view as ineffective or missing components of their teacher preparation programs, specifically in relation to teaching in an urban environment?

3. What specific recommendations did novice educators provide to more effectively prepare educators to teach in urban schools?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Typically, traditional teacher preparation programs are 4-year bachelor of arts (BA) or bachelor of science (BS) degree programs. Customarily, these programs include general education courses, professional education courses, specialized courses in a certification area, a specific number of hours of field experience, and at least one school internship.

While the curriculum is comprehensive, it often fails to include information that will prepare educators to teach in urban and often underserved areas. Though there is no substitute for the acquisition of content knowledge, a growing body of research finds that

in schools that are heavily diverse, teachers cannot depend solely on content knowledge to guarantee that students will reach their highest academic potential (Dembo, Grant, & Jackson, 1994; Harrison, McAfee, Smithry, & Weiner, 2006).

Teachers have the daunting task of giving children dreams where reality is dim and providing hope when it seems that all is lost. Motivating students to set goals in addition to helping them ignite their potential fire from within is a fundamental responsibility of all educators. Given the weight of such massive responsibilities, are novice educators prepared for the challenges of teaching in urban schools where poverty is rampant and the needs of students vary significantly from those of their middle-class counterparts?

In order to acquire a thorough and comprehensive understanding of how novice teachers perceived their 4-year undergraduate teacher education programs as preparation to teach in an urban school, descriptive methodology was used. The framework of this study is based in elements of constructivism, and heuristic research.

Constructivism

The fundamental assumption of the constructivist stance holds that learning i**s** derived in the process of constructing meaning; it is essentially how people make sensible conclusions of their experiences (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Two leading learning theorists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, both supported the idea of constructivism, but with philosophical differences.

Piagetian psychological constructivism. According to Piaget's theory of constructivism, human beings start as children constructing meaning from personal experiences and establish understanding of issues and situations from perceptions;

however, self-established understanding may or may not be accurate (Piaget, 1952). As teachers enter environments that are different from those they are accustomed to, they bring with them their beliefs based on individual experiences. Therefore, it is not difficult to anticipate the potential challenges that will be encountered when faced with the unknown and the unfamiliar.

Vygotskian constructivism. Additionally, in the social cognition learning model, Lev Vygotsky (1962) asserted that culture is the primary factor of individual development in teaching children both how and what to think. When teachers are forced to enter cultures or ways of life with which they are unfamiliar, they may feel uncomfortable and choose to retreat. Novice teachers may build walls based on previously formed perceptions and be unwilling or unable to construct new meaning from new relationships or experiences.

The socio-cultural aspects of constructivism are of great significance to the preparation of educators teaching in high-poverty schools. Educators have the immense power to open students' minds; however, teachers have to agree that these same students have the ability to open their minds as well as their hearts. The United States of America is considered to be a melting pot for race, culture, gender, sexual preference, and economic status. Willingness to appreciate the diversity of this complex and unique nation provides educators with the tools needed to make society not just tolerant of others, but accepting and appreciative of differences.

Heuristic Research

Through elements of heuristic research, it is the researcher's goal not only to allow the process of discovery to pave the way for new meaning regarding human

phenomena, but also to realize the relevancy to individual experiences and lives

(Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas noted:

> Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the
> researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a
> personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the
> world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with
> virtually every question that matters there is also a social – and perhaps universal
> – significance. (p. 25)

Teacher educators should be intrigued by the complex components of teacher education

programs and the potential influence and impact these programs have in shaping and

developing the lives of children from diverse and, in some cases, impoverished

communities.

<center>Significance of the Study</center>

Despite national and local efforts to utilize existing models, strategies, and

ideologies to enhance teacher preparation programs, there continues to be much debate

about the extent to which teacher preparation programs have prepared teachers for the

field. Surrounding much of this debate is the extent to which teacher preparation

programs are preparing teachers to teach diverse and underserved populations. This

investigation is significant that it provided insight into novice teachers' perceptions

regarding the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, specifically in preparing

future teachers for urban settings.

This study will ultimately assist in furthering the goal of creating effective

teacher preparation programs for all teacher candidates. When teachers understand and

are prepared to deal with the barriers of poverty (e.g., high rates of student mobility, abuse, and neglect), they are potentially able to focus more fully on delivering quality instruction. Students in poverty need educators who have the ability to understand their backgrounds and to target instruction to overcome the many obstacles that these students face.

Definitions of Terms

The definitions for the following terms used in this study are given below:

Alternate route programs: These programs, sometimes called nontraditional programs, are post-baccalaureate programs designed for individuals who did not prepare as educators during their undergraduate or graduate studies. They accommodate the schedules of adults and recognize their earlier academic preparation and life experiences, and usually lead to a unit's recommendation for a state license (National Council on Accreditation for Teacher Education [NCATE], 2008).

Field experience: A variety of early and ongoing field-based opportunities in which candidates may observe, assist, tutor, instruct, and/or conduct research. Field experiences may occur in off-campus settings such as schools, community centers, or homeless shelters (NCATE, 2008).

Novice educator: For the purpose of this study, novice teachers refer to educators who have been teaching no less than 2 years and no more than 4 years since degree attainment.

Pedagogical content knowledge: The interaction of the subject matter and effective teaching strategies to help students learn the subject matter. Thorough

understanding of the content is required to teach it in multiple ways, drawing on the cultural backgrounds, prior knowledge, and experiences of students (NCATE, 2008).

Pedagogical knowledge: The general concepts, theories, and research about effective teaching, regardless of content areas (NCATE, 2008).

Poverty: The extent to which an individual does without resources (Slocumb & Payne, 2000); less pretax annual income when compared with the poverty threshold, which adjusts for family size and composition (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2009).

Schools of education: For the purposes of this study, this term refers to academic divisions of colleges and universities through which students may take courses in various content areas, pedagogy, and field experiences as a part of the teacher preparation program without prior teaching experience.

Traditional 4-year teacher preparation program: The term *traditional* is used to refer to undergraduate-college- and university-based initial teacher preparation programs (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001).

Urban schools: For purposes of this study, this term refers to Duval County schools with a free or reduced lunch rate of 70% or more.

Methodology

A descriptive qualitative research design was used in this study to identify novice teachers' perceptions of their preparation for teaching in urban elementary schools. Creswell (2002) stated that a descriptive model is when the researcher relies on detailed descriptions of people, places, and events to explain the narrative. The study invited 17 novice elementary school educators teaching in an urban setting to participate in two focus groups with each group having 2 to 4 participants. Using this design, I collected

data which examined participants' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions (Creswell, 2002). Following the focus groups, I interviewed each participant individually, using a semi-structured interview protocol.

Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption of the study was there were challenges that poor students encounter which have a negative impact on their academic performance. This assumption leads to the thought that teachers can counter this problem by utilizing effective classroom practices. A second assumption of the study was that teachers have difficulties implementing these practices with economically disadvantaged students due to their limited experiences with diversity. This assumption leads to the thought that if teachers were better prepared during 4-year traditional teacher preparation programs they would be better equipped to understand the challenges of children in poverty and provide effective instruction in urban settings.

One limitation was that this study was primarily a reflection of one program. The study consisted of teachers in Duval County Public Schools (DCPS). As a result, approximately 50% of the participants were graduates of the same teacher preparation program. A second limitation was the methods used to collect data. Focus groups and interviews were used to gain information concerning the experiences of the participant. Teachers could have withheld views that others perceived as negative or controversial. In addition, teachers could have forgotten valuable information due to the time that has lapsed since their completion of the preparation program.

Chapter Summary

Due to the increasing shift in demographics in K-12 public schools, there is a new urgency to prepare teachers adequately to teach diverse populations, including students who live in poverty. Teachers entering the teaching profession find it extremely difficult to connect with students who live in poverty due to the vast differences in culture and socioeconomic backgrounds. The root of this disconnect can be explained through Piagetian and Vygotskian constructivism. While people begin constructing meaning from their own personal experience from an early age, their self-established understanding may be incorrect in other contexts.

Despite efforts at the national, state, and local levels, it still appears that teachers do not feel they are prepared to teach in urban settings upon completing traditional 4-year undergraduate programs. Teachers constantly battle the secondary effects of poverty inside the classroom and are often at a loss because of their inability to understand how these issues impact students' academic progress.

Organization of the Research

This study addressing the perceptions of novice elementary teachers from urban settings was organized into five chapters. Chapter One included a presentation of the background, purpose, problem, questions, assumptions, and limitations of the study. Chapter Two contains a review of the related literature addressing the issues of children in poverty, challenges for White middle-class teachers in urban schools, traditional teacher preparation programs, and criticisms of teacher education. Chapter Three includes a description of the research methodology and design, including the population and sample, data collection and methods of analysis, and ethical considerations of the

research. Chapter Four introduces the participants and allows the reader insight into their backgrounds and perceptions of urban environments. The chapter includes the findings from the interview questions and the focus groups. Chapter Five includes a summary of the study and the conclusions drawn from the analysis. Implications for teacher education programs are included, as are recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As teachers enter the workforce, research suggests that their collegiate programs have not adequately prepared them to teach in urban settings largely comprised of minority children who live in poverty (Gordon, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). As each year passes, increasing numbers of students who enter schools are faced with the challenges of poverty (Pellino, 2006). The effects of living in certain socioeconomic environments can leave students far behind their counterparts before they even have an opportunity to begin. Is the predominantly White, female, middle-class teaching majority adequately prepared for this massive responsibility of providing quality instruction for all children?

This review of the literature focused on challenges of children in poverty, challenges for White middle-class teachers in urban schools, teacher preparation programs, and critiques of teacher education.

Section I: Challenges of Children in Poverty

Poverty has an impact on every aspect of a child's life. The lack of household income can potentially cause children to suffer emotionally and socially. As a result, children's academic progress can be stagnated. The following section will address how the effects of poverty can hinder various aspects of children's development.

Effects of Poverty

    Emotional and social challenges. Children who live in low socioeconomic environments often feel that they have little or no control over their lives. They certainly did not choose their circumstances. According to Pellino (2006), children in poverty long for emotional stability. There is a strong desire for attention and stability (Ciaccio, 2000). When this need is not met, feelings of abandonment and isolation may lead to various forms of emotional trauma such as depression or feelings of inadequacy. Low expectations are often voiced during the children's early stages of self-development, and this can severely affect the child's self-esteem.

    A high mobility rate is common for urban students, and moving can be an extremely stressful experience. As children are shuffled around from school to school, they form a shell to protect themselves from being hurt (Ciaccio, 2000). They may become withdrawn and, based upon past experience; decide it is best not to establish new relationships. This can have a strong impact on feelings of efficacy and personal aspirations (Brophy, 1998).

Due to the lack of income for household necessities, there are fewer opportunities for low-income children to enjoy educational activities and learning experiences outside of school. Poor children usually do not have access to tools that could assist with the development of social skills that could help them in their quest for academic achievement (Thompson, Ransdell, & Rousseau, 2005). Furthermore, in a society where the concepts of collaborative partnerships or teamwork prevail, poor children do not have the same opportunities as others to participate in activities that cultivate the idea of working with

others to reach a common goal (Richardson, 2010). The effects of these emotional and social challenges can result in these children not making adequate academic progress.

Early academic challenges that contribute to the achievement gap. Tileston (2004) noted that many teachers agree that children who live in poverty start school with deficits in vocabulary, knowledge of cause and effect, and various other prerequisite skills that lead to academic success. Furthermore, it is common for these students to enter grade levels without the prerequisite skills needed to master new content areas. Lower levels of achievement are generally common for children in poverty in comparison with children of the middle and upper classes (Pellino, 2006). Slavin (1998) noted that the quality of children's earliest experiences has a tremendous impact on their future progress and success; consequently, poor children who have participated in quality early childhood education programs have shown a drastic improvement in communication and grade point averages and seem to have a lower dropout rate (Weaver, 2005).

The connection between poverty and racial/ethnic status continues to exacerbate the problem of equitable educational outcomes between White and non-White groups (Dembo, et al., 1994; Schultz et al., 1996; Talbert-Johnson, 2006). The correlation between poverty and race is startling and has been documented. For example, Grant and Secada (1990) noted,

> Of White children who were between 1 and 3 years old in 1968, 25% experienced some period of poverty over the next 15 years; however, for black children, the same statistic was 78%. The experience of poverty is more intense for black children. (p. 403)

As children proceed through school, these academic deficiencies are well noted in the achievement gap. The achievement gap refers to the difference in academic performance among different classes or groups (Pellino, 2006). These groups are delineated by ethnicity, race, status, or income. There are numerous factors which influence this gap, related both to the social environment of the children and their prior educational experiences. While there are schools with a high population of poor students whose academic achievements parallel those of students from middle-class and wealthy districts, these success stories are not typical.

One of the most intricate challenges facing public education in the United States today is the achievement gap as it relates to race. Black students consistently fall behind their White classmates on a variety of standardized tests. Weaver contended, "In the year 2000, 20% of White fourth graders scored below basic on the national math test, while 61% of black fourth graders scored below basic" (2005, p. 1). By the 12th grade, the average African American and Hispanic student can only do math and read as well as a White eighth grader, and high school completion rates remain markedly lower for students of color (Resnick, 2004).

Children who live in poverty need more instruction. Around the United States, communities are determining the best ways to provide the additional instruction that is so desperately needed. Some states give high-poverty schools additional funding to extend instruction before and after school and even during the summer. Again, teacher quality is a vital element in the extended effort to promote student success. For students to be held to high standards, they need teachers who are competent in their subject matter and who

know how to teach the subjects. "What schools do matters enormously. And what matters most is good teaching" (Haycock, 2001, Lesson 4: Teachers Matter a Lot section, ¶ 2).

The National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) has a strong commitment in the preparation of teachers to eliminate the achievement gap as evident in "The Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Preparation Programs":

> We recognize the existence of an unacceptable achievement gap based on race, ethnicity, disability/exceptionality and socioeconomic status. The gap is exacerbated by some children being assigned well prepared teachers and other children being assigned unprepared and under-prepared teachers. Closing the achievement gap requires that all children be educated by teachers and other professional personnel who meet rigorous professional standards. We renew our commitment to social justice in schooling for all children by demanding well prepared educators for all children. (2008, p. 6)

For children from poor families and neighborhoods, a quality education is frequently the only way of breaking the cycle of poverty. As they are faced with the social and emotional challenges that could potentially impact their academic progress, students in economic disparity also contend with the issue of parents or caregivers who are unable to provide them with specific support mechanisms that would strengthen them academically, socially, physically, and emotionally.

Parental Support

The life of a child in poverty begins at a disadvantage. The mothers of these children may have lacked or had inadequate pre-natal care, and the children may have

had insufficient early medical care. In addition, poor children usually do not have access to tools that could assist with the development of skills and academic achievement. Pellino (2006) explained that examples of this would be the use of home computers; visits to zoos and museums; attendance at pre-school programs; availability of literature and educational reading materials; interaction with educated, literate and well-spoken adults; and exposure to being read to by a parent (p. 8).

The primary vehicle through which children experience the world is their parent(s). Children trust their parents to ensure their safety and provide for their physical and emotional needs. If the parents fail in these tasks, their children's development could be severely affected (Kaiser & Delaney, 1996). In low socioeconomic settings, parents tend to model language that is considered unsophisticated and are not able to give sufficient amounts of emotional stimulation or support (Pellino, 2006); furthermore, discipline methods are usually inconsistent and, when enacted, more punitive (Kaiser & Delaney, 1996).

Although it does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest, overall parental support and involvement is lower among poor parents. This could possibly be an effect of parents' work schedules, lack of childcare, inadequate access to transportation, or even personal negative experiences when they themselves were students (Pellino, 2006).

Children in poverty face a unique set of challenges that could be detrimental to their overall success. Inadequate healthcare, high-mobility rates, and insufficient parental support can play a role in a student's classroom performance. These secondary effects of poverty pose a dilemma to White middle-class teachers and have the potential to affect

their instructional practices. The following section will examine challenges of White middle-class teachers in urban schools.

Section II: Challenges of White Middle-Class Teachers in Urban Schools

Tileston and Darling (2008) argued that the proficiency of teachers in providing effective instruction is a high predictor of student academic achievement. Beginning teachers often have difficulty applying the considerable information learned during college courses correctly. These difficulties are magnified when teachers are placed in urban schools and the teachers have limited experience with the culture of poverty. Specific challenges of White middle-class teachers in urban schools include changing demographics, understanding the culture of poverty, and teacher expectations.

Changing Demographics

Nearly 40 years ago, approximately 88% of the public school teaching force was White (Snyder, 1998). Similarly, today about 90% of teachers in the United States are White, which is mirrored at the preservice level (Howard, 2006; Howey, Arends, Galluzo, Yarger, & Zimpher, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1997). In contrast, the student population is becoming increasingly non-White and more likely from urban backgrounds. In addition, most prospective teachers are monolingual English-only speakers, but in the last decade the number of students in schools who had limited English skills doubled to 5 million (Zhao, 2002).

As of 2002, nearly 40% of public school enrollment was comprised of children of color (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). It is projected that by 2035, students of color will comprise the majority of the student population in K-12 public schools (Hodgkinson, 2001; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

As the number of minority students enrolled in public schools increases, the burning question is whether or not it is possible for teachers to provide a quality education to students who do not look like them or share their sociocultural or economic background.

Teachers' ability to connect with their students becomes more challenging as the teaching profession continues to experience a demographic divide between the teacher and the learner (Gay, 2010). The racial and socioeconomic differences can serve as obstacles between teachers and students. Teachers may become frustrated and leave the profession or decide to teach in a more affluent setting. Those who remain in urban schools may become calloused or apathetic, coming to believe that they cannot impact the lives of these students (Holt & Garcia, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education's "1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey" (U.S. DOE, 2002) indicated that teacher shortages are 50 percent higher in urban schools than in suburban schools. Many urban schools across the country continually face shortages of qualified teachers due to higher turnover rates (Dembo et al., 1994).

When teachers can understand the influence and culture of poverty in the various aspects of their students' lives, they can use the knowledge as a tool to strengthen all aspects of their teaching practices.

Understanding the Culture of Poverty

It is vital that educators are cognizant of the variety of needs that at-risk children have and that they are educated concerning the culture of poverty. The intricacies of poverty make preparation and planning particularly necessary to student success. As teachers model appropriate behaviors and provide emotional support, they also help students to utilize and further develop their strengths, skills, and knowledge. Weiner

(1993) concluded that, like doctors who use validated research findings to improve clinical practice, teachers have to examine the influence of class differences on students and be ready to use proven instructional strategies to enhance the academic success of all students.

Payne's (2005) book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* outlined the hidden rules of economic class along with ways to overcome these obstacles. She concurred with Stephen Wright's (1981) philosophy that urban students need dedicated teachers who understand their situations and how these situations can affect learning. Payne cited a working definition of poverty as "the extent to which an individual does without resources" (2005, p. 7). Typically, the lack of financial resources has been the only specification for poverty. While it is true that financial resources are extremely important, these resources cannot explain how individuals are able to leave poverty nor the reasons that they remain in poverty. Payne argued that breaking the cycle of poverty is not solely dependent on financial resources**.**

In the qualitative study "Effective Teaching/ Effective Urban Teaching: Grappling with Definitions Grappling with Differences*"* (Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, & Gordon, 2006), 17 novice teachers who recently completed the same urban teacher preparation program participated in a study designed to answer the following broad research question: How do new teachers trained in an urban teacher preparation program make sense of their preservice experiences and their future job prospects? The participants were interviewed at the completion of the program and then interviewed again approximately three months later in their first year of teaching.

Although there were stereotypical constructs of race and class mentioned throughout the study, the final analysis of the data indicated that two-thirds of the sample referred back to elements of culturally responsive teaching when asked about the characteristics of effective urban teaching. The two main ideas rooted in the participants' definition of effective urban teaching were bringing in the lives of students and knowing the backgrounds of their students (Watson et al., 2006).

The majority of the participants desired that their students see the classroom as a comfortable and welcoming place to learn. The new teachers explained that the key to student academic achievement is using the real-life experiences of students in the classroom. This is essential in an effort to understand and respect the cultural backgrounds of students, their experiences, and their resources in order to effectively teach in an urban setting (Watson et al., 2006). Darling-Hammond (2002) thoughtfully noted:

> A critical task in becoming an effective teacher of diverse students is coming to understand individual young people in nonstereotypical ways while acknowledging and comprehending the ways in which culture and context influence their lives and learning. (p. 209)

An additional aspect of understanding the culture of poverty is acknowledging the challenges of parents in poverty. While teachers generally have personally experienced nurturing and supportive parental or family relationships, in the environment of poverty the characteristics of successful families -- such as stability, security, access to basic resources, and a strong shared-belief system -- are limited or non-existent. Teachers have the challenge of building positive relationships with parents and families in poverty and

encouraging them to be consistently involved with their children's education and school activities (Pellino, 2006). Educators must first understand the complexities and dynamics of parenting in the context of poverty before undertaking this challenge.

In a qualitative case study inquiry of 4 teachers in high poverty communities, Leroy and Symes (2001) explored teachers' beliefs about factors that placed their students at risk for failure in life and school; familial factors were perceived as most significant. Issues such as abuse, alcoholism, and single, absent or unsupportive parents were the most frequently mentioned throughout the study. These beliefs seemed to confirm pre-existing stereotypes and negative perceptions concerning differing social classes. However, low-income parents hold beliefs about education that are similar to those held by wealthy parents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Leichter, 1978). Although low-income parents are less likely to attend school functions or volunteer in their children's classrooms (Compton-Lilly, 2003), it is not because they do not care about education, but rather because they have less access to school involvement due to working multiple jobs, holding jobs without paid leave, and being unable to afford child care and public transportation.

With teaching as a predominantly White, middle-class profession, how can the necessary connections be made between these teachers and students of different racial, ethnic, language, and economic backgrounds? The following section of the review will focus on teachers' prior experiences and attitudes toward diversity.

Prior Experiences and Attitudes toward Diversity

Typically, White teacher candidates come from backgrounds that have provided little opportunity for establishing relationships with people from different racial, ethnic,

and socioeconomic populations (Gay, 2010; Grant & Gillette, 2006; Schultz et al., 1996).

There is a desperate need for educators to reflect critically on their beliefs, practices, and

attitudes toward people who are different from them.

White or socioeconomically advantaged new teachers who find their way to an

urban school setting will most likely teach students who are unlike themselves. Despite

having virtually no experience with diverse groups, future teachers have strong beliefs

about teaching students from backgrounds different from their own. They have spent

years forming these opinions with help from the media, family, and friends. Studies have

suggested that these beliefs, which have been formed over a lifetime, tend to take

precedence over concepts taught in university courses (Yeo & Kanpol, 2002).

In a survey of 300 preservice teachers at Kutztown University conducted by

Schultz et al. (1996), which focused on beliefs and attitudes about urban schools and

minority students, most of the participants used negative phrases such as "violent,"

"emotionally unstable," "screw-you attitude," and "unmotivated" (p.4). The students of

this teacher education program staunchly believed that the attitudes and beliefs of urban

students were in stark contrast to their own. Differences can be extremely unsettling and

difficult to accept. The professionals dominating the teaching force often view

differences as negative traits or ideas that need to be corrected (Cochran-Smith, Davis, &

Fries, 2004; Howard, 2003; Ketter & Lewis, 2001; Miron, 1996; Rousseau & Tate,

2003).

Examples of teacher beliefs and ideologies include optimistic individualism,

absolute democracy, and naive egalitarianism. Many future teachers enter preparation

programs with the idea of optimistic individualism, the assumption that regardless of any

obstacle, hard work, perseverance, and dedication will triumph over roadblocks to success (Ahlquist, 1992; Finney & Orr, 1995; McCall, 1995; Nieto, 1998). Personal experience of these teachers has led to the belief system that consistency, coupled with a serious work ethic and responsible behavior, will result in success. Unfortunately, this has not been the general experience of children who were raised by poor families and in economically deprived neighborhoods. These students have been forced to accept that hard work does not always result in victory and that they can be a target for unfair treatment based on race, gender, and/or ethnicity.

O'Grady (1998) stated that beginning teachers hold the ideology that, despite differences in cultural backgrounds, all children are the same and teaching practices that are considered generally effective can be used with all children. This "one size fits all" mentality is termed *absolute democracy* (Finney & Orr, 1995; Nieto, 1998) and fails to recognize the differences among students and the need to differentiate instruction due to various learning styles.

Another idea that prospective teachers often hold is that of naïve egalitarianism. Sleeter (1992) contended that this belief holds the philosophy that all people deserve equal treatment and each individual should be granted equal access to resources. Although this is an extremely open-minded attitude, it is not realistic. Whether or not White middle-class people have desired special treatment or unfair advantages in society, the fact is that these advantages have been available. Naïve egalitarianism tends to mask prospective teachers' access to these privileges and overlook the turmoil of present and past discrimination (Bollin & Finkel, 1995; Finney & Orr, 1995; Nieto, 1998; O'Grady, 1998; Sleeter, 1992).

Although the present study focused on urban schools, it is imperative that all

teachers, regardless of the school setting, be able to communicate and relate to students

and be deemed trustworthy by these students (Weiner, 1993). As teacher educator

programs guide future teachers to understand the culture of poverty, recognize the issues

and concerns impacting parents and students, and uncover how their backgrounds,

attitudes, and prior experiences with diversity affect their personal beliefs and

expectations of students, a bridge will be formed between teachers and urban students.

In addition to understanding the culture of poverty, teachers need to recognize

how their own life experiences and attitudes concerning diversity influence their

expectations of students.

Teacher Expectations

In a meta-analysis on diversity and preservice teachers, Zeichner (1996)

examined traits of teachers that enabled them to be successful with poor students.

Findings indicated that in addition to successful teachers having high expectations for

their students, they regularly communicated these expectations to them.

A possible issue that is more serious than demographic differences between

teachers and students is the perspective of many White, middle-class teachers regarding

diversity. These teachers have low expectations of urban students different from

themselves and associate diversity with deficits (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1990; Valenzula,

2002; Weiner, 1993; Yeo, 1997).

Often, these beliefs are based on teacher candidates' backgrounds and life

experiences. In a study conducted by Wolffe (1996), a majority of elementary education

majors that attended a small liberal arts college in rural Indiana held negative

expectations of urban field experiences. The participants expected greater discipline problems, racial conflicts, lack of parental support, and a higher rate of abuse with children in urban settings.

In research conducted by the Education Trust in the 1990s, when adults were questioned concerning students from impoverished communities, they heard comments such as "they're too poor"; "their parents don't care"; "they come to school without an adequate breakfast"; "they don't have enough books in the home"; "indeed, there aren't enough parents in the home." Their comments were consistently riddled with excuses and blame directed toward students and their families.

Young people, however, have different answers. They talk about teachers who often do not know the subjects that they are teaching. They talk about counselors who consistently underestimate their potential and place them in lower-level courses. They talk about principals who dismiss their concerns. And they talk about a curriculum and a set of expectations that feel so miserably low-level that they literally bore the students right out the school door. (Haycock, 2001, What's Going On section ¶ 2)

Teacher expectations influence what and how they teach students. If the teacher does not believe the student can successfully master the content, often they will not even attempt to provide the student with exposure to the material. Schools must offer students a challenging curriculum, and teachers must implement the curriculum. Even if they do not succeed, students need to be challenged at their highest possible level. There is ample evidence that almost all students can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels (Haycock, 2001).

Regardless of color or class, all students have a right to learn, and all teachers should be properly trained to ensure the academic and social growth of all students. A review of the challenges of children in poverty and how those issues pose potential (or perceived) obstacles for the instructional practices of White middle-class teachers shows the importance of teacher preparation programs using policies and procedures to support both students and teachers.

Section III: Teacher Preparation

For 50 years national standards have served as guidelines for effective teacher preparation within colleges and schools of education. The implementation of these standards is supervised by NCATE. In the following section, national standards and national initiatives regarding teacher preparation will be examined.

National Standards for Teacher Preparation Programs

NCATE was founded in 1954 with the collaboration of national professional education organizations and public organizations for the purpose of accrediting colleges, schools, or departments of education in the United States. NCATE is the assessment tool that assists the education profession in establishing high-quality teacher preparation. Improvement in teacher preparation and accountability are central to NCATE's mission (NCATE, 2008).

Colleges or schools of education that earn accreditation are recognized as having met national professional standards for the preparation of teachers and other educators. The six NCATE standards recognize the importance of knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions expected of educational professionals: Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions; Assessment System and Unit Evaluation; Field

Experiences and Clinical Practice; Diversity; Faculty Qualifications, Performance, and

Development; and Unit Governance and Resources. These standards apply to initial

teacher preparation and advanced programs for teachers and other school professionals

(NCATE, 2008). A significant element of these standards is the teachers' responsibilities

to promote equitable practices for all students, regardless of their ethnicity, race,

language, socioeconomic status, and/or functioning level (Irvine, 2003). At a minimum,

NCATE standards require that professional education programs prepare

candidates who

- have the content knowledge needed to teach students;

- have the pedagogical and professional knowledge needed to teach effectively;

- operationalize the belief that all students can learn;

- demonstrate fairness in educational settings by meeting the educational needs of
  all students in a caring, non-discriminatory, and equitable manner;

- understand the impact of discrimination based on race, class, gender,
  disability/exceptionality, sexual orientation, and language on students and their
  learning; and

- can apply their knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions in a manner
  that facilitates student learning. (NCATE, 2008, p. 4)

National initiatives have been created in order to reform teacher preparation

programs to include more attention to diversity. These initiatives ensure that future

teachers are provided with opportunities for practical application in urban schools and

with diverse groups of students, and they have the potential to expand clinical

experiences of teacher candidates.

Most recently, NCATE's Panel on Clinical Preparation, Partnerships, and Improved Student Learning convened for a historic meeting with the goal of recommending scalable ways to improve clinical experiences and strengthen relationships between school districts and the colleges and universities that prepare teachers. Ultimately, these recommendations could possibly serve as the foundation for revisions to NCATE's standards of accreditation (Epstein, 2010). The panel is charged with "identifying what the best practices are in a strong clinical preparation and in preparing teachers to more effectively teach diverse learners," which has been an issue of much debate (James Cibulka, president of NCATE, cited in Epstein, 2010).
In response to the issues of teacher preparation, several national initiatives have focused attention on how preparation programs meet the needs of diverse learners and high-need schools.

National Initiatives

Darling-Hammond (2010) asserted that governments need to ensure that all teachers have access to high-quality training by mandating quality preparation, funding the costs of training for candidates, and providing an adequate supply of teachers for all communities by providing competitive salaries and an optimal work environment.
The NCLB and the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) are national policies that include funding and a variety of resources to strengthen teacher preparation programs (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2008). The following discussion will provide pertinent information concerning these two significant pieces of legislation.

NCLB. As the impact of NCLB is examined, a top priority for educators is the work of teachers in urban contexts (Cohn, 2005). The NCLB attempts to ensure that teachers are accountable for the academic improvement of all students, especially those who are economically disenfranchised (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). In order for effective change to occur, schools of education must participate in this dialogue. However, Talbert-Johnson (2006) argued that the type of change that will affect student learning will occur only when teacher preparation programs' curricula reframe their structure to target dispositional and instructional changes.

The Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) program is a vehicle by which NCLB attempts to improve student achievement by addressing the need to enhance teacher preparation programs. A primary focus of TQP is to hold teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education accountable for preparing highly qualified teachers (U. S. DOE, 2009).

The purpose of the three Teacher Quality programs authorized by Title II--State Grants, Partnership Grants, and Teacher Recruitment Grants is to make changes in current methods used to recruit, prepare, license, and support teachers. One clear goal of these grants is supporting efforts to reduce shortages of qualified teachers in high-need school districts. The purpose of these grants is to promote statewide teacher preparation reform activities, raise student achievement, improve learning, and assist in teacher recruitment reforms at the state and higher education levels (U.S. DOE, 2009).

HEOA. In addition to the NCLB, the HEOA is another federal initiative linked to teacher preparation. HEOA remains consistent with the structure of accountability used in the Higher Education Act, mandating annual institutional report cards, state report cards,

and a federal report card on the quality of higher education based teacher preparation programs. There are also revisions in the HEOA to make available more concise data on preparation program effectiveness (AACTE, 2008).

The Institutional Report Card is a summary of the number of candidates taking and passing teacher certification examinations for each state-approved program. Reports are submitted annually to the Department of Education and include enrollment information and requirements for admission and completion of programs. As institutions set annual goals based on shortage areas in their states, they must provide assurance that they have systems in place to meet those goals (University of North Florida, 2009).

Institutions receiving federal student aid to assist with the funding of teacher preparation programs have increased reporting requirements on the Institutional Report Card. Title II, Section 206, requires higher education institutions that admit students who receive financial assistance under Title IV of HEOA to establish goals for increasing the number of teachers prepared in critical shortage areas, as designated by the Secretary of Education or the state educational agency. Additionally, institutions must provide evidence to the U.S. Department of Education that candidates are prepared to teach in urban and rural schools; however, institutions are not expected to design or implement new preparation programs to meet the requirements (AACTE, 2008). Title II, Section 208, requires that states provide data (e.g., K-12 student achievement or demographic data or teacher evaluations) to higher education preparation programs that will help them assess their programs' effectiveness in the classroom.

While the federal government can provide resources to teacher preparation programs and mandate specific policy concerning criteria and accountability measures,

the government cannot mandate how educators relate to their students or create a funding formula that will solve the challenges of teaching students who differ from the White middle-class. A method of addressing these issues is teacher preparation programs' pursuit of preparing culturally responsive teachers.

Cultural Responsiveness

Given the barriers between teachers and urban students, there have been efforts at various levels to provide solutions to the problem of effectively preparing future teachers to provide quality instruction to economically disadvantaged students in urban schools. One solution is a commitment to create culturally responsive teachers with the implementation of multicultural education and field experiences.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) shared their belief that preparing teachers to be culturally responsive is a dire issue in teacher education that has not been properly addressed**.** Failure to take action leads to a wider gap between White, middle-class, English-speaking children and their poor, minority, and non-English speaking counterparts. Teacher educators view learning to teach as a process of conceptual change (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Stimulating conceptual change, while simultaneously preparing future teachers for diverse settings, is the responsibility of the teacher educator. The teacher educator must provoke future teachers to reflect on their personal feelings concerning the rationale for schools and the purpose of cultural diversity. Villegas and Lucas defined culturally responsive teachers as those who

- Have sociocultural consciousness; that is, recognition that the ways people perceive the world, interact with one another, and approach learning, among other things, is deeply influenced by such factors as race/ethnicity,

social class, and language. This understanding enables teachers to cross the cultural boundaries that separate them from students.

- Have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to be solved.

- Have a sense that they are both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schooling more responsive to students from diverse backgrounds.

- Embrace constructivist views of teaching and learning. That is, they see learning as an active process by which learners give meaning to new information, ideas, principles, and other stimuli; and they see teaching largely as a process of inducing change in students' knowledge and belief systems.

- Are familiar with their students' prior knowledge and beliefs, derived from both personal and cultural experiences.

- Design instruction that builds on what students already know, while stretching them beyond the familiar. (p. xiv)

Coursework infused with multicultural education coupled with field experiences are ways in which teacher preparation programs strive to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to self-reflect on their personal beliefs and dispositions while working with diverse populations. Future teachers can potentially strengthen the academic achievement of underprivileged students when they acknowledge and explore their personal cultural

biases**.** Multicultural education and field experiences are course components that allow opportunities for students to engage in a self-exploration of attitudes and beliefs.

Multicultural Education

During the professional preparation for becoming a classroom teacher, it is essential that preservice teachers be given opportunities to discover and assess their personal sociocultural beliefs. If these experiences are absent from the program, future educators will be unable to adequately serve students from diverse backgrounds (Weiner, 1993). Preservice teachers must be challenged to look beyond their own personal spectrum of life experiences.

Grant and Secada (1990) pointed out that programs that provide multicultural education for teachers cannot be successful unless they include the following components: specific content on multicultural education; education courses (methods, curricula, educational psychology) infused with multicultural applications (e.g., examples, course readings); field experiences in schools populated with diverse students; and coursework and experiences that require teachers to examine their own life histories and education via autobiographical analysis (p. xx).

According to Banks and Banks (2004) and Trent, Kea, and Oh (2008), more teacher preparation programs recognize the importance of diversity and are including isolated multicultural education courses or some cultural diversity components as integrated curriculum. The following sections describe both approaches.

Infusion approach. The infusion approach to integrating education courses with multicultural applications and diverse field experiences is an example of how preparation programs can focus solely on preparing teachers to work with ethnic- and language-

minority students (Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996). Programs can also concentrate on preparing teachers to educate diverse groups of students of color, such as are found in most urban school districts, or on the preparation of teachers to educate specific groups of students, such as Native American or Hispanic students.

In pretest and posttest studies in which the participants were predominantly White preservice students, mixed findings were reported when examining the effects of a course combined with a field experience component on student perceptions. Four studies concluded that there was a positive change in the perceptions of preservice students (Bondy, Schmidtz, & Johnson, 1993; Grottgau & Nickolai-Mays, 1989; Mason, 1997; Wiggins & Follo, 1999).

Bondy et al. (1993) investigated a course in which preservice teachers evaluated the reasons that White, middle-class students' academic performance was better than that of poor and minority students. In order to link the strategies discussed and learned in class, preservice teachers completed field experiences in public housing neighborhoods. It was found that the two components together, the course and field experiences, had a monumental impact on the participants. In contrast, preservice teachers who did not complete either of the components or did not complete them simultaneously did not show gains. Researchers concluded that the course served as a venue for students to make meaningful interpretation of their tutoring experiences.

It would seem that a didactic pedagogical format would strengthen teacher preparation programs. However, there is inconclusive data to support this assumption because there is limited research on how preservice teachers transfer knowledge from the collegiate curriculum into classroom practice. Research that extends beyond single-site

studies and focuses on long-term effects is critical for the education field. When there is an in-depth examination of the threads that interweave teacher preparation -- the growth of knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teacher candidates, teachers' performance, and their students' learning -- there will be data to lead to understanding some of the critical issues of teacher preparation (Hollins & Guzman, 2005).

Sleeter (1989) conducted a survey of 456 teachers certified in Wisconsin to determine the extent to which they utilized elements of multicultural education in their teaching. While findings indicated that teachers were more likely to utilize multicultural content when their students were from minority or low-income backgrounds, it was unclear whether they had grown enough to become strong teachers in diverse settings. Murtadha-Watts (1998) noted:

> The perspectives of the preservice teachers in this pilot program, most of whom will (regrettably) never get opportunities early in their teaching studies to question and challenge their own tightly held cultural assumptions, are commonplace. What will happen if the increasing numbers of teachers have no idea about what they are doing culturally, who they are working with and what the student's circumstances are? Will we continue this cycle? Does the cycle of culturally incompetent teachers continue, or can teacher educators provide other opportunities for culturally responsive teaching? (p. 100)

Segregated approach. The segregated approach to cultural diversity in teacher education involves diversity as a subtopic or an add-on to a regular teacher education program in one or more courses or field experiences, while the other courses remain untouched by issues of diversity (Zeichner, 1996). Gay (1986) found that scholars who

have assessed the work of teacher education programs have indicated a clear preference

for the integrated approach, but the segregated approach is clearly dominant in U.S.

teacher education programs (Grant & Sleeter, 1985). Sleeter (1988), after conducting an

analysis of coursework in multicultural education in Wisconsin teacher education

institutions, stated,

> Including a relatively small amount of multicultural education training in
>
> students' preservice program does not have much impact on what they do. It may
>
> give them a greater repertoire of teaching strategies to use with culturally diverse
>
> students, and it may alert them to the importance of maintaining high
>
> expectations. For significant reform of teaching to occur however, this
>
> intervention alone is insufficient. (p. 29)

There has been notable progress in cultural diversity teacher preparation since

NCATE first included multicultural education in its certification standards in 1978;

however, there are important needs that have not been sufficiently addressed (Gay, 2010).

Given that multicultural education is most beneficial to students when integrated

into the curriculum, providing preservice teachers with the ideology of cultural

responsiveness is an example of how teacher education programs can continue to

emphasize the importance of developing teachers who are prepared for diverse student

populations. The following section examines a critical component of a successful

multicultural teacher education program, field experiences.

Field Experience

Field experiences can be pivotal in preservice teachers' opportunity to teach

children different from themselves. School-based field experiences are common for

students in traditional preparation programs. Students are able to observe effective teaching strategies, construct lesson plans, implement teaching and learning strategies, and develop their own personal philosophies of education. Strong supervision by well-trained teachers and university faculty, as well as the prospective teachers' knowledge of subject matter and basic understanding of pedagogy prior to student teaching, are characteristics of high-quality field experiences. NCATE's fourth standard, diversity (section 4d), reads as follows:

> Extensive and substantive field experiences and clinical practices for both conventional and distance learning programs are designed to encourage candidates to interact with exceptional students and students from the broad range of diverse groups. The experiences help candidates confront issues of diversity that affect teaching and student learning and develop strategies for improving student learning and candidates' effectiveness as teachers. (2008, p. 36)

Teachers have identified field experience as an indispensable element of their teacher preparation programs (Burant & Kirby, 2005). The various descriptive studies in *Eight Questions on Teacher Preparation: What Does the Research Say?* support the claim that solid field experience can have an influence on prospective teachers, and the influence is most often expressed in terms of changes in beliefs and attitudes (Allen, 2003). Cole, Knowles, and Presswood (1994) stated that the field experience component of teacher preparation programs can be the most valuable part of development, but only if students allow it to be a vehicle to refocus their thinking about becoming teachers.

In a research study conducted by Fleener (1998) of approximately 2,000 elementary teachers, findings indicated that the longevity of teachers was related to the

amount of field experiences they acquired as teacher candidates. After 3 years of teaching, only 4.8% of these who were from field-based programs had left the profession, in comparison to 12% of the teachers who had completed more traditional programs.

The old paradigm of field experiences has been for preservice teachers to strictly apply techniques in classroom-based settings they have learned in methods courses; however, research has demonstrated that field experiences are pivotal moments for teacher learning. Although teacher educators understand the merit of field experiences being included in the collegiate curriculum, often the critical time that students spend in classrooms fails to have the same impact as a course held at a school site with a clinical curriculum (Turney, Eltis, Fowler, & Wright, 1985). An array of studies have displayed the hurdles of preservice teacher learning that arise as a result of the traditional, unstructured, and haphazardly-applied model of field experience (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Griffin, 1983; Stones & Morris, 1977; Zeichner, 1996).

Although the structure of field experience is extremely important, careful monitoring of student practices and application is also vital to the success of teacher candidates. Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005) and Zeichner and Conklin (2005) found that in programs where field experiences are strategically aligned with coursework and carefully monitored, teacher educators are more effective in preparing teachers to apply rigorous teaching practices.

Merely adding more hours to the existing structures of field experiences will not automatically constitute better programs. Quality experiences that focus on children, parents, and families will culminate in thoughtful reflection (Burant & Kirby, 2005). Clinical experiences outside of individual classrooms that are systematically situated

throughout communities give future teachers needed opportunities that challenge assumptions and beliefs.

The characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher are in alignment with the needs of students to promote their academic and social success. The infused model of multicultural education with field experiences has been shown to impact the attitudes and dispositions of preservice teachers. Using this information, teacher educators can carefully design programs to provide a framework for effective models of teacher preparation programs for urban schools.

Effective Models of Teacher Preparation for Urban Schools

Based on over 30 years of experience with programs to prepare urban teachers, Haberman (as cited in Claycomb, 2000) emphasized,

> Successful programs are those that study the relationship of language and culture to learning; emphasize the relationship between learning at school and at home; develop informed sensitivity among candidates to diversity; require prolonged community experience with various cultural groups; place students in diverse, urban schools for their student teaching; and teach the dynamics of prejudice, social oppression, and economic inequity. (p. 19)

Several effective models exist for preparing preservice teachers to teach in urban schools. A model that appears to support one of Haberman's claims for preparing teachers for urban settings is to place students in diverse, urban schools for their student teaching. One way this is implemented is through the model of the university-school partnership of professional development schools (PDSs).

PDSs are schools that have partnerships with universities to provide a structured clinical foundation and setting for teacher candidates. The idea of school-university partnerships was implemented with a recommendation from the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986). The Carnegie report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (1986), suggested that a clinical school linked with university faculty was the optimal learning environment for teacher candidates. In turn, the Holmes Group recommended the establishment of PDSs (Burstein, Kretschmer, Smith, & Gudoski, 1999).

For the past 20 years, variations of this model have been used to improve the quality of teacher preparation. Studies conducted by Castle, Fox, and Souder (2006) and Ridley, Hurwitz, Hackett, and Miller (2005) concluded that PDS candidates are instructionally prepared for their first year of teaching. This is attributed to the greater number of hours spent by these candidates in the classroom during their teacher preparation program and the frequency of clinical supervision received by the PDS candidates.

Both studies concurred that having more feedback was responsible for the accelerated progress of the development of the PDS-prepared teacher. Therefore, Castle et al. (2006) stated it is possible that PDS graduates might affect student learning sooner (that is, perhaps in their first year of teaching) or to a greater extent than non-PDS graduates. In addition, more hours spent in the internship resulted in more experiences with classroom management, allowing candidates to perfect specific management techniques and provide more time for instruction.

Teacher educators continue to make modifications to preparation programs based on revised NCATE standards and national initiatives prompted by the federal government. In an effort to ensure that teachers are culturally responsive and well-equipped to work with diverse populations, programs that employ multicultural education and field experiences appear to have a greater impact on the dispositions of teacher candidates.

Section IV: Critiques of Teacher Education Programs

Critiques of teacher education programs come from inside as well as outside the realm of teacher education. Educators and other professionals agree that there is a growing problem across the United States regarding teacher education graduates. Some critiques are intended to strengthen teaching and university-based teacher preparation programs; however, others are intended to bring an ultimate end to university-based preparation (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). This immense crisis can be simplified into a brief generalization: upon leaving college, teachers are underprepared to meet the many differing needs of today's diverse student body (Kent, 2005).

Colleges of education throughout the nation play a vital role in producing effective teachers who will positively impact the lives of all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, or language. Shen (1999) stated that the school of education is not an isolated entity, that the public expects the school of education to perform its most important job of educating school educators. As the number of minority students enrolled in public schools increases, the burning question is whether or not it is possible for teachers to provide a quality education to students who do not look like themselves or share their sociocultural or economic backgrounds.

Though no single institution should be held solely responsible for this problem, certainly higher education has a part in it (Haberman, as cited in Kent, 2005). As Haberman stated:

> The second cause for the continuous teacher turnover is the failed system of traditional teacher preparation. If traditional teacher education were working rather than grinding out failures/quitters and those who never take jobs there would be no need to hire 2.2 million teachers between 2000 and 2010. Universities must take responsibility and respond to this problem before any more students suffer instructionally. (p. 343)

The following section examined three critiques of teacher preparation. Modification to the first two areas could potentially improve teacher preparation programs. The final critique, alternate routes, is gaining significant ground in the education field and could have a major impact on how traditional undergraduate programs are executed.

Selection Process

Ladson-Billings (2000) argued the struggle in teacher preparation begins in the admission process. In discovering ways in which teachers can be better prepared for urban settings, a pivotal point includes the process by which candidates are selected into preparation programs. Critics of current selection practices and procedures question the instruments used to measure academic potential (e.g., GPA, SAT and ACT, and teacher tests) and personal characteristics of teacher candidates (e.g., cultural sensitivity) and whether these admission criteria can truly predict their success and longevity in the classroom (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). Haberman (1994) and Haberman and Post (1992)

agreed that a more rigorous selection process should be implemented for the purposeful selection of teacher candidates who will view the poor, minorities, and urban schools with a less negative attitude.

In addition, Haberman (2005) proposed that the methods currently in use by colleges and universities to select candidates should be redesigned. First, urban schools should choose candidates based on their own selection procedures. Next, the candidates who are identified by the district as meeting designated criteria should be guaranteed a position and then admitted into programs of preparation. The selection procedure should include interviews of applicants that examine their ideology, followed by observations of candidates interacting with youth.

Haberman (1989) contended that it is impossible to produce better teachers without having better people selected into programs. Another critique of teacher education which mirrors concerns within the selection process is the argument that traditional preparation programs are restricted by bureaucracy and that most program requirements need to be eliminated (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001).

While exploring critical elements of a traditional 4-year teacher preparation program in relation to preparation for teaching in urban schools, it is necessary to examine the faculties that make up schools of education. As Obidah and Howard (2005) queried, do teacher educators truly understand the task of training preservice teachers to instruct and nurture students in contexts where the teachers lack experience and background knowledge? Who are these professors and scholars who have accepted the role of preparing future educators?

Teacher Educators

The teacher education faculty is currently a stable lot: largely tenured associate professor or full professor, White, male, and place-bound (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1999). While steady growth has occurred in the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population, college faculties have failed to diversify. Despite the efforts of many colleges and universities, racial and ethnic minority groups make up only 13.8 % of the total faculty nationwide (Turner, 2002). These statistics indicate there is little chance that the professors training future teachers are likely to have had experiences with students from diverse backgrounds.

In contrast, an ideal teacher educator, according to Ducharme and Ducharme (1999), is a female minority in her mid-30s, tenured as an associate professor, who stays abreast of the current trends in K-12 education by spending time at a local school each week working with parents and students. She has traveled to other countries, and her name can be found as the author or co-author of countless articles.

Is it possible for teacher educators, who have very little, if any, experience with the harsh realities of children in poverty, to prepare future teachers to effectively teach these students? It is imperative that teacher educators challenge their own preconceived ideas, biases, and assumptions concerning minorities and those of lower socioeconomic status. Discrepancies among the demographics of students, teachers, and teacher educators should serve as a notice to all members of the education community that change is needed (Grant & Secada, 1990).

Teacher educators face many dilemmas in preparing preservice teachers to address the racial, cultural, and socioeconomic differences between themselves and their

students. These issues have major ramifications for efforts to effectively train teachers who can be confident of their ability to balance the social and academic well-being of their students (Obidah & Howard, 2005). It is clear that the differences between teachers and students stemming from race and culture contribute to the ways in which teachers view disruptive behavior, as well as the teachers' perceptions of their own ability to meet the needs of these students. Teacher education classes could be the only place where future teachers can reflect on their beliefs and practices. Ladson-Billings (2005) stated:

> The point of creating a more diverse teaching force and a more diverse set of teacher educators is to ensure that all students, including White students, experience a more accurate picture of what it means to live and work in a multicultural and democratic society. (p. 231)

In research-oriented universities, where recognition can be sparse for faculty in teacher education, there is a heightened reliance on clinical faculty and graduate students, as a result of tenure-track faculty choosing not to participate in clinical experiences (Bullough, Hobbs, Kauchak, Crow, & Stokes, 1997; Goodlad, 1994). Even though clinical faculty and graduate students bring a wealth of knowledge into college- and university-based teacher education programs, particularly their recency in the classroom, the necessary changes in teacher education cannot be realized without tenure-track faculty being more fully involved (Zeichner, 2010). College administrators and senior tenured faculty are called on to establish a climate where faculty will be recognized for their assistance in developing and maintaining superior teacher education programs (Zeichner, 2010).

While there is a movement to strengthen teacher preparation, the number of programs that offer alternate pathways for teacher preparation is also growing.

Alternate Route Programs

Darling-Hammond (2010) argued that traditional teacher preparation programs – those that include formal preparation, licensure, certification, and accreditation – have been forced to compete with marketing ventures that provide access to the teaching profession without expectations for sufficient training; however, alternate route programs have become viable contenders to the traditional paths of teacher preparation. Alternative routes to teacher certification are routes defined by the state through which an individual with a bachelor's degree can obtain certification to teach without returning to a campus-based teacher education program (National Center on Alternative Certification, 2010).

With the presence of these alternative routes to obtain the necessary credentials to teach within a condensed timeframe, traditional programs must be able to ensure students that the time spent in obtaining an undergraduate degree in the field of education is conducive to developing the skills of an effective teacher. The following two alternative route programs have gained national recognition and have become entitled to funding through the HEOA and NCLB.

Teach for America (TFA). Founded by Wendy Kopp and established as a non-profit organization in 1990, TFA seeks to eliminate educational inequity in America by enlisting the nation's most promising future leaders in the effort (TFA, 2008). This program recruits professionals and college graduates to become corps members to teach for 2 years in low income and high poverty schools. Since its inception almost 20 years

ago, TFA has seen continued growth. In 2009, the program accepted a record 35,000 applications for 4,100 available positions (TFA, 2009).

Teacher certification is not a requirement for admittance into TFA; however, alternative certification is available through coursework as recruits complete the program. Through a 5-week summer institute, corps members are trained to undertake the various responsibilities of classroom teachers. Upon completion of the summer institute and being hired within a school district, corps members are full faculty members and receive the standard benefits and salary of their school districts. In addition, these teachers receive education vouchers through AmeriCorps, which can be used to eliminate past education debt or to offset the costs associated with future educational expenses.

Title VIII, Sec. 806, of the HEOA authorizes TFA and supports its efforts to provide highly qualified teachers for high-need schools. TFA is required to provide an annual report on the number and quality of candidates it recruits, including an external evaluation of how satisfied local education agencies are with teachers from the TFA program. In the study "Does Teacher Preparation Matter? Evidence about Teacher Certification, Teach for America, and Teacher Effectiveness," Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig (2005) examined the link between student achievement data and teacher certification status, experience, and degree levels. Using a series of regression analyses over a 6-year period to look at student achievement gains of fourth and fifth graders, the researchers found that certified teachers consistently produce stronger learning gains than uncertified teachers. The data set allowed for the study to tackle the overarching question of TFA candidates' effectiveness versus certified teachers' effectiveness. According to the findings, there were no areas where uncertified

TFA teachers performed as well as standard certified teachers. The researchers further

contended that several years after receiving certification, TFA recruits had similar

success rates to other certified teachers with regard to supporting student academic gains.

*Transition to Teaching Program (TTP).*TTP is an alternative route to certification

that supports the recruitment and retention of highly-qualified mid-career professionals.

This effort to solicit individuals to teach in high-need schools includes qualified

paraprofessionals and recent college graduates who did not obtain degrees in the area of

education. According to Chapter B, section 2311 of PL 107-110, the NCLB of 2001, the

TTP program is intended to

> encourage the development and expansion of alternative routes to certification
>
> under State-approved programs that enable individuals to be eligible for teacher
>
> certification within a reduced period of time, relying on the experience, expertise,
>
> and academic qualifications of an individual, or other factors in lieu of traditional
>
> course work in the field of education. (NCLB, 2001 Chapter B, section 2311)

The program provides 5-year grants to state and local educational agencies, for-

profit organizations, non-profit organizations, or institutions of higher education

collaborating with state or local educational agencies to create and implement thorough

and detailed approaches to train, place, and support teacher candidates, all of whom have

been recruited into their programs. Grantees must ensure that the programs meet relevant

state certification or licensing requirements and that program participants are placed to

teach in high-need schools and districts. The candidates are provided with additional

support services as they commit to serve in these placements for at least 3 years (NCLB,

2001 Chapter B, section 2314). In 2009, The U.S. Department of Education awarded

grants totaling approximately $43 million to 14 programs that received initial funding and to 73 programs that were eligible for continued funding (U.S. DOE, 2010).

In a report published in 2000 by the National Commission on Teaching and America's future, *Solving the Dilemmas of Teacher Supply, Demand, and Standard*, Darling-Hammond found that twice as many teachers who had been trained in alternate route programs leave the profession by their third year of teaching, compared to those trained in traditional programs.

While there has been much research in the area of teacher education, data is inconclusive because researchers generally do not follow teachers into the classroom to measure their classroom performance against what they have been taught and have experienced while completing teacher preparation programs. The present study is unique because it allowed novice teachers to reflect on the challenges they face daily with students in urban settings, and to evaluate the specific areas of teacher education programs that prepared them for these challenges. Placing blame on colleges of education, the federal government, or parents will not solve the problems that confront teacher education. All of these entities must work together to accomplish this set of comprehensive reforms (Darling Hammond, 2010).

<div align="center">Chapter Summary</div>

This chapter was a review of literature pertinent to this study, including information on the challenges of children in poverty, the challenges of White middle-class teachers in urban schools, teacher preparation, and critiques of teacher education.

Economic disparity can have a negative impact on a child's social, physical, and emotional growth. This impact can result in poor students to experience academic

challenges that widen the achievement gap between race and class. It is common for White middle-class teachers to have limited experience with issues that economically disadvantaged students face on a routine basis. Teachers' prior attitudes and beliefs regarding diversity have been influenced by personal experiences and society. These beliefs potentially lead to low expectations of students in poverty.

Efforts at the national, state, and local level have been implemented to effectively prepare teacher candidates to provide instruction to students form underserved populations. These efforts include the mandates of NCLB, the professional standards of NCATE, and the collaboration of colleges and universities with local school districts. Opponents and proponents of traditional teacher education programs view the selection process of candidates for admission into teacher education, the role of teacher educators, and alternate route programs as pivotal points in reforming how teacher candidates are prepared to teach in urban settings. As pointed out in the literature, the need to improve teacher education program is great – as well as critical – if all children are to be served effectively and with equity.

In an effort to contribute to the improvement of teacher education programs, the purpose of the present study was to identify strategies and techniques that novice teachers (teachers in their first 2 to 4 years of teaching) who completed a traditional teacher preparation program reported as having been effective in preparing them to work with students in urban settings. In addition, the participating novice teachers described what skills, information, or experiences they perceived to have been ineffective or missing in the preparation programs they completed. Chapter Three presents the methodology for the study.

CHAPTER THREE

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Relevant theoretical and research literature supporting the study was reviewed in the last chapter. This chapter will present information regarding the purpose and design of the study and the corresponding research questions used to conduct the study. In addition, data sources and methodology used to collect and analyze the data will be described.

Statement of the Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of novice teachers and identify strategies and techniques that novice elementary teachers (teachers in their first 2 to 4 years of teaching) who completed a traditional teacher preparation program reported as having been effective in preparing them to work with students in urban settings. In addition, the participating novice teachers were asked what coursework or experiences they perceived to have been ineffective or missing in the preparation programs they completed. The current study addressed the following research questions:

1. What coursework and/or experiences did novice elementary educators teaching in urban schools view as effective from their teacher preparation programs, specifically in relation to teaching in an urban school?

2. What did novice elementary educators teaching in urban schools view as ineffective or missing components of their teacher preparation programs, specifically in relation to teaching in an urban school?

3. What specific recommendations did novice elementary educators have to more effectively prepare educators to teach in urban schools?

<div align="center">Setting</div>

Duval County Schools in Jacksonville is the 19th largest school district in the nation and the city's second-largest employer with nearly 15,000 employees. At the time of the study, the school district included 105 elementary schools (K-5th grade), 28 middle schools (6th-8th grade), 17 high schools (9th-12th grade), 2 academies of technology, 3 exceptional student centers, and 4 alternative schools. Since then, the district has added 3 K-8 schools. Duval County Schools served approximately 123,200 students.

Students in the district are diverse in racial and ethnic origin: 43.6% are White, 42.7% are Black, 6.2% are Hispanic, and 7.6% are Asian or of other ethnicities (Duval County Public Schools, 2009). According to the Florida Department of Education September 2009 Education Information and Accountability Services Data Report, approximately 45.7% of the district's students are eligible for free and reduced lunch programs; many of these students attend 38 urban schools in the district, none of which are high schools – 4 are middle schools and 34 are elementary schools. For purposes of the study, an urban school was defined as a school having a minimum of 70% of the students eligible for the free and reduced lunch rate.

The city of Jacksonville is the largest inland city area in Florida. Located on the east coast of Florida, it is sometimes referred to as part of South Georgia. The racial

composition consists of 65% White and 29% African American, and the male and female gender percentages are nearly equally divided. Residents between the ages of 18 and 64 comprise 56 % of the population, residents between the ages of 0 and 17 comprise 34%, and residents 65 and older comprise 10% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Jacksonville is divided into 6 major sections: Arlington, Mandarin, Southside, Northside, Westside, and Downtown. The 6 areas of this metropolitan city are comprised of a variety of settings that include rural areas, beaches, suburbs, and the urban core.

I chose to focus solely on elementary schools based on the following personal experiences and area of expertise: my completion of a traditional 4-year teacher education program with a major in elementary education, my experiences as a classroom teacher at the elementary level, and my service as a clinical instructor at a local university where a majority of the preservice teachers I supervised were focused on grades K through 6. My own experiences enabled me to better understand and relate to participants' points of view from the perspective of a classroom teacher, while also challenging me to reflect on my practices as a teacher educator.

<center>Initial Research Design</center>

Initially, the study was to employ a qualitative research methodology using focus groups and individual interviews to identify novice teachers' perceptions of their preparation for teaching in urban schools. Using this methodology, 16 elementary school educators who had taught in an urban setting for 2 to 3 years were to be invited to participate in 2 focus groups, each made up of 8 participants. These focus groups were to be conducted within a 1-month period of each other. Following the focus groups, each

participant was to be interviewed individually using semi-structured interview methodology (Creswell, 2002).

The participants for this study were to be teachers currently employed in 1 of the 34 urban elementary schools. Elementary schools would be stratified based on assigned letter grades from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) so that an equal number of teachers from each school type would be selected and invited to participate. It was my intent to draw participants at random from each of the FCAT grade categories of A, B, C, D, and F schools. To have a sample that would represent each school grade, there would be 4 teachers from the following 4 categories: the A and B elementary schools, the C schools, the D schools, and the F schools. Eligibility lists were to be created using data from the stratified list so that a total of 4 teachers from each of the 4 categories would be invited to participate. In addition, the group was to be stratified by race and gender. Each focus group would then have consisted of 8 participants including 1 African American male, 2 African American females, 4 Caucasian females, and 1 Caucasian male. This selection process was intended to ensure a balance of teachers from each ethnicity and gender category as well as representation of schools at all FCAT grade categories. I had planned to conduct a semi-structured individual interview with each participant.

Implementation of the initial design proved to be challenging when I began the selection process and scheduling of focus groups and interviews with participants. Teachers were not as eager to volunteer for the study as I had anticipated, and the teachers who agreed to participate had a variety of scheduling issues. Due to these unexpected circumstances, I modified the initial design of the study.

Implemented Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design using focus groups and individual interviews to identify novice teachers' perceptions of their preparation for teaching in urban schools. The design based the overall findings on the views and behaviors of those targeted, assuming them to be typical of the whole group (Creswell, 2002).

Participants were 17 elementary school educators teaching in an urban setting for a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 4 years who were invited to participate in focus groups, each made up of a varied number of participants. Following the focus groups, each participant was interviewed individually by me or responded to interview questions via email. These techniques permitted the in-depth exploration of the experience of individuals, which often yields new insights and perspectives that would be difficult to capture using other research methods (Helms, 2010).

The study began in June of 2008 after approval from DCPS Department of Instructional Research and Accountability and the University of North Florida Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A for the DCPS approval form and Appendix B for the UNF IRB approval form). I contacted the Title I office of DCPS and was able to verify through a district economic survey the elementary schools that had a free or reduced lunch rate of 70% or more. This established criterion is used at a local university to identify urban schools for student field experiences.

After confirming a school's eligibility for the study, I contacted Employee Support Services, a division of DCPS Human Resources, and requested a list of teachers hired in 2005 who at the time of the study taught at 1 of the 34 urban elementary schools

identified as eligible for the study. This database targeting teachers hired in 2005 identified teachers who met the requirement pertaining to the number of years of teaching experience. The list contained the following components: employee name, race, gender, hire date, degree status, school of employment, and the percentage of students at the school receiving free or reduced lunch. The list secured from Employee Support Services identified a total of 282 teachers with 2 to 3 years of teaching experience and taught at one of the eligible schools.

Employees were identified by a number (1-282) and the website www.randomizer.org was used to provide a stratified random sample of the data. The website was used four times during the study to select potential participants. Of the 282 eligible participants, a total of 140 either could not be contacted via school email or previously had been enrolled in a course taught by me at the University of North Florida. Teachers who were my former students could possibly withhold valuable information in an effort to protect my feelings or to not appear controversial. Of the remaining 142 eligible participants, approximately 15% of those teachers were deemed not eligible to participate in the study because they had not earned an undergraduate degree in elementary education via a traditional teacher preparation program.

To ensure that there was a representative sample of teachers in the study, gender and race were taken into account when identifying participants. School grades designated by the FLDOE based on the Florida Comprehension and Assessment Test (FCAT) grades for the 2006-2007 school year were used to group schools for the study (see Table 1).

Table 1

Comparison of FCAT Grade of Schools Represented in the Study Sample Versus DCPS

Urban Elementary Schools

Overall

GROUP	A	B	C	D	F
DCPS Urban Elementary Schools (Categorized by 2007 FCAT grade)	1	6	18	5	4
DCPS Urban Elementary schools with participants in the study (Categorized by 2007 FCAT grade)	0	4	10	2	1

The schools included in the study were well distributed across FCAT school grades, as

indicated in Table 1.

Data Collection

Data were collected from June 2008 through June 2009 via focus groups and

individual interviews. All focus groups were conducted face-to-face, and individual

interviews were conducted face-to-face and via email. Participants were initially

contacted via email (see Appendix C for the recruitment email), with a telephone follow-

up invitation to participate in the study. Beyond the initial email and two telephone calls,

additional attempts were not made to invite participants to join the study. Various

challenges occurred while attempting to secure eligible participants for the study, which

will be discussed in the section on limitations of the study.

Focus Groups

The 17 participants selected for this study were in their 2nd to 4th year of teaching

and taught at 1 of the 34 urban elementary schools identified as eligible for the study.

Those agreeing to participate in the research study received an initial email describing the

purpose of study and were provided the location and time of the focus group. Prior to the

start of focus groups and individual interviews, participants were given informed consent

documents (see Appendix D and Appendix E) explaining the extent of participation and

providing assurances of confidentiality and informing them of their right to withdraw at

any time without penalty and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were

informed that the entire focus group session would be recorded and later transcribed

verbatim for research analysis purposes. They were also informed they had the right to

ask that something not be recorded and upon their request, the recording would be

temporarily stopped and resumed upon their approval.

Thirteen of the 17 participants participated in 4 focus groups comprised of 2 to 4

people, meeting at a public restaurant in a reserved room. Of those 13, 7 participated in

face-to-face follow-up interviews and 6 sent responses to the follow-up interview

questions electronically via email. Two participants were interviewed using focus group

probes and interview questions and probes. The remaining 2 teachers were interviewed

using focus group probes with email responses to interview questions (see Table 2). In

addition, due to the schedules of 3 participants and a visual impairment of another that

limited driving capacity, 2 participants were interviewed at their school sites in a

classroom or conference room, and the other 2 were interviewed in the private meeting

room.

Table 2

Participant Focus Group/Individual Interview Methods of Delivery and Responses

Identified Group	Number
Participated in focus groups and personal interviews	7
Participated in focus groups and emailed responses to interview questions	6
Interviewed using focus group probes and interview questions and probes	2
Interviewed using focus group probes with emailed responses to interview questions	2

Appointments for all focus group meetings and individual interviews were confirmed by telephone. It appeared all participants were eager to be involved in the study; they seemed to take pride that they had been selected to discuss such an important matter – one to which they committed themselves daily. This was an opportunity for their voices to be heard and for the world to know that their responsibility of educating children in an urban setting was not one that came without sacrifice and commitment.

The setting for several of the focus group meetings was a small cafe in the San Marco area of Jacksonville, Florida, in a private reserved conference room. Only the participant(s) and I were in the room during the meetings. Prior to the focus group meetings, I was able to have casual conversation with the participant. The teachers seemed pleasantly surprised to learn that I was a former elementary school teacher. I consider myself an extrovert and was able to use non-verbal cues and my sense of humor to establish a non-threatening climate.

Each teacher was assigned a place card with a number used to identify him or her. The numbers were displayed on placards to be referred to during the

discussion to assist each participant in remembering his or her assigned number

when referring to other participants.

The focus groups began with introductions, clarification of the purpose of the

study, and references to the letter sent to potential participants. The average length of the

focus group meetings was 1 hour each (see Appendix F for Interview Questions).

Individual Interviews

It was my original intent to interview each participant face-to-face after the focus

group meeting. Due to scheduling conflicts, 8 of the 17 individual interviews were

replaced by written responses to the interview questions that the participants sent to me

electronically via email (see Table 2). Respondents' answers to the questions were

concise and focused on the topic about which they had been asked. The maximum length

of the individual written responses was 2 pages.

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 9 of the 17

participants (see Appendix F for the interview questions). The 9 individual face-to-face

interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes. I asked 8 questions based upon the data

obtained during the focus group interviews. Using the semi-structured interview method

enabled me to pursue additional areas of concern that emerged during the participants'

responses to the initial interview questions, thus providing additional depth to the data

obtained.

Participants

Of the participants, approximately 94% were female and 6% were male; 65% were White, 29% were Black, and 6% were Hispanic (see Table 3). These demographics are similar to the statistics from the Florida Department of Education March 2009 Education Information and Accountability Services Data Report, which indicated that in fall 2008, approximately 90% of teachers in DCPS elementary schools were female and 10% were male; 73% were White, 23% were African American, and 2.5% were Hispanic.

Table 3

Description of Participants

Participant (Pseudonym)	Race	Gender	Years of Experience	2007 FCAT Grade	Elementary School (Pseudonym)
Kelsey	W	F	3	C	Alachua
Donna	W	F	2	B	Baker
Mona	B	F	2	C	Calhoun
Christian	W	F	3	B	Desoto
Connie	W	F	3	B	Desoto
Kennedy	W	F	2	F	Escambia
Annie	W	F	4	D	Flagler
Libby	W	F	3	C	Alachua
Shana	W	F	4	C	Gadsden
Kasey	W	F	2	C	Calhoun
Kelby	W	F	3	C	Hamilton
Michelle	B	F	3	C	Indian River
Amanda	H	F	4	D	Jackson
Corrine	B	F	3	C	Alachua
Carly	B	F	3	C	Lafayette
Elise	B	F	3	C	Madison
Tony	W	M	4	B	Nassau

Data Analysis

All sessions were audio recorded by me and later, transcribed verbatim by a transcriptionist. I analyzed the data using pattern coding to guide the identification and coding of data to identify central constructs and themes in the data (Fetterman, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1998). Using a stage approach to analysis, coding was initially theory-driven using various aspects of social-cultural theories (Coburn, 2001; Cohen-Vogel & Ingel, 2007; Cohen-Vogel & Osborne-Lampkin, 2007). At this first stage of analysis, I developed descriptive codes and searched the data for the pre-identified codes. Descriptive codes at the initial stage of the coding process included "social class" and "cultural backgrounds." Additional codes (i.e., subcategories) and themes were also identified within the initial codes. For example, subcategories for "cultural background" included (middle-class experiences) and (strong family support).

Qualitative analysis is typically inductive when deciphering potential categories, patterns, and themes (Patton, 2002). Strauss and Corbin (1998) referred to this as "open coding" to emphasize the importance of the researcher being open to the data. Subsequent to analyzing the data using pre-identified codes, I conducted a more in-depth analysis using "open coding". At this second stage of analysis, additional codes and themes were identified in the data, as well as new perspectives on previously identified themes and issues. Some of these codes included "parental involvement," and "perceptions of poverty." At this stage of the analysis, I also looked for patterns and connections both within and between the categories and themes (Patton, 2002). Finally, a list of significant statements was compiled for each participant, showing evidence of how

responses were intertwined with established themes and patterns. The data were also analyzed across participants.

Timeline

The timeline for the study consisted of a successful proposal defense in August 2007 followed by Institutional Review Board approval on June 3, 2008, and approval from the DCPS Department of Instructional Research. The district economic survey that verified schools' free- and reduced-lunch percentages was received from DCPS Title I office in September 2007, and teacher eligibility lists from Employee Support Services were received in June 2008. The participant selection process using www.randomizer.org was initiated in June 2008 and throughout the study. Initial contact requests to eligible participants began in June 2008 and ceased in May 2009. The focus groups and individual interviews were held between July 2008 and June 2009.

Researcher's Role

This study stemmed from a personal, lifelong passion and desire to be a teacher able to enhance the academic performance of any child. After becoming a fourth grade teacher and finally realizing this dream, I was afforded the awesome responsibility of becoming a mentor for beginning teachers. As a servant leader, one who leads by primarily serving others (Spears, 1996), I sought to obtain a position that would allow me to use my knowledge and experience to help others and began working at a local university. Thus began my journey not only to help novice teachers, but also to provide assistance to students who were pursuing degrees in educational programs.

Having never attended a public school prior to collegiate studies, my childhood education took place in a predominantly White private school rooted in Southern Baptist

ideology on the west side of Jacksonville. My White middle-class friends had little or no experience with people of different economic backgrounds or minorities. For most of these friends, I was the only Black person they knew. They lavished me with compliments such as, "You don't act Black" and "You don't look Black." These women mirror those who teach today. Therefore, the question arose: How can people similar to my childhood friends connect to people who are different from them?

A significant focus of the study centered on how teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding poverty can lead to a disconnect between teachers and urban students. It is my belief that teacher education programs can act as a powerful force in dismantling the barriers that prevent teachers and students from establishing relationships that foster student achievement.

<center>Chapter Summary</center>

Chapter Three outlined the methodology for this study. This qualitative study used focus groups and individual interviews to investigate the participants' thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences. These qualitative methods were appropriate for inquiring about the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their preparation through a traditional teacher program for teaching in urban schools. The next chapter reports the study's findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The previous chapter provided the research questions, described the research design, and clarified data collection and analysis from focus groups and individual interviews. This chapter will present the study's findings.

The findings in this chapter are divided into three major sections that describe the participants and address the perspective of poverty and effective teacher preparation programs through the lenses of the participants based on the three research questions stated in the methodology. The first section will provide commonalities of the 17 participants and focus on the socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants and provide insight into their perceptions of urban environments. During the focus groups and individual interviews, I became increasingly aware that the participants' backgrounds and personal experiences had a vital impact on the their perceptions of urban environments and their undergraduate teacher preparation programs. The second section will present the coursework and/or experiences that participants of the study viewed as effective from their teacher preparation program in preparing them for teaching in an urban environment. In addition, this section will discuss areas of concern expressed by the participants as challenges experienced during their teacher preparation program: a feeling of disconnect between collegiate coursework and current educational trends, problems with the collegiate curriculum, the need for more field experiences, and students who are unable to perform academically on grade level. This section is a key to unlocking the mystery of how educators can provide children in poverty with equal access to learning.

The third section will examine responses regarding preparedness to teach in an urban setting and identify the recommendations made by the participants to more effectively prepare educators to teach in urban schools.

As findings of the research are reported, they are distinguished between findings taken from individual interviews and those from focus groups (signified by the participant's pseudonym followed by the identifiers Focus Group or Individual Interview). Two participants were asked both sets of questions during the same interview.

Section I: Novice Teachers' Socioeconomic Backgrounds, Influences, and Cultural

Experiences: Insight into Perceptions of Urban Environments

To ensure the protection of the participants' identities and the confidentiality of the data collected, the teachers were assigned a pseudonym, as were the schools where they taught. In an effort to provide a brief snapshot of the teachers, each were identified each with a pseudonym and grouped participants based on certain characteristics such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, experience in urban settings prior to teaching, and number of years of teaching experience.

Kelsey and Connie

Kelsey and Connie were the only participants who held B.S. degrees in pre-K/primary education. Both were third-year teachers who were native Floridians and shared a middle-class background. Both teachers admitted to having limited contact with people from other races or social classes. While Kelsey was optimistic concerning her future in urban schools, Connie was the only participant not truly convinced that any teacher preparation program could prepare a teacher candidate or future teacher for an

urban setting. In addition, Connie expressed that she felt guilty admitting it, but the stress from working in her current urban setting had worn her out. She had actually been granted a transfer to a suburban school in a middle-class neighborhood and was eagerly awaiting the new school year.

Donna, Kim, and Elise

Donna, Kim, and Elise graduated from the same university, each obtaining a B.S. degree in elementary education. Donna and Kim, both White females from middle-class backgrounds, were in their second year of teaching and had limited contact with people from other races or social classes. Donna was adamant that an urban environment was not the "cookie-cutter setting" that it seemed her collegiate curriculum had prepared her for. An African-American female with 3 years of teaching experience, Elise experienced interaction with diverse groups of people while attending an all-White school. Her comments reflected her overall disappointment with various aspects of her teacher preparation program. Elise referenced her role as a parent throughout the interview.

Mona and Kasey

Mona and Kasey attended the same university and completed their student internship in the same professional development school where they had been employed for 2 years. Both of these females shared the same middle-class background; however, Kasey is White and Mona is African American. Kasey had limited experiences with people from other races and social classes; however, Mona was familiar with the urban environment as a result of family members living in these settings. As a result of her principal being transferred to open a new K-8 school in Duval County, Mona was set to start the following school year at a new non-urban school.

Christian, Libby, Annie, and Shana

Christian, Annie, Libby, and Shana were not required to complete an urban field experience in their teacher education programs. They were all White females from middle-class backgrounds. Both Libby and Christian were from middle-class backgrounds and in their third year of teaching. Each had limited experiences with people from different races and social classes. Christian had taught for 1 year at an affluent school in the Midwest prior to coming to Jacksonville. When I conducted her follow-up interview, she had recently been married and spoke of the stress from teaching and the desire to try something different. In addition, at the end of the data collection phase of the study, Libby moved back to her hometown of Ohio and was attempting to secure a teaching position in a non-urban setting.

Annie and Shana were both completing their fourth year of teaching. Annie was 1 of 2 participants that held a graduate degree. Although neither participant was required to complete fieldwork in urban settings during her undergraduate program, Annie completed countless hours of fieldwork in housing projects and urban schools during her graduate program. She spoke of her middle-class family often during the interviews. Shana did not have any experiences with people of different classes or races growing up in an Amish community, which she actually referred to as a village.

Tony and Kelby

Tony and Kelby, both White and from middle-class families, were the only participants in the study who had chosen teaching as a second career. In addition, they were not required to complete any fieldwork in urban settings in their teacher preparation programs. Tony was the only male in the study and was completing his fourth year of

teaching when we met for the interview. He gained experience in urban settings by working as a substitute teacher while he was in college. Kelby petitioned her small Catholic college in Louisiana to be placed in urban settings for fieldwork, and her request was granted. Kelby was in her third year of teaching.

Michelle, Carly, Amanda, and Corrine

Michelle, Amanda, Carly, and, Corrine all defined themselves as being from lower-middle-class to poor backgrounds. Michelle, Carly and Corrine, all African-American females, were in their third year of teaching. Carly held a graduate degree in educational leadership and planned to pursue an administrative path. Although she was not required to complete any fieldwork in urban settings in her teacher preparation program, she gained experience in this area by working at a juvenile detention center. Amanda, a Hispanic female with 4 years of teaching experience, was raised in a poor farming community, and she felt her life experiences helped her to build relationships with her students. She has lived on government subsidies and paid her way through college. Growing up, her father was in the Army and the family lived in military housing. Amanda's mother is from Panama, so she was taught at an early age to appreciate what she had been given. She stated that her life did not truly begin until she became a parent and could relate to the trials of the parents of her students. Similar to Carly, she said her experience as a juvenile probation officer helped her deal with issues the children in urban schools are forced to deal with. Like Amanda, Corrine's experiences as a mother and her socioeconomic background prepared her for teaching in an urban environment. She was raised in Mississippi, and the town was actually separated by the railroad tracks

in the town, with most of the African Americans on one side of the tracks and most of the Caucasians on the other.

The participants were diverse in terms of race, but the majority shared the same middle-class social and economic backgrounds. These teachers professed to have had limited contact with people from social classes which differed from their own backgrounds. The following section will provide greater insight into how class status and various influences assisted in forming the participants' perceptions of urban environments.

Socioeconomic Backgrounds

It is highly unlikely that White or socioeconomically advantaged new teachers who find employment in urban schools will teach students with backgrounds similar to their own. The current demographic makeup of teachers and students with regard to diversity is alarming. Dembo et al. (1994) contended that future members of the teaching profession would continue to be predominantly White, female, monolingual, and from rural or suburban backgrounds with little knowledge about or understanding of those who are different from themselves. Villegas and Lucas (2002) stated a similar point:

> White teacher candidates, by and large, come from racially segregated, middle-class suburban communities and have attended predominantly White schools. As members of the dominant group in society, they have benefited from the privilege accorded to the White middle-class population. (p. xx)

Consistent with this literature, findings of the study revealed that of the 17 teachers interviewed in this study, 16 were female, 12 were White, and 15 classified themselves as having grown up in a middle-class setting. Only one teacher stated that she had grown up

in a diverse background as an African-American who attended predominantly White

schools.

Influences on Teacher Perceptions of Poverty and Urban Settings

Although they had experienced limited contact with diverse groups, being reared

in traditional middle-class lifestyles helped these participants form strong ideas about

people from socioeconomic classes different from their own. According to Piaget's

theory of constructivism, children construct meaning from their own personal experience

and establish understanding concerning issues and situations from their own perceptions;

however, self-established understanding may or may not be accurate (Ormond, 2006). In

addition, media, family, and friends have helped to mold these opinions that have been

created over a lifetime. Participants in the study described several factors that influenced

their perceptions of urban environments.

Media. Four of the 17 participants made reference to influences on their

perceptions and specifically the extent to which media shaped their perceptions about

urban environments. Christian referred to the influence of movies on her perceptions:

> Basically, my definition was based on the movies that I watched. And, you know,
>
> you picture urban settings as, what I think of as, downtown Chicago and very
>
> poor families. Children, you know, just running around mad everywhere, doing
>
> drugs. When you think about an urban area you think you don't want to go in that
>
> neighborhood, it's scary. . . . I'm going to get shot at, the little White girl; I'm
>
> going to be sticking out like a sore thumb. (Focus Group)

Two other comments provided additional evidence of the influence of the media in

developing participants' perceptions about urban environments.

I think that before I started teaching I had a very cinematic view of urban schools, or whatever. I always thought of, like, "The Concrete Jungle," in the projects. I thought inner city, as opposed to the suburbs, like Chicago, New York. Like the poverty, the ghetto, and the gangs, all that type of thing. (Michelle, Focus Group)

In agreeing with Christian, Annie (Focus Group) said, "Basically about the same, lower income, tough neighborhood, crime, a lot of homeless. Just what you see on TV and you would see, rundown houses, stuff like that."

Significance of family structure and support. Concepts taught in teacher preparation programs usually have little impact when compared with beliefs that have been formed over a lifetime (Yeo & Kanpol, 2002). When asked about their perceptions of urban environments prior to obtaining employment in this type of setting, 7 of the 17 participants expressed perceptions rooted in family structure or race. These participants overwhelmingly referenced "broken homes" or "single family homes" plagued by various aspects of poverty (e.g., unemployment, subsidized housing, and financial support). For example, Donna (Focus Group) expressed her perceptions of people from urban environments as "people not working most of the time, broken homes, broken families, living with grandparents, not having your parents even there at home. Not a lot of parent support, not a lot of family support." Another participant indicated, "I was just thinking in the city, poor environment, I was thinking like, parents didn't have, I was thinking about when I was on housing and food stamps" (Amanda, Focus Group).

The support that participants received from their families throughout their formative years was markedly different from the experiences they have encountered with the families of their students. For example, when asked how leisure or recreational

activity was spent, 13 of the 17 teachers made specific reference to how they enjoyed spending time with family members. Moreover, the participants acknowledged the role that family support potentially played in their overall success. In distinct contrast, when asked about the differences between urban and non-urban schools, 13 of the 17 teachers adamantly spoke of the lack of parental support they had encountered in urban schools. Indeed, some participants identified lack of family support as a characteristic of urban environments. Others further concluded that this lack of support was an indication of the extent to which parents cared about their children. For example, Libby stated, "In the urban areas . . . parents don't care as much. You are not going to get a real mom." Other comments included this explanation from a participant in the study.

> A serious disadvantage our children have is total lack of parent support. When they don't have parents in the home, a parent is in jail or the parents are just as disadvantaged as the children, you don't have anyone at home to check on the child, or to make sure the child is doing their work, or see what kind of problems are in the home. In my personal experiences, you have phone numbers that are disconnected constantly or there are just no phone numbers available. If you get someone on the phone, you make appointments, conferences, whatever, and no one ever shows up. You send notes home, and there's never a reply and so that also makes it so incredibly hard to move forward, especially if you have a behavior problem or behavior issue or social issue where the child is not being able to interact with the other children, [and you're not getting] . . . parent's support. You are very limited in what you can do, because the parents are a resource that the teachers need, and without that, we are even further behind,

aside from the children being disadvantaged just because of their home life. So

that is something that has been a real obstacle for me for all 3 years I've been

teaching. (Michelle, Focus Group)

Annie (Focus Group) concurred:

Just that it's not like when I was growing up, my mom was involved in everything

but now I see where I'm working that parents are barely involved. And I think

you need teachers to be prepared for the fact that parents aren't always going to

be around. I mean they'll be there when their child's in trouble or something

wrong happens against their child, but when it comes to their education they just

don't seem to have the drive and the motivation to be there for them.

One participant spoke of the challenge of changing students' ways of thinking when

parents are uninvolved:

Really with the lack of parent involvement, if their parents aren't going to read or

aren't going to enforce what we're doing at school and they're just like, "Oh,

don't worry about that," or "You don't have to do your homework," then it's hard

to really change that thinking at school. And it's not for all of our parents but the

majority. (Donna, Focus Group)

Participants also commented on the differences in urban and non-urban schools

concerning parental involvement:

The differences were the parents were more involved [in non-urban schools] . . .

dealing with things like, "Hey I called five numbers and I couldn't get in touch

with you, that is why I walked your child home today," compared to dialing the

number and, "Hey, Mrs. Wilson, it's nice to talk with you!" Parent involvement is

a biggie. (Carly, Individual Interview)

Two participants who had experiences with parental involvement in non-urban schools

shared similar comments:

Parental involvement is one of the huge things that hit me coming from a non-

urban school and going to where I'm at now. I mean, at the non-urban school

parents were in uninvited all the time and now it's, I beg and beg and beg for

parents to come in and . . . they don't come, you can't get a hold of them. Their

telephone number is – they don't have a telephone. There's no way to get a hold of

them. Dealing with parents is definitely one of the things that I've struggled with.

(Kelsey, Focus Group)

Tony (Individual Interview) said,

In the non-urban [school], the parents are always there, I didn't have to worry

about not getting a hold of them for days on end. I didn't have to worry about the

kids not having a computer, or I didn't have to worry about sending a note home

and then asking the child 4 days later, "Did your mom ever get that note?" Then I

check the book bag and there it is. The mom never checks the book bag, so the

child knows this, so the child never gave the mom the note.

Unfamiliar settings. As evidenced in their responses, the participants of the study

were overwhelmingly teaching in environments in many aspects different from those in

which they were reared. As teachers enter environments that are different from what they

are accustomed to, they bring with them their beliefs based on individual experience.

Therefore, it is not difficult to anticipate the potential challenges that will be encountered when they are faced with the unknown and unfamiliar aspects of teaching and guiding children living in poverty. Perhaps the reality is, as Christian (Focus Group), stated: "Going through the university was geared toward the average middle-class family . . . it never taught us [teachers] what to do with a child who didn't eat at night or dealing with those types of situations."

Libby's comments were unexpected and I found the following statement somewhat offensive:

I mean, the hardest part is the behavior. A lot of these students, they are not taught at home that you have to sit, you have to listen, and you have to respect your teacher. They don't know, so they don't respect you. You [teachers] need to know that coming in, you have to teach them how to behave like civilized human beings . . . . It would have definitely opened up my eyes a little bit, [being] held responsible for some of these kids you can't control.

Yet, her final statement was quite informative and seemed to echo the sentiments of the vast majority of the participants. She stated, "I guess just knowing what to expect going into it would be a little bit easier. I didn't really know what I had gotten myself into when I accepted the job" (Libby, Individual Interview).

Students' limited experiences outside of their environment. Lev Vygotsky (1962) asserted that culture is the primary factor of individual development in teaching children both how and what to think. Consistent with Vygotsky's social cognition learning model, findings of the study revealed that participants' perceptions about the value of cultural

experiences influenced their perceptions about urban settings, particularly in terms of challenges that urban students face. Kelby made the following comment:

> I think our kids are at a serious disadvantage because they do lack that
> background knowledge . . . .When you are talking to them about a logging camp,
> first of all they don't know what a log is. They don't have fireplaces, they don't
> burn logs, they don't know what timber is. Whereas a family that may have taken
> a vacation up at a cabin somewhere and would have some dialogue with their
> child, our kids rarely make it out of their neighborhood. We spend a tremendous
> amount of time building that background knowledge, adhering to a structured
> curriculum doesn't allow for the flexibility for us to take and go with those
> teachable moments and actually build that background knowledge. (Focus Group)

And Shana (Focus Group) said,

> Urban, predominately urban, kids are at a disadvantage because they don't have
> the experiences that kids that are affluent have, such as traveling; for example,
> snow, when you are reading a passage about snow, they have never experienced
> it. Even the beach, we live in Jacksonville and the beach is 20 minutes away or 30
> minutes away. A lot of them have never been to the beach because they don't
> have the transportation to get to the beach. Curriculum-wise, they can't relate to
> the text itself, they cannot even make a connection to any kind of experience they
> have, and it is very hard for them.

It is not uncommon to resist ways of life to which people are unaccustomed or to retreat from experiences from which they are not familiar. During the professional preparation of becoming a classroom teacher, it is essential that preservice teachers be

allowed the opportunities to discover and assess their personal socio-cultural beliefs. If these experiences that allow students to evaluate their beliefs are absent from their teacher preparation program, these future educators will be unable to adequately serve students from diverse backgrounds (Weiner, 1993). The following section will focus on additional aspects of the perspectives of novice educators regarding undergraduate teacher preparation for urban schools – specifically what they found effective and ineffective about their preparation programs.

Section II: Effective and Ineffective Components of Teacher Preparation Programs

It is vital that teacher educators be aware of various teaching techniques and strategies that have been recognized by novice teachers as effective and/or ineffective during their journey through collegiate teacher preparation programs. The opportunity to gain direct insight from these teachers could lead to further research and dialogue that could launch substantial change to various components of teacher preparation programs. This section will discuss the participants' overall perceptions of their teacher preparation programs.

Overall Perceptions of Preparation

Constructivist philosophy stands on the premise that learning is derived in the process of constructing meaning; it is primarily how people make sensible conclusions of their experiences (Merriam & Caffarella,1999). One cannot truly learn if meaning is not processed throughout the variety of experiences that people encounter. It is believed

throughout the various tiers of the education community that when preparing teachers to instruct in urban settings, teacher education programs miss the mark (Yeo & Kanpol, 2002).

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that their experiences did not adequately prepare them for the distinct and unique aspects of the urban environment. For example, Libby (Focus Group) explained, "Definitely not. No, my college didn't prepare me." A majority of the other participants made similar claims. Specifically, participants reported the lack of preparation for teaching in these unique settings and for teaching students with complex needs.

In terms of working in different environments, specifically urban environments, Amanda explained: "I don't really [feel prepared to teach in an urban setting], not really, because it is so different. I was in a rural farming community and this is a totally different setting" (Amanda, Focus Group).

Another participant expressed her concerns about her lack of preparation for teaching in this unique setting. She explained:

> . . . they never gave us examples of that kid that's going to push you or a kid that's going to throw a chair or a kid that's going to hit you. They never tell anything about that. I mean that they mentioned urban schools but they didn't tell us all the things that go along with urban schools . . . so I don't think it prepared me; I really don't. (Elise, Individual Interview)

In addition to not being prepared for, and in some cases not even aware of, the complexities of teaching in urban class settings, participants also expressed concerns

about their lack of knowledge regarding some of the complex needs of students in poverty who attend urban schools. One of the participants explained:

> No. I don't think it has. I mean, I think it [the teacher education program] prepared

me to teach in a setting where you concentrate on academics, you don't have to concentrate on teaching children who are hungry because they're not ready to learn, you know, so, no, I don't think it has. (Christian, Focus Group)

Another participant stated:

> I would even have kids in 2nd grade come to me as foster children that couldn't
>
> read . . . like nothing prepared me to teach on the varying levels of students and
>
> the drastic, you know, levels from the urban setting. (Mona, Focus Group)

Michelle (Focus Group) explained:

> With the children not having parents at home, being moved, being in foster care,
>
> knowing their parents are locked up, or seeing close family members or friends
>
> shot – just really mentally preparing teachers, that these are things you have
>
> deal with.

Finally, also identifying the issues that some of these students face, a participant explained:

> They can teach you do this and do this for classroom management . . . .They
>
> didn't teach me when a kid comes to school and he didn't sleep the night before
>
> because his house burned down; that's happened before. You know, you just take
>
> those on a day-to-day basis and trial and error. (Connie, Focus Group)

Finally in terms of overall preparation to teach in urban settings, it should be noted that although the vast majority of the participants indicated that their teacher preparation

programs did not prepare them to teach in these settings, two participants responded differently. Tony explained, "I was lucky enough to go into an urban setting before I started teaching. I was lucky enough to be in a[n] . . . urban school when I did my practicum" (Tony, Individual Interview). Another participant indicated, "Yes, I do, definitely, especially the urban practicum that I did. I would say I had a number of diverse students there and the school that I am in is diverse so, I would definitely say it prepared me" (Corrine, Focus Group).

Participants were eager to provide feedback concerning what they considered effective and ineffective elements of teacher preparation programs. They were encouraged that their voices would be heard and their words could potentially impact an important segment of education.

Effective Elements of Teacher Preparation Program

One purpose of teacher preparation programs should be to provide students with strategies to increase student achievement. Although that task is completed in numerous ways, participants of the study identified three common areas they experienced as effective components of teacher preparation programs: coursework, field experiences, and strong mentor support.

Coursework. Teachers identified courses they viewed as effective components of their preparation program; classroom management, educational psychology, and children's literacy courses were courses repeatedly mentioned by participants as having been effective. The identified courses appeared to be in alignment with the participants' concerns about the consistent problems teachers encounter with behavior management

and the obstacles students face outside of the classroom (e.g., lack of food, proper clothing, transportation, and housing). For example, Kelby (Individual Interview) was adamant when she made the following point: "I benefited greatly and often reflect on the Ed. Psych and Child Psych classes I took. Behavior theory has also been very useful in understanding what some of my kids have been through." Kelsey highlighted the usefulness of educational psychology indicating that this course was "the most beneficial class . . . because so much of that comes in especially dealing with the urban kids." Libby (Individual Interview) concurred with the other participants and stated:

> Classroom management was a key component of my program. This class was vital because it taught me very valuable lessons; such as how to arrange students in the room, how to arrange my room effectively, and how to set forth rules that will help the students become successful.

Participants also identified literacy courses as critical components of their programs. For example, Christian (Individual Interview) remarked on the importance of the children's literacy coursework – "my children's literature classes, I felt really helped prepare me to be a teacher." Kelsey (Individual Interview) also benefited from the literacy courses: "All the reading classes were really good. Foundation for Literacy, Beginning Reading and Writing, Evaluation and Planning, Early Childhood Literature . . . .Teaching reading is not an issue for me. I'm really comfortable." Kelsey attributed this confidence to the extensive preparation and emphasis on reading in her teacher education program.

Field experiences. Overall, teachers who were participants in the study identified practicums and internships as primary tools for effective teacher preparation. Phrases such as "trial and error," "hands-on experience," and "practicum/internships" were

repeated frequently throughout the focus groups and interviews. Nearly all of U.S. teacher education programs mandate that preservice teachers spend extensive time in early field experiences (Burant & Kirby, 2005). Teachers have acknowledged field experience as an essential element of their teacher preparation programs (Burant & Kirby, 2005). In a Public Agenda survey, "A Sense of Calling," it was discovered that teachers were overall pleased with the coursework and curricula of their teacher preparation programs, but they felt that a more hands-on and practical approach regarding relevant experiences in classroom management, implementing motivating lessons, and ensuring that students understood subject matter would have made them better prepared to enter the classroom (Edutopia, 2001).

The following statement was representative of all teachers who participated in the study. Donna (Focus Group) stated, "The actual training in the classroom, the internship, was what prepared me the most as far as how everything kind of runs with the county and the school system."

As active learners participating in school-based field experiences, teacher education students are able to observe effective teaching strategies, construct lesson plans, implement teaching and learning strategies, and develop their own personal philosophies of education while taking part in school-based field experiences. Participants agreed that the most valuable components of their teacher preparation program were practicums in the field and the culminating student teaching internship:

- "The most valuable education courses were Field I, Field II, and Internship" (Kasey, Individual Interview).

- "The field experiences, I liked those courses, the internship and the experiences, the classes like out in the field, those were the ones I really liked" (Donna, Focus Group).

- "The actual internships because you can tell me all day about an urban school but there is nothing like seeing it for yourself. I was able to compare the two for myself" (Elise, Individual Interview).

- "The hands-on field teaching prepared me more than anything, including the classroom work . . . just being there, seeing it, dealing with it, working with the kids, that prepared me more than anything" (Tony, Focus Group/Individual Interview).

As a teacher educator, there were numerous opportunities to work with preservice teachers from their initial admission into the college of education to the finale of the student internship. I have been able to witness a transformation in some of the attitudes and beliefs of these students as they evaluated their perceptions and compared them to the realities of urban settings. Encouraging students to use field experiences as a means of self-reflection can be a vital asset to their teacher development (Cole et al., 1994).

Strong mentor support during field experiences. A strong mentor can have a profound influence on the practices of a protégé. As students complete field experiences, they have the opportunity to observe experienced teachers and to implement professional practices in the classroom. Ideally, students are paired with teachers who understand the critical task of serving as models for the world's future teachers. It was comforting to hear participants speak of the experiences they had encountered with their supervising

teachers during field experiences, which led to professional growth. Kelby reflected on her internship placement and mentor teachers in an urban environment:

I felt my experiences with my internship teacher were perfect. I interned at an "urban" school, and I feel like I was provided with authentic practice on how to deal with limited space and resources, ESE students in a regular education classroom, parents, etc. I was also shown how to have high expectations for these students despite any deficits they faced, and how to give them the support and confidence they needed, while staying on their level and remaining firm. (Kelby, Individual Interview)

Another participant fondly remembered her internship experiences:

I mean my internship was great. I had a teacher that was great in an urban environment. She was great, she was great with the children and I learned a lot from her. When I got here, the field teacher . . . Miss xxx . . . was wonderful and very good with the kids, patient, and very focused, and willing to teach me . . . .I don't think I would change anything as far as my directing teachers, by any means, I think I was blessed to have great intern teachers. (Individual Interview, Mona)

A strong mentor has the potential to provide future teachers with a magnitude of practical and relevant classroom experience. In turn, this will guide the preservice teachers in the effort to fuse the effective strategies and techniques learned during field experiences into their own classrooms.

Similar to their eagerness to discuss effective elements of teacher preparation was the excitement with which participants gave feedback concerning ineffective and/or

missing elements of teacher preparation programs. I feel they were more adamant with their responses regarding this issue. Perhaps, they were hopeful that preservice teachers would have opportunities and experiences they themselves had not yet been exposed.

Missing and/or Ineffective Elements of Teacher Preparation Programs

Various experiences throughout the lifetime of those in the middle class validate the concept that hard work coupled with consistency will always equal accomplishment; however, impoverished students have learned lessons that resulted in different outcomes. For them, a responsible work ethic does not always result in success, and regardless of their desire to achieve, some of them may never achieve the same academic success of their White counterparts due to existing disparities among student achievement levels. The following areas identified by teachers as missing and/or ineffective components of teacher preparation programs can have a severe impact on student academic growth.

Failure to address how to assist low performing students. When asked about the differences between urban and non-urban school settings, the majority of participants spoke of the disparities among student achievement levels between urban and non-urban students. They discussed how they make adjustments to their instruction to compensate for the lack of information gained during teacher preparation programs:

> When we talked about small groups [in the teacher preparation program], we
> never talked about, "Listen, you may have a group like this, you may have 2, or
> you may have 6 kids that just aren't going to get it. You're just going to have to
> get with them." (Tony, Individual Interview)

Donna (Individual Interview) observed, "Also the academics, like the differentiating of instruction for the different levels and how you cannot necessarily just pool the students

up, but having such varying abilities – and what[ever] works for you." Tony (Individual

Interview) emphatically stated a similar point of view:

> My grade level is the fourth grade. I have second grade books in my classroom. I
>
> have actually gone down and gotten first grade books for my classroom I
>
> have had kids from second grade to sixth grade reading levels in my classroom.
>
> You need a very wide range of reading levels, because you need to keep those
>
> kids engaged. Math, same thing, you need a wide range of manipulatives . . . .You
>
> have to have a wide range of math, reading, of the core curriculums, that would be
>
> my number one thing. My number two thing after that would be to make sure you
>
> have things that will engage these students. They need to be engaged. Don't
>
> expect the kids to come in at grade level.

Participants expressed concerns with their abilities to adequately assist students

with academic challenges. These concerns could stem from a breach between the

collegiate curriculum in preparation programs and current educational trends within

school systems.

> *Disconnect between collegiate curriculum and current educational trends*.

Levine's (2006) study of teacher education in colleges of education revealed a persistent

disconnect between campuses and schools. Participants agreed that there was a

disconnect between the course content of the preparation program and the reality of the

classroom. It was evident that the participants felt that there was not a clear or cohesive

link between what they were taught while in college and what was actually taking place

inside elementary classrooms. Two responses represent the disdain voiced by the

participants regarding this issue:

I don't think any of the methods classes were useful, there is such a disconnect

between what you do in those classes and what you actually do in the profession.

It's hard to implement the fun, and I just feel like what you do in college classes is

very idealistic, in a perfect world, with parents, and all the money you need, the

biggest classroom you can imagine, with all these things it would be great! I think

it was good as far as preparation but as far as practicality not so much. The two

big ones would be classroom management and diagnostic reading. (Michelle,

Focus Group)

Another participant articulated a similar point:

Whatever we were learning in our classes had no relation to the way that they do

things in the county. It's like here [college] I am doing all these thematic units,

well, I am not doing thematic units, I am doing learning schedules . . . . If there

was more of a connection between, can we get together more with the county,

even though people may not stay in the county. (Kasey, Focus Group)

Several participants spoke specifically of being given the opportunity to learn more about

the county curriculum:

My problem is with the new curriculum . . . . I think what we do in college is

great, but actually having what the teachers are expected to teach . . . to have the

actual textbook for the teachers to get comfortable or familiar with would be

beneficial. (Corrine, Focus Group)

Another participant echoed this sentiment:

Also bringing in the curriculum that we actually have to use, because in college

you learn and you prepare these lessons and stuff as if there is no curriculum. I

think bringing that into the college classroom, and actually allowing us to prepare

lessons and implement that, in addition to thinking about dealing with a certain

type of child. That would be helpful as well. (Michelle, Focus Group)

Participants generally agreed that there was a seeming disconnect between the

collegiate curriculum and current educational trends. In light of these opinions, it is not

difficult to understand several thoughts regarding field experiences.

The need for more opportunities to apply practice in the field. According to the

Public Agenda survey "A Sense of Calling," 56% of participants said they missed

opportunities to receive practical teaching experience as a result of theoretical course

content. Only 30% of teachers said they were satisfied with the amount of practical

experience they received in real classrooms as part of their education (Edutopia, 2001).

The findings of that survey are similar to the findings of this study. The majority of

participants stated that field experience was a vital part of the preparation program and

they would have preferred more time for practical application rather than studying

various theories of education.

Participants were consistent with the viewpoint that future teachers need to be

given more opportunities to apply practical teaching strategies and techniques to

classrooms in urban settings. For example:

The changes I would make are more hands-on in the field practice . . . . We

should have [gone] into a classroom and been taught classroom management in a

classroom setting, see the behaviors and see how that works. And telling you that

this kid's going to act out and you should go stand next to them – Why does that

work? You know, you don't understand – you need to go to the classroom with

the kids and see it in action. (Kennedy, Focus Group)

In steadfast agreement, another participant replied:

I would have more field experience, I would say a program needs to implement

more field experience, hands-on stuff, stuff you're going to use – not the fluff.

The theory, great, give me 1 class, but not 3 or 4 classes sitting there listening to

someone talking about nothing. (Shana, Focus Group)

Christian (Focus Group) also noted the importance of hands-on experience and its lack in

the college preparation program:

The least beneficial is not being hands-on, we were just able to sit and observe

and I wish I would have been more active in the classroom, more active in the

school, talking to the principal more, talking to the teachers more, seeing what

their experiences were in the school.

Libby (Focus Group) also mentioned hands-on learning:

I am a hands-on person, and I am not actually following through with these

methods and trying to do them on my own. A lot of them just went over my head

. . . a lot of good ideas, but without trying them out, they just don't sink in.

Overwhelmingly, participants consistently agreed with the viewpoint that future teachers

need to be given more opportunities to apply practical teaching strategies and techniques

to classrooms in urban settings.

Failure of teacher educators to demonstrate a connection with real life K-12

classroom practices. It is the opinion of Ladson-Billings (2005) that the distance between

college faculty and public schools is not solely measured by mileage; college- and

university-level faculty are seldom in contact with the realities of urban classrooms and

communities serving minority populations. College faculty may verbalize commitments

to diversity and equity but are seldom placed in situations where they must act on these

commitments. When asked if their college professors were connected to the "real world"

of teaching, many of the participants, such as Tony, had two points of view, which Tony

justified with examples:

> I had one professor that had been a professor at the university for like 35 years.
>
> Way out of touch, so far out of touch it was like, "Wow!". . . . I never saw her in a
>
> classroom and she never talked to us as, "What can I do as a professor to help out
>
> more?" It was more this is how she did it, and that was it. I think that she lost
>
> reality and she lost touch of the whole thing. Then I had some other professors
>
> who had also been there for 20 years, but those professors were very active. They
>
> were active by going back into the schools and checking on the interns and seeing
>
> things. Talking to us as individuals, sitting down and asking, "What did you learn
>
> today? What should you do different?" . . . . They tell teachers that they have to
>
> stay active, we have to update our credits, we have to maintain our certification
>
> every 5 years. I think professors should have to do something like that. I think
>
> they need to be out in the real world, out in the real schools. They need to see
>
> what is changing out there.

Michelle's overall experience, along with four other participants, varied from Tony's:

> I believe it's hard for anyone not in the classroom every day to be connected to
>
> the real world, especially those who have been out of the classroom for many
>
> years. This is the case simply because times change quickly and constantly, and if

you're not hands-on in that environment, you will quickly lose touch. Also,

professors teach ideals, principles, and "what research shows," unfortunately, we

don't teach in a perfect world with perfect classrooms. Therefore, a disconnect

exists between what we are taught to do, and what we are actually able to

implement.

While the views of participants concerning the connection of teacher educators

with current classroom practices was mixed, it was evident that participants recognized

the influence of teacher educators in regard to their potential impact on the learning

experiences of preservice teachers. A majority of the participants expressed teacher

educators must be more aware of the dire issue of the lack of parental involvement in

urban schools.

Failure to address how preservice teachers should respond to the lack of parental

involvement in urban schools. Findings of the study revealed that the vast majority of the

participants experienced frustrations working with parents, specifically in terms of

involvement. While only 5 of the 17 participants specifically stated that there was a

definite lack of parental involvement in the high-poverty schools where they taught, 13 of

the 17 participants referred to the impact of parental involvement on classroom

instruction and student academic progress. Several participants highlighted the

importance of helping educators understand the dynamics of parenting in the context of

poverty. One of the participants explained:

We've had some courses dealing with like the issues of kids of divorced parents,

kids of single parents, but you don't hear of kids that come from abusive homes,

kids that come from like, momma crack head – you don't hear that – so stuff

to prepare us about the kind of kids and the kind of parents that we are going to

deal with. (Elise, Individual Interview)

Given these concerns about the lack of parental involvement in urban schools,

participants recommended "more classes on parental involvement" (Mona, Focus Group).

Annie concurred with the statements and also provided another focus: "I think you need

teachers to be prepared for the fact that parents aren't always going to be around." At the

least, participants suggested that teacher preparation programs provide strategies for

working with parents, particularly in urban settings.

Participants provided their perceptions and opinions regarding effective and

ineffective components of teacher preparation programs. Change cannot occur unless

specific areas of concern can be identified by stakeholders. The effective elements

discussed by the participants should continue to be used in an effort to continue to meet

the needs of preservice teachers. Additionally, if ineffective elements identified by

participants or missing elements can be addressed, the possibility opens to add to the

curriculum or modify certain areas in order to strengthen preparation programs.

Section III: Participants' Recommendations to Improve Programs

In order for teacher preparation programs to be effective, collegiate coursework

needs to incorporate information about the culture of poverty and afford teachers

experiences that will allow them to be cognizant of the barrage of needs that children in

poverty bring to the classroom (Pellino, 2006). Findings of the study revealed that

teachers were in agreement that students were in desperate need of material items, but

also discussed children's need to develop trusting relationships and learn to abide by consistent structures of discipline. The following section highlights recommendations that would potentially enhance teacher preparation programs, as presented by the participants.

Understanding Poverty

Several of the participants' recommendations were closely related to increased efforts to present prospective teachers with information about some of the potential issues associated with poverty (e.g., lack of basic needs such as shelter, food, and clothing). Connie (Focus Group) talked about a lack of care of the children: "Well, I mean, these kids' shoes don't fit, clothes don't fit, clothes are dirty, hands are dirty, hair is dirty. Everything smells like smoke, sometimes smells like weed [marijuana]. You know, hair is dirty, hair is knotted." Kennedy (Focus Group) also expressed concerns about her lack of experience with similar issues. She explained:

> The first thing I noticed when I went to my urban school was the breakfast being
>
> provided. I had never seen that before . . . also they were kind of dirty . . . had to
>
> clean up kids, you know, not as well kept as some of the other kids I had seen.

Teachers also expressed the need to understand the culture of poverty so they could then understand the impact of the psychological influences with which the children must contend. As such, participants suggested incorporating additional courses (e.g., psychology, urban education) and/or increasing the required hours for particular courses in teacher preparation programs. Tony (Individual Interview) explained:

> If you are an elementary teacher, strictly elementary, you should take 1 or 2
>
> classes in child psychology or at least sociology . . . . They did a great job for
>
> preparing me for the classroom; they did not do such a great job of preparing me

for all the other things that come along with it. Especially in today's world, where

. . . there are a lot of different things going on.

Kelby (Focus Group) advocated for immersion in the urban teaching experience

as part of program requirements, as well as for psychology classes.

If they incorporate it [teacher preparation courses for urban schools] into the

regular curriculum, required coursework, I think that would prepare them for not

only inner city, but it would prepare them to deal with those rich snotty kids who

have just as many issues and problems as our babies do. Those young kids who

are in college, they would not choose to take the urban tracks, but if they were

required to take those courses it would open their eyes to the realities of what it

really is to teach . . . . So yeah, I think that that it should be added to the

curriculum but not necessarily a separate track and definitely more hands-on

experience, definitely some kind of psychology clinical or counseling clinical so

that they can see the psychological make-up of a inner city school.

The majority of the participants were in consensus that with a better understanding of

children's backgrounds, educators could be better equipped to use this knowledge to

effectively enhance instructional skills and classroom practices.

Building Relationships with Students

Participants also expressed the importance of helping teachers to understand the

need to develop relationships with students in urban schools. One of the participants

explained:

When you are in an area like ours, they are very needy children and they need to

know that you love them and respect them. It is a different environment, totally

different. I think they need to know, maybe some classroom management.

Working with children, they need to know that stickers and candy may work in

other schools but when it is an urban school, the kids need to learn to trust you. I

think that is an important piece that needs to be added to classroom management,

it is an important piece to add in there somewhere in that curriculum. (Amanda,

Focus Group)

Another participant stated the significance of creating relationships with students:

Relating to the students is very important. Building relationships with them is also

very important. I can teach but if I do not have rapport with them first my

teaching is not effective. I have learned to take time and talk to my students. If I

don't listen, they have no one to hear them. (Shana, Individual Interview)

Working with Parents

In addition to building relationships with students, participants overwhelmingly

expressed concerns about working with parents. In the past 14 years, I have read

numerous articles citing the challenges of soliciting parent involvement in urban schools.

As a teacher educator, I have taken this information and incorporated it into presentations

and courses, which I have facilitated in the collegiate curriculum and public school

systems.

Reading the information and even providing the same information to students did

not prepare me for hearing participants repeatedly state that parents were not involved in

their children's education. I was literally numb when I heard Elise comment during a

focus group on a question concerning the coursework in her teacher preparation program

that led to an indictment of parents: "But like I said, as far as the class I don't know what

they could do differently 'cause I think they've [university] given us all of the things that we can use – it's just the parents."

In contrast to the many comments made by the participants concerning parental involvement, various studies show that socioeconomic status is not an indicator of the extent to which parents care about their children. Most parents love their children and desire for them to be successful. McGee (1996) contended that parents can learn coping strategies, which in turn will lead to their children breaking the cycle of poverty. Shana's comment (Focus Group) proved powerful and enlightening for other teachers:

I've also discovered it's a cycle. The parents went through it and now the kids are going through it and the kids are their environment. So the kids don't know, because the parents don't know either, because the grandparents, it's a cycle . . . . It's a cycle that is extremely hard to break . . . but I didn't know that the cycle was as strong as it is. Because you can see it, the parent doesn't know how to read or write, the kids don't, so really it isn't the kids' fault, it's really not the parents' fault either because, the grandparents . . . . Some of the parents got pregnant at 14, so they dropped out in seventh grade, so they only know up to seventh grade. So the parents can't help the kids.

Providing Structure and Managing the Classroom

In addition to building relationships with students and parents, the participants explained the importance of providing structure for students. Several participants suggested incorporating additional classroom management classes in teacher preparation programs to help teachers develop the skills needed to provide such structure and support. Amanda (Individual Interview) explained,

If I could create a course specifically for dealing with students in the urban

environment, one of them would be how to manage a classroom in the urban

environment (stickers don't work for all children).

Participants expressed their desire to leave college better equipped to handle

discipline problems inside the classroom. For example, Shana (Focus Group) stated, "I

think if I were a professor, if I were structuring a college program for undergrad students

going into teaching, classroom management would be the top thing."

Expanding Field Experiences

In addition to more classroom management courses, participants also

recommended greater required experience in the urban school settings. One participant

proposed:

In my personal opinion, as a professional now, I think that every teacher should

have to go through an urban setting. Not for a whole year, but they should at least

experience an urban setting and then experience a non-urban setting, so if they

end up in an urban school, they are at least exposed to it. (Tony, Individual

Interview)

A few participants suggested that a longer student internship could be the key to

properly preparing students to teach in urban schools. These comments included

Kennedy's statement:

Well, what I wish would have happened at my university was a longer internship.

Do two semesters of a whole internship and spend one internship in a lower grade

level in a semester, a 16-week period, and then another 16-week period in an

upper grade level. I think that would have been the most beneficial. (Focus Group)

In support of Kennedy's statement, another participant noted the following:

In college, we used to talk about how internships should be a whole year instead of just a semester, because in our school it was a 14-week semester. I feel like even having one semester in an affluent, regular, whatever you want to call it, school and one semester in a[n] urban school setting would be so beneficial. It would prepare teachers for both ends of the spectrum. (Michelle, Focus Group)

Separate Track for Urban Studies

When asked about forming a separate program for urban studies, participants were of mixed opinions. While they were in support of specific coursework identified for preparation for urban settings, they were unsure if students would pick an urban track of studies if given the choice. Mona recommended that students choose the setting that they would like to focus on and have tailored field experiences to fit that option:

Maybe you take a survey at the beginning of entering into the college and say, "If you had a choice to teach in a certain environment, what would that environment be?" Let's say they circle Urban, then I would focus on those teachers, and yes, give them that choice and standard, but they get placed in an urban environment for their field and internship. (Individual Interview)

Christian and Donna agreed. Christian explained,

I think a whole separate track, I really do, because I don't think just one course would cut it. (Christian, Individual Interview)

Additionally, a participant commented,

Yes, definitely. Because at my other school with new teachers it seemed there was

much more of a struggle there than the teachers here when I've met new teachers

from Teach for America. And I know they were prepared better for it and seeing

them as first year teachers, the majority of them seem to have a better

understanding of the urban setting and love it! They would never want to teach

anywhere else . . . . They are constantly with their program still continuing

workshops on Saturdays and over breaks and they are going to do more over the

summer. So I think that from the coursework at UNF, if you are going to teach in

an urban setting you definitely need different classes to prepare you for that.

(Donna, Individual Interview)

In contrast, another participant expressed a different opinion. Kasey felt strongly

that if given a choice, preservice teachers would not choose an urban setting:

In terms of the curriculum for a teacher who wants to be urban, I feel like it would

be hard to make that decision early on to have a separate track. I feel like the

whole thing should shift. I think a teacher would be better off going through the

urban curriculum. What would the alternative be? I don't know? Perfect? Nobody

would choose [an urban environment]. I love where I teach, but I was scared to

death when I got my placement. It was, "Oh, my gosh, what I am going to do?"

But I love it! But I wouldn't have chosen that [teaching assignment] if I hadn't

been placed there and fallen in love with [my school].

While the participants did not reach a consensus concerning the most appropriate

method to ensure that preservice teachers acquired experience in urban settings

throughout teacher preparation programs, it was clear by their responses that they felt

students should be exposed to and be given the opportunity to complete field experiences in urban settings.

The six recommendations provided by the participants included more courses to assist in understanding poverty, building relationships with students, working with parents, providing structure and managing the classroom, expanding field experiences, and creating a separate track for urban studies within teacher preparation programs. These recommendations can facilitate further discussion in an effort to strengthen the experiences of preservice teachers.

<div align="center">Chapter Summary</div>

Overwhelmingly, the participants interviewed believed they were not adequately prepared to teach in an urban setting. Of the 17 teachers interviewed, 12 indicated they lacked the necessary preparation to be effective in an environment where they had to deal with issues associated with poverty. Contributing to this feeling of being unprepared were the participants' personal experiences and backgrounds which reinforced the disconnect between the teacher and urban students.

A majority of the teachers were also in agreement concerning coursework, information, and experiences they viewed as effective from their programs. Courses that focused on educational psychology and classroom management strategies were mentioned throughout the interviews. Fifteen teachers indicated there were certain areas of coursework or field experiences that were missing or not expounded on in their teacher preparation program. These areas included addressing low level learners, the disconnect between collegiate curriculum and classroom practice, field experiences, teacher educators' connection with actual K-12 classroom practice, and parental involvement.

Lastly, the participants discussed their recommendations for improving teacher

preparation programs. Based on these findings, the implications of this study and

conclusions will be discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This research examined novice teachers' perceptions of the impact of teacher

preparation programs in preparing teacher candidates to teach in urban schools. Chapter

Four included the analysis of the interview data from the 17 participants in this study.

The participants' perceptions were collected using focus groups and individual semi-

structured interviews. Data analysis was based on Patton's (2002) methods.

Chapter Five summarizes the research study, provides conclusions drawn from the study, presents recommendations to enhance the field of teacher preparation specific to urban schools, and offers recommendations for further study. The summary of the study discusses five generalizations developed in the analysis of the data: (a) the disconnect between middle-class novice teachers and urban students; (b) the need for more field experiences during teacher preparation programs; (c) the link between theory and practice regarding coursework within collegiate curriculum; (d) the disconnect between teacher educators and real life K-12 classroom practices; and (e) the lack of parental involvement in urban schools. The chapter then offers implications for improving traditional 4-year teacher preparation programs, as well as recommendations for future studies.

Summary of Related Literature and Methodology

Race and class status have long been an issue in America. Prior to conducting this study, I continually wondered if these barriers could truly be broken in classrooms in order to make education the great equalizer it has the potential to be. The overall research question investigated how novice teachers in urban schools perceived their undergraduate teacher preparation programs, specifically in regards to preparing them to teach in urban settings. The primary purpose was to determine how teacher preparation programs could utilize current programs and practices to better prepare teacher candidates to provide effective instruction in urban environments.

Colleges and universities have the responsibility to provide future teachers with the necessary tools to offer quality instruction in any setting. This study examined novice

teachers' perceptions of the impact of traditional teacher preparation programs with regard to teacher candidate preparation for teaching in urban schools.

Chapter Two provided a review of the related literature. The review of the literature concentrated on four major topics: (a) the challenges of children in poverty, (b) challenges of White middle-class teachers in urban schools, (c) teacher preparation, and (d) critiques of teacher education. The theoretical frameworks of Vygotsky (1962), Piaget (1952), and Moustakas (1994) led to issues in the literature relevant to this study.

A conceptual framework for the study was established after an initial review of the literature. This framework provided a basis for the questions used in focus groups and individual interviews. Following the data collection, data analysis was conducted to interpret the data and give meaning to the research findings.

A total of 17 participants volunteered for the study. Recruiting occurred through the Human Resources Department of Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Florida. The participants consisted of 16 females and 1 male and included individuals of Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic backgrounds.

The overarching research question focused on the extent to which novice teachers believe that their teacher preparation programs adequately prepared them to teach in urban settings. Because the study was intended as an examination of the perceptions of novice urban teachers about their preparation programs, a qualitative research design was employed to obtain the data. In this design, I collected data and examined participants' current attitudes, beliefs, and opinions (Creswell, 2002). Following the focus groups, I interviewed each participant individually, or the participant responded to interview questions via email.

In light of the goal to obtain, interpret, and make meaning of data associated with the participants' perceptions in any given study, qualitative methodologies were the most appropriate to employ for this research. The process of in-depth interviewing was the most appropriate method to gain insight from the participants as well as the research questions addressed in the study (Mishler, 1986, p. 6).

Summary of the Findings

The first topic presented the seeming disconnect between middle-class novice teachers and urban students. This topic described the backgrounds and previous experiences that future teachers had upon which to base their connections with poor minority students. The findings indicated that most teacher candidates are not equipped to adequately address the class differences that exist between teachers and urban students. This disconnect could inhibit academic instruction and have a negative impact on student growth.

A second component of the study focused on effective and missing and/or ineffective elements of teacher preparation programs. Participants were able to reflect on their experiences during their teacher preparation programs and discuss in great detail the components of the program that they regarded as beneficial as well as the areas they believed were not conducive to sufficiently preparing them for urban settings.

Finally, recommendations were provided by the participants for improving teacher preparation programs. Participants gave insight as to how teacher preparation programs could better serve future teachers by modifying or adapting existing program components.

The conclusions of this study are limited as a result of all the participants being employed by Duval County Public Schools. A second limitation is the methods used to collect data. Teachers could have withheld opinions in an effort to appear socially or politically correct. In addition, valuable information could have been forgotten due to the time that has lapsed since completion of the preparation programs.

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

The analysis of the data resulted in five main conclusions: (a) the disconnect between middle-class novice teachers and students from urban environments can be addressed through coursework; (b) field experiences are an integral part of teacher education programs and can be enhanced by increasing the amount of time preservice teachers are required to spend in the field; (c) coursework within collegiate curriculum does not sufficiently link theory to practice; (d) many teacher educators are not connected with real life K-12 classroom practices; (e) and the magnitude of the lack of parental involvement in urban schools impacts the teacher's ability to provide effective classroom instruction and enhance student achievement. The topics developed from the processes of data analysis provided a framework to suggest implications of the study.

1. *The disconnect between middle-class novice teachers and urban students can be addressed through coursework such as educational psychology and classroom management.* Fourteen of the 17 participants were reared in a middle class-home and were not previously exposed to challenges they encountered in the classroom. Due to the failure to understand the culture of poverty and limited background knowledge or prior experiences with diversity, novice teachers are often unable to relate to urban students. Racial as well as socioeconomic differences should continue to be addressed in teacher

preparation programs as public schools experience a steady demographic shift in the teacher and student population. According to data collected during interviews, participants acknowledged that teacher education preparation programs could bridge these cultural gaps by providing teacher candidates with more coursework regarding educational psychology and classroom management. Eleven of the 17 participants agreed that these specific courses allowed them great insight into building and maintaining positive, trusting relationships with students.

2. *Field experiences are an integral part of teacher education programs and can be enhanced by increasing the amount of time of preservice teachers are required to spend in the field.* The teachers interviewed were generally pleased with experiences associated with their full-time student internship but had mixed opinions concerning other field experiences throughout the program. There was a consensus among the participants that more hands-on experience was needed for truly efficient teacher preparation programs. The participants expressed how gaps they experienced during field experiences could be filled to assist current and future teacher candidates. These ideas included having open discussions with master teachers in urban schools, field experiences solely focusing on classroom management, and extending student internships to 1 year. While I continually heard the phrase "less theory and more practice," I believe that if students could see actual theory in practice, they would recognize the benefits and desire to understand these theories at a deeper level.

3. *Coursework within collegiate curriculum does not link theory to practice.* Participants agreed that the connection between theory and practice during teacher preparation programs was limited to non-existent. Consistently, teachers stated that the

required methods courses of the collegiate curriculum did not adequately translate theory into practice. The disconnect between coursework and field experiences is referred to by Darling-Hammond (2010) as the "Achilles' heel" of teacher education and has been a recurring problem in traditional college- and university-sponsored teacher education programs. Schools of education should apply more practical experiences within coursework to make theories and concepts more relevant to student learning. Rather than read about theories in isolation and listen to professors lecture about them, participants preferred that teacher educators model more effectively how theory can come to life through practice. Participants agreed that theory was a vital element of teaching and learning, but suggested that simulations during classes and the use of technology to see actual classrooms would allow them opportunities to make the connection of theory to practice prior to becoming a classroom teacher.

4. *Teachers feel that many teacher educators are not connected with real life K-12 classroom practices.* Participants shared mixed responses concerning their perceptions of how well collegiate professors were in touch with real life classroom practices. Given that 12 of the 17 participants stated that they were not prepared to teach in an urban setting, I was surprised that only four teachers expressed with certainty that their college professors were not connected to the realities of current classroom practices. I had assumed that more of the teachers would agree that based on their experiences during teacher preparation programs, college professors were disconnected from K-12 classroom practices. When reflecting on the data, I realized that the teachers viewed each professor as an individual and not just part of a packaged program. Most teachers were able to call

professors by name even though it had been several years since they had been in contact with them.

5. *The magnitude of the lack of parental involvement in urban schools impacts the teacher's ability to provide effective classroom instruction and enhance student achievement.* Participants repeatedly spoke of the impact that parental involvement had on their personal and academic success. As a parent of middle-class status and a teacher who has taught in the same setting, I related to their sentiments and comments. What was difficult to connect with were the stories and comments concerning backpacks returning to school with the same teacher notes and homework passed out earlier in the week, PTA meetings and open houses that played host to a handful of parents and/or guardians, and the frustration in participants' voices as they spoke of how difficult it could be to contact a parent to discuss issues concerning their own child.

This research has led me to reflect on my own teaching career in a suburban public elementary school and determine if my own instructional practices were affected by parental involvement. My conclusion was a resounding "yes." Children were positively impacted academically as well as socially when their parents were actively involved in their education. There was a positive impact on the academic and social growth of students whose parents were actively involved in their education. Given parental involvement is not a district or national mandate, teacher preparation programs must provide teachers with the skills to secure parental involvement, along with strategies to still provide effective classroom instruction and enhance student achievement even if parents make the choice not to play an active role in their child's education.

The conclusions of the study provided significant insight concerning novice teachers' perceptions of traditional teacher preparation programs. They serve as a foundation to provide implications for teacher preparation programs, which can potentially enhance certain aspects of collegiate programs.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs</div>

This study provided significant implications for strengthening teacher education programs by preparing teacher candidates to provide quality instruction to students in low socioeconomic settings. This study of novice teacher perceptions of their undergraduate teacher preparation programs provided insight and information from which teacher preparation faculty and administrators can draw implications for improvement of current practices. Based on the data analysis and conclusions, I formulated four major recommendations.

1. *The requirements of field experiences should be modified to better prepare preservice teachers to teach in urban settings.* Participants continuously stated that field experiences were a vital component of their teacher preparation program. As a clinical instructor, I fully agree with this overwhelming sentiment and believe that modifications to current field requirements can be implemented to better serve preservice teachers. I believe that all fieldwork should follow an inquiry-based model. Critical inquiry is based on learning the practice in the classroom, observing an expert model the practice, implementing the practice, and, finally, reflecting on practice. Based on participant responses, after students receive the knowledge of the practice, there is a breakdown in the remaining components of the process. For preservice teachers to implement effective teaching practices, they must be able to decipher what effective teaching looks like. Field

experiences can be modified by mentor teacher leaders within schools serving as a model for the delivery of effective instructional practices and the expectation that all students can succeed. Directing teachers and teacher educators can take a more active role in monitoring the learning experiences of preservice teachers. As the conduits for this process, they must remain abreast of innovative strategies and techniques to share with future teachers and also model these strategies in a classroom setting.

2. *Directing teachers of preservice teachers and teacher educators should be given extensive training in an effort to provide preservice teachers with quality experiences in the classroom.* Although directing teachers are required to have clinical training prior to hosting preservice teachers, this limited training is not enough to provide future teachers with the proper support and guidance needed to have a successful start as classroom teachers. In addition, teacher educators should be aware of current educational trends and information concerning district curriculum. Universities in conjunction with school districts should design and implement mandated workshop/trainings that all directing teachers and teacher educators are required to attend prior to supervising a preservice teacher. Directing teachers should be aware of the beliefs and ideologies regarding mentoring from the university perspective, and the practice of teacher educators should consistently remain in alignment with current trends of local school districts. The creation of a teachers-in-residence program would be an approach to facilitate these needed changes. Teachers who desire to work with preservice teachers would spend time with teacher educators at the university level learning about the various aspects of the teacher education program as well as how to support graduates in their early years of teaching. In turn, these teachers would provide teacher educators with knowledge concerning

curriculum and policies of the local school district. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee uses the teacher-in-residence program to strengthen the connection between teacher preparation and the experience of urban teachers (Zeichner, 2010). This program could be enhanced to include the expertise of teacher educators.

Teacher educators can be a powerful force if bonded together with the same goals and mission. We, as teacher educators, need to be more visible in schools. We need to explain to teachers the significance of theory and model how theory and practice should interweave to create effective instructional practices. One way that colleges and universities create public school partnerships is by having an assigned faculty member at schools in the position of professor-in-residence. Although this is an ideal way to bond the two groups, there are few schools that have the luxury of receiving this on-site support and guidance. Generally, master teachers and university faculty are active only at their respective sites. Teachers are not involved in the design and delivery process of teacher preparation programs, and teacher educators are not involved in curriculum development and school planning at the K-12 level (Zimpher & Howey, 2005). Both entities need to be active participants at both ends of the spectrum, so the two groups are able to meet in the middle to work together effectively to strengthen teacher preparation programs.

3. *Preservice teachers should be assigned to work with strong mentors while completing field requirements*. Rather than adding more hours to assigned field experiences, teacher education programs should attempt to make the current time spent in the field more meaningful to students. This can be accomplished by assigning each student a teacher educator mentor within schools and colleges of education that will

monitor the candidate's progress throughout the program. Mandated meetings to discuss

content, methodology, practical application, and diversity issues with teacher candidates

while they are completing fieldwork would give candidates needed support as well as

identify potential challenges early in the preparation program. These meetings would give

candidates the opportunity to experience various challenges of the field and provide

opportunities in which they could apply theories learned in the collegiate curriculum to

classroom settings. The responsibilities of the mentor would also include shadowing the

student during field experiences in order to implement inquiry-based professional

development. With support of the mentor, field experiences can reach beyond students

merely learning new ideas, to delving into guided practice with data collection and

reflection.

4. *Teacher preparation programs should include curricula focused on parental*

involvement to prepare preservice teachers for work in urban settings. Participants of the

study repeatedly indicated that a lack of parental involvement was a burdensome plight of

urban schools and that they personally felt the impact of the burden daily.

While teachers cannot mandate that parents be actively involved in their child's

academic life, it is evident from the study that teachers must be trained to handle parents'

lack of academic involvement. Some might believe that poor parents choose to be absent

in their child's academic life because they do not value education; however, low-income

and wealthy parents hold the same attitudes concerning education (Compton-Lilly, 2003;

Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Leichter, 1978). Educators could confuse poor parents' limited

access to all aspects of school involvement (e.g., multiple jobs without paid leave, lack of

transportation, inability to afford childcare for evening events) with the idea that they care less about their children than their wealthy counterparts.

Since teachers typically have not had such life experiences (e.g., high mobility, lack of extra-curricular activities), they are at a loss as to how to handle this problem. In my own experience, teacher education programs attempt to provide teacher candidates with various ways to motivate parents to become involved with their children's academic progress; however, these are textbook strategies and can be difficult to apply without support from school leaders or school budgets. Colleges and universities should also focus attention on the grim possibility that teachers may never be able to motivate or lure parents to become involved with their child's academic progress.

In this case, teachers must make a conscience effort to remain committed to the student's academic achievement and continue providing the student with stability and consistency through classroom rules and procedures. In an effort to examine this issue in more detail, preservice teachers can be assigned to work with a Parent Teacher Association during field experiences in order to gain insight of strategies that schools use to actively engage parents in school activities.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Further research is needed in order to determine changes in current programs to better prepare teacher candidates to teach in urban settings. Two research questions would be appropriate and meaningful in this pursuit.

1. Research is necessary to determine whether a separate track within traditional teacher preparation programs could increase teacher preparedness for urban schools. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that giving teacher candidates the option to choose a track of study within a teacher preparation program that was specifically geared toward providing instruction in urban schools would not be successful. They were convinced that teacher candidates would deliberately avoid this option due to their prior experiences, attitudes, and beliefs concerning diversity. A few participants were concerned that if students who initially agreed to the urban track were unable to switch back to the traditional track, they would ultimately withdraw from the teacher education program.

It is my belief that a pilot study would be beneficial in determining whether or not teacher candidates would take advantage of the option of an urban track in teacher preparation. Some participants suggested that students be given a survey upon entering a college of education to determine their interest in urban school settings; this seems an appropriate method to determine initial interest and commitment to an urban track of study.

2. The role of teacher preparation and parental involvement at urban schools should be examined. A majority of the participants made reference to the lack of parental involvement they experienced as novice teachers. Most stated that teacher preparation programs did not address this issue adequately and, consequently, they were unaware of how to handle this problem along with how to effectively work with parents of low socioeconomic status. Traditional teacher education programs should embrace innovative strategies and utilize existing models implemented within urban school districts that have a high rate of parental involvement. Focus groups consisting of teachers and

administrators of these urban schools could be conducted to determine the best methods for engaging parents to increase their activity with students inside and outside of the classroom. Colleges and universities must be willing to implement changes to existing teacher preparation models in an effort to better prepare teacher candidates for low socioeconomic settings. Research from the findings of this future study could provide a clearer picture of what impact teacher preparation programs have on the ability of novice teachers to increase the rate of parental involvement within their schools and classrooms.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter summarized the related literature and supporting design of the study, the specific methodology that guided both data collection and analysis, and the findings from the study. It also provided the five conclusions determined to be relevant from the data analysis: (a) the disconnect between middle-class novice teachers and urban students can be addressed through coursework such as educational psychology and classroom management; (b) field experiences are an integral part of teacher education programs and can be enhanced by increasing the amount of time of preservice teachers are required to spend in the field; (c) coursework within collegiate curricula does not link theory to practice; (d) many teacher educators are not connected with real life K-12 classroom practices; and (e) the magnitude of the lack of parental involvement in urban schools impacts the teacher's ability to provide effective classroom instruction and enhance student achievement. This study examined novice teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach in urban schools after completing a traditional teacher education program. Through interviews, the study provided better insight regarding effective components of teacher education programs, in addition to identifying specific concerns of

the participants. While no teacher preparation program can fully prepare a new teacher for the realities of teaching, the recommendations offered by the participants of the study and myself could further teacher preparation reform efforts.

With the increasing minority population in K-12 public schools, it is vital that teachers be able to establish relationships with students while providing them with effective instruction that will positively impact their academic achievement. Teacher educators along with directing teachers can offer assistance in this effort by remaining committed to enhancing their own professional growth. The restructuring of field experiences can also be a determining factor in the preparedness of future teachers. The opportunity to participate in fieldwork which links theory with practice will provide preservice teachers with hands-on experience, which they will employ in a practical manner. Quality traditional teacher education programs are essential in the mission of strengthening the teaching profession. It is vital that school districts and universities establish significant and consistent dialogue in an effort to provide future teachers with meaningful and extensive experiences in urban settings.

APPENDIX A

DCPS Research Approval Form

dcps
Duval County Public Schools

1701 Prudential Drive
Jacksonville, FL 32207
www.dreamsbeginhere.org
904 390 2000

August 4, 2008

Dr. Crystal Timmons

Dear Dr. Timmons:

Your request to conduct research in Duval County Schools has been approved. This approval applies to your project in the form and content as supplied to this office for review. Any variations or modifications to the approved protocol must be cleared with this office prior to implementing such changes.

Participation in studies of this nature is voluntary on the part of principals, teachers, staff, and students. Our approval does not obligate any principal, teacher, staff member, or student to participate in your study. A signed copy of this letter must accompany any initial contact with principals, teachers, parents, and students.

Our approvals for research run through June 30th of each school year. To continue with the next phase of your study you will have to submit an application again when school begins in the fall. You will be required to supply copies of signed consent and assent forms at that time. If there have been no changes to the approved protocol you may refer to the previously submitted paperwork.

Upon completion of the study, it is customary to forward a copy of the finished report to the Office of Instructional Research and Accountability, 1701 Prudential Dr., rm. 322, Jacksonville, Florida 32207. This office also shall be notified, in advance, of the publication of any reports/articles in which Duval County is mentioned by name.

If you have questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call me or Jeff Dryden

Sincerely,

Timothy Ballentine
Executive Director
Instructional Research and Accountability

APPENDIX B

UNF IRB Approval Form

UNF

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTH FLORIDA.

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
1 UNF Drive
Jacksonville, FL 32224-2665
904-620-2455 FAX 904-620-2457
Equal Opportunity/Equal Access/Affirmative Action Institution

MEMORANDUM

DATE:	June 3, 2008
TO:	Crystal Timmons, Educational Leadership
VIA:	Dr. Russell Mays
FROM:	Dr. A. David Kline, Chair UNF Institutional Review Board
RE:	Review by the UNF Institutional Review Board IRB#08-073: "Preparation for teaching in urban schools: Perceptions of the impact of traditional training programs"

This is to advise you that your study, "Preparation for teaching in urban schools: Perceptions of the impact of traditional training programs," has been reviewed on behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board and has been approved (Expedited/Category #7).

This approval applies to your project in the form and content as submitted to the IRB for review. Any variations or modifications to the approved protocol and/or informed consent forms as they relate to dealing with human subjects must be approved with the IRB prior to implementing such changes. Any unanticipated problems involving risk and any occurrence of serious harm to subjects and others shall be reported promptly to the IRB.

IRB approval is valid for **one year**. If your project continues for more than one year, please provide a continuing status report to the UNF IRB by **May 20, 2009**.

Should you have any questions regarding your project or any other IRB issues, please contact Nicole Sayers, Assistant Director of Research Integrity, at _____ or _____

Thank you.

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Email

Dear Educator,

Greetings! My name is Crystal Timmons and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at UNF.I would like to invite you to be a part of my dissertation concerning collegiate teacher preparation for urban schools. For the study, it is my goal to examine novice urban elementary teachers' perceptions of effective components of teacher education programs. Your participation would include taking part in a focus group followed by an individual interview concerning your teacher preparation program and your teaching experiences. My aim is to use this information to have collegiate preparation programs reformed or enhanced to better prepare future teachers to provide instruction in high- poverty schools.

Please know that I would like to work with you at your convenience. I know your time is valuable, and I very much appreciate your willingness to assist with this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at   or at
                              You may also contact my committee chairperson, Dr. Russell Mays,

I will call you at your school site within 48 hours as a follow-up to this email.

Thank you in advance for your consideration,
Crystal Timmons

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Notice
(Focus Groups)

Crystal Timmons is a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at the University of North Florida. She is conducting research on collegiate preparation for teaching in urban schools. The purpose of this investigation is to determine the perceptions of novice teachers regarding the impact of traditional preparation programs on the effectiveness of teaching in urban schools.

This research study consists of two components: (1) a focus group, and (2) individual interviews. This consent form applies to the focus group phase of the study. The focus group should last approximately 2 hours. Focus groups will be audio-taped and transcribed for the purpose of data collection. Participants' identities will be kept confidential. Participation is voluntary, and participants may stop at any time during the focus group or may refuse to discuss any specific question(s) without penalty.

After the focus group has concluded and during the data analysis phase, the investigator may review the transcription of the focus group with any of the participants in order to clarify responses.

There are no foreseeable risks to participants in this study nor is there any compensation for participation.

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to ask now or any time following this focus group. Crystal Timmons can be reached by phone at
or by email

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. A. David Kline, Chair of the UNF Institutional Review Board, by phone at   or by email at

I have read and understand the procedures described above. I agree to participate in this research study and I have received a copy of this description.

Signatures:

_____
Subject   Date   Principal Investigator   Date

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Notice
(Individual Interviews)

Crystal Timmons is a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at the University of North Florida. She is conducting research on collegiate preparation for teaching in urban schools. The purpose of this investigation is to determine the perceptions of novice teachers regarding the impact of traditional preparation programs on the effectiveness of teaching in urban schools.

This research study consists of two components: (1) a focus group, and (2) individual interviews. This consent form applies to the individual interview phase of the study. The individual interview should last approximately 1 hour. Interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for the purpose of data collection. Participants' identities will be kept confidential. Participation is voluntary, and participants may stop at any time during the focus group or may refuse to discuss any specific question(s) without penalty.

After the interview has concluded and during the data analysis phase, the investigator may review the transcription of the interview with any of the participants in order to clarify responses.

There are no foreseeable risks to participants in this study nor is there any compensation for participation.

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to ask now or any time following this focus group. Crystal Timmons can be reached by phone at or by email at

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. A. David Kline, Chair of the UNF Institutional Review Board, by phone at   or by email at

I have read and understand the procedures described above. I agree to participate in this research study and I have received a copy of this description.

Signatures:

_____

Subject   Date   Principal Investigator   Date

APPENDIX F

Focus Group Questions

1. What was your definition of an urban (lower socio-economic) environment prior to teaching in your current setting?

2. Has this definition changed since you began teaching?

3. What were your previous experiences with urban environments?

4. Think back to your urban field experience. Overall, would you consider it a positive or negative experience?

5. What was most helpful during your experience?

6. What was least helpful during your experience?

7. Do you think that your training has prepared you to teach in this type of school?

8. Describe the transition into your 1st year of teaching. How did your collegiate courses and field experiences relate to this transition?

9. Based on your experience, do you see a need for a different curriculum to prepare students for teaching in an urban setting?

10. What are the differences in urban and non-urban settings that make it necessary to have different curriculum? (What is it specifically about urban schools that leads you to believe in the need of a different setting?)

11. What course topics within your collegiate courses on education and/or field experiences were most beneficial to you during your 1st year of teaching? (What is the single most important topic within your collegiate courses?)

12. Based on your teaching experience thus far, what recommendations for change would you make in the field courses and/or course instruction to better prepare future educators to teach in urban settings?

Individual Interview Questions

1. From your first year of teaching to the end of this school year, what do you consider the most vital points you have learned in reference to dealing with students from the urban environment?

2. Would you have liked to have a different experience with the Directing Teacher from your student internship/practicum?

3. Please explain the differences in your experiences with urban vs. non-urban settings.

4. Would you characterize the things that you feel you did not receive from your teacher preparation program as totally absent from the program or that they were present and just not expounded on as they should have been?

5. Please state the specific courses that you felt were the most valuable in your teacher preparation program.

6. Reflecting on the professors of your program and their instructional capabilities, do you feel that they were connected to the education world outside of college- the "real world"?

7. If you could create a course or curriculum specifically for dealing with students in the urban environment, what would the essentials be?

8. Do you see yourself teaching in a non-urban setting?

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University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, 2010

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Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida
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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES
University of Florida:
Clinical Assistant Professor, Jacksonville, Florida   2010-present
- Responsible for coordinating job-embedded graduate program
- Develop recruitment strategies to increase number of participants

University of North Florida:
Clinical Instructor, Jacksonville, Florida   2002-2010
- Provided instruction for preservice teachers
- Coordinate field placements within Duval County Schools

Duval County Public Schools:
Teacher, Jacksonville, Florida   1994-2002
- Implemented fourth and fifth grade curriculum
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MEMBERSHIPS

- NAACP   2008-present
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