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Project ReConnect: Fostering Resilience within Disconnected Youths

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This qualitative research study identifies protective factors that foster resilience in disconnected youths (ages 16-18) who are participants in Project ReConnect, an alternative education program in New York City. Observations, participant observations, interviews, and focus groups were utilized to collect data from ten participants. Findings suggest a small class size, caring environment, and building unity among at-risk youths contribute to enhanced resilience in these youths. Examples of resilience, as well as implications for education will be discussed.

Matriculating through the adolescent stage can be very difficult for some. During this period, adolescents go through a plethora of psychological, social, and physiological changes. Many individuals within this challenging life period are faced with a number of risk factors which consequently makes them susceptible to a destructive life course (Aristilde, 2006). The extensive research (Brooks & Goldstein, 1001, 2006; Malekoff, 2004; Fraser & Richman, 2001) clearly illuminates the devastating effects poverty, abuse, violence, and neglect may have on the development of adolescents.

One particular developmental life task that may serve as a major impediment to healthy adolescent development, is the completion of high school, which is one of the most

prominent social contexts for adolescents (Aristilde, 2006). Young people who drop out of high school are unlikely to have the minimum skills and credentials necessary to function in today's increasingly complex society and technological workplace. The completion of high school is required for accessing post-secondary education and is a minimum requirement for most jobs (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). High school dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to be unemployed (Caspi, Wright, Moffit, & Silva, 1998).

According to Levitan (2005), youths between the ages of 16-24, unemployed and not in school, are "disconnected "and seriously at risk for failure. New York City has the third lowest graduation rate among the 50 largest school districts in the United States. Nearly one in six of New York City's youths are fail to graduate from high school and can be considered disconnected youths.

Wehlage (1989) argue that most studies show that disconnected youths are: a) of low socio-economic status, b) racial and ethic minorities, c) low achieving, d) low scoring test takers, and e) frequent misbehavers. School programs were not the way to deal with individuals with these "uncontrollable social characteristics." While these indicators may describe the "typical students" who drop out of school, there are also many who do not fit the profile. Many scholars argue that despite overwhelming adversities, there are some at–risk, disconnected youths who are able to overcome obstacles and become competent, productive young adults. These individuals have been referred to as being *resilient* (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999).

Resilience

Resilience is the capacity to recover and/or bounce back Normalcy after experiencing difficult situations (Rosenfeld, Lahad, & Cohen, 2001). It is used as a term to describe children who have been able to overcome the grips of poverty, abuse, neglect, and school failure who persevere

and lead productive lives (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). A child who optimally utilize available resources or benefits from them without a specific strategy or intervention, and in doing so produces positive result in the face of adversity can be called resilient (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999).

Factors that impact resilience have been categorized within the person, family, community, and other aspects of the environment. Factors that prevent the development of resiliency are known as "high risk factors" (Brooks & Goldstein, 2006; Loewenson & Blum, 2001) while those that contribute to, enhance, and promote resiliency are known as "protective factors." Protective factors may include individual characteristics or environmental conditions that help adolescents thwart risk factors (Kirby & Fraser, 1987).

Several studies highlight role models to include teachers, administrators, and counselors as protective factors for at-risk youths (Werner, 1986; Dugan & Coles, 1989). According to Rosenfeld (2001), schools can become protective factors when they are sensitive to needs and hardships of youths who are exposed to risk factors. The dearth of literature on resiliency in disconnected youths suggests that schools do not traditionally promote resiliency due to their large class sizes and academically driven environments (Krovetz, 1999; Benard, 1993). Alternative education is usually the option that serves those most at risk including students who are: from minority backgrounds; expelled or suspended, and disenfranchised from the traditional high school experience (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

Project ReConnect

In an effort to address New York City's disconnected youths, St. John's University's School of Education developed Project ReConnect, an alternative educational program designed to assist disconnected youths living in New York City transition to high school or prepares them to take the General Equivalency Diploma test (GED). The program is located at the Roy Wilkins Community Center in

Southeast Queens, New York and offers a variety of programs for individuals of all ages. The center is equipped with several offices, classrooms, two cafeterias, a weight room, a gymnasium, and a swimming pool.

Project ReConnect is a partnership between St. John's University and the Southern Queens Parks Association, Inc. (SQPA), a community-based organization. The goals of Project ReConnect are to provide students with academic services, mentoring, counseling, computer literacy, and test preparation assistance. In addition, students are provided with informational workshops on self-esteem building, study skills, time management, critical thinking skills, college linkages, and financial aid. Students have the opportunity to participate in career and college fairs, summer internship programs, and a host of cultural activities. Students are introduced to the job market and receive information on how to apply and interview for part- and full-time employment.

Each student enrolled is involved in all aspects of the program for one year. At the end of the year, students have the option of taking the GED test or transitioning back to high school. Project ReConnect participants outcomes are: a) competitive employment; (b) enrollment in or graduation from a two or four year college; (c)employment or a vocational/trade school; or (d) the armed forces.

Students living in New York City who have either dropped out or been removed from traditional high school are eligible for the program. Since its inception in 2004, Project ReConnect has served over 150 students, with an average of 50 students per year. To recruit students, Project Reconnect's administrative staff has made several visits to high schools speaking to principals and counselors. Fliers were also posted throughout the community (distributed in parks, churches, schools).

Studies have shown that the school structure and environment plays a critical role in students' school success. Therefore, it is important to understand the structural and environmental factors that promote and support successful

completion, thus enhancing resilience. Little is known about the impact that alternative education programs have on fostering resilience. To that end, the purpose of this study was to determine if and how Project ReConnect contributed to the resiliency of its at-risk study participants.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were students considered to be disconnected youths hereafter referred to as youths who successfully obtained their GED. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the youths. The youths enrolled in the program were between the ages of 16-19, unemployed, and had been either expelled or dropped out of high school due to truancy, violence, peer pressure, low-self esteem, or lack of academic, social, and emotional support from school staff. These youths were mainly residents of Jamaic, New York or the surrounding areas.

Selection criteria for participants in this study included: (a) regular attendance (defined as four or five days per week) to the program; and (b) achieving one or more of the aforementioned outcome measures. Ten youths (6 males, 4 females), a teacher, the assistant director, and the executive director were included in this study. The students ranged in age from 16-18 years of age. The majority of the youths were African Americans. However, one Indian female and one Hispanic male participated in the study (see Table 1 below).

Letters were sent to the homes of youths (who passed their GED test and are either working, in college, or in the military) soliciting their support for the study. Additionally, flyers were posted around the facility soliciting youths. Due to the nature and time constraints of this qualitative inquiry, the first ten youths who agreed to participate were accepted. Teachers and other staff affiliated with Project ReConnect were encouraged to participate in the study.

One of the researcher's role as a participant observer

Name	Age	Ethnicity	School Status
Charles	16	Black	Expelled
Dena	17	Black	Drop-out
Tam	17	Black	Drop-out
Larry	19	Black	Expelled
Steve	16	Black	Drop-out
Vinetha	18	Black	Drop-out
Robert	18	Black	Drop-out
Homaira	17	Indian	Drop-out
Hector	19	Hispanic	Drop-out

TABLE 1 *Study Participants*

was to serve as a counselor and assist the youths in coping with contextual factors that might impede their progress in the program and/or life. The goal was to conduct qualitative research which allowed the students to share their perspectives of the program. Rist (2000) indicates that a unique contribution to qualitative inquiry is to give voice to those who are often not heard.

Data Collection Procedures

Three data collection procedures were used in this study: interviews, focus groups, and participant observations. Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted with the youths to collect information on the youths' perceptions of Project ReConnect and how the program helped them be successful. These semi-structured interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes each. All students were asked the following questions.

- What led to your interest in Project ReConnect?
- What was it about the traditional high school that did not appeal to you?
- What made it easy for you to attend the Project ReConnect Program?

- What helped you to successfully complete the Project ReConnect Program?
- How did Project ReConnect help you deal with negative environmental and other issues in your life?

Two focus groups were conducted with five youths in each one. Each focus group lasted one and one-half hour. Specific questions from the focus group centered around the program's impact on the students. Questions included the following.

- What do you like most about the Project ReConnect Program?
- What do you like least about the program?
- What would you tell a student who inquires about Project ReConnect?

Due to the in-depth and flexible nature of qualitative inquiry, the researchers probed for additional information to better understand the context and meaning of participant answers when warranted (Merriam, 1998). Participant observations were conducted by the lead author in his role of counselor. Throughout the duration of the study, the lead researcher would spend a significant amount of time in the cafeteria and in the classroom observing student interactions among peers as well as with the teachers and administration.

Additionally, student interactions were observed before and after schools. Detailed field notes were taken during each observation. The cafeteria observations yielded rich, pertinent data. Often some of the student would be "short on cash" and ask one of his/her peers to "help him out." It was interesting to see that the student who did have any money would be ridiculed in a comical way but would always get something to eat.

In the classrooms, students could be observed intently listening to the teacher on some occasions and fiercely challenging the teacher on other occasions. The teachers would seemingly possess great poise in allowing for and crating environments where the students could be themselves

and freely express their opinions regarding various topics of discussion. Teachers were also observed to express their sincere interest in caring about their students' participation.

Before and after school observations confirmed the fact that the students really had a strong connection with each other as evidenced by the laughter and joking. The majority of the group would actually enter and exit the building as a single unit.

Data collected from field notes clearly indicates a united group with focus and purpose. The students appeared to be in an environment where they felt welcomed and valued. Additionally, it was somewhat humbling to witness the strong sense of camaraderie among the group.

Data gathered from the staff were obtained via semi-structured interviews. Specific questions that were asked included the following.

- What do you think were attributing factors for those students who successfully completed the Project ReConnect Program?
- What was it that you did as staff that you think helped students to succeed in this program?
- Please describe your interactions with the students in this program.
- If asked, what would students in this program say about your teaching/administrative style?

Data Analysis

The collection and analysis of data occurred continuously throughout this process. The interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In particular, content analysis was used to interpret and categorize the interview data, allowing for a continuous discovery of the data and identifying themes. The use of content analysis classified the information being collected according to a conceptual framework.

Peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, long-term observation, and triangulation were implemented in order to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and credibility (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 1998) for this study. In this study, a peer debriefing process was conducted by an independent expert who is knowledgeable about qualitative inquiry, to listen to the researchers' ideas and/or concerns, to observe the data collection process, and provide support throughout the study. Peer debriefing helped address some inherent assumptions and biases that may have been present while analyzing data.

One of the researchers spent well over a year working with the students in a counseling capacity; the other researcher was a program administrator. These long-term interactions ensure the element of prolonged engagement with the study participants.

Triangulation is a process of comparing and cross checking the consistency of information derived from different times, through the use of different means of data collection (Patton, 1990). In this study, we conducted interviews, participant observations, and focus group data that we were able to triangulate.

Results

The results of the study suggest Project ReConnect is a protective factor for disconnected youths. The overwhelming attitude of the participants was that participating in Project ReConnect was a source of inspiration and hope.

Project ReConnect is a Caring Community

During the participant interviews, one of the first questions asked was: What made it easy for you to come and successfully complete the program? Each participant responded positively. Charles stated:

> *The teachers here are nice, and they care about you... they work with you. I had good teachers… The job helpers helped you a lot, they made it easy for you because you could go to school and then meet with them to help you look for a job, and I didn't have to worry about going to this place and that looking for a job and filling out applications. Everything was right here.*

Dena began looking for an alternative program because she felt she "wasn't getting the attention" she needed at her old high school. She indicates this by saying

> *Ms. R helped me out with my writing like I always thought I was a good writer as far as the essays, but I saw where I improved on my writing when I took those practice tests. And Mr. M was excellent in math. I never had that connection with math, but he showed in a way where I actually felt like I know something like okay I'm understanding it. Ms. R and Mr. M, they really care about us doing good! They are very dedicated!*

The concept of caring was a prevalent theme that emerged from the data. Staff data seemed to correlate with the student perspectives as they relate to caring. One staff member responses capture the essence of the staff's perspective when she stated, "With the assistance of a caring, patient, supportive but firm staff member, students begin to take ownership of their education, set goals, and work towards achieving these goals."

Project ReConnect Promotes Unity

An emerging theme that surfaced was a sense of unity at Project ReConnect which served as a means to motivate students to support one another. Tam, who struggled with getting along with her peers in the beginning because of a

"lack of trust" in everybody, eventually became a well-liked student. She was known to help students in a number of ways. Tam mentioned:

> *Being in a situation with other people like you helped me a lot….Tonia, she dropped out of school because she felt like she wasn't getting no attention, and you felt the same way so you like can actually connect or relate to that person. That doesn't mean you have to be best friends with that person…It makes you want to stay and help each other.*

Robert stated,

> *There are people in here just like me like who dropped out of high school, and I see that they can come in here and do it and I say to myself I can to. …The people that finished were there for each other and helped each other out.*

After serving time "upstate," Larry came back home and was introduced to Project ReConnect by his cousin, who was a student in Project ReConnect. Larry quickly learned that his peers were a valuable source for him getting through the program. He stated:

> *My classmates helped me out a lot, like we would study together in a classroom or sometime like when I'm going through a problem, and I might disagree with what the teacher was saying, they would come to me and tell me to calm down. It was basically like we were one big family in here. Everybody stuck together, and nobody really had problems with each other. Everybody was here for the same reason…That's the main reason I stayed.*

All of the staff alluded to the fact that a mission of Project ReConnect is to create an environment where the students would be supportive of each other. One staff member mentioned:

> *The students enrolled in Project ReConnect are not atypical of students who have not met with success in traditional secondary schools. These students have a host of social, emotional, economic, and family issues that impacted their decision to drop out of high school. Project ReConnect is designed to help participants identify and address barriers to success. It provides a risk free environment for a cohort of students who work toward the same goal of getting back on track and continuing on a path to a more promising future.*

Small Class Size

Steve knew Project ReConnect was the right place for him when a staff member came to his school and conducted a meeting about how the program. He became intrigued. When asked what made it easy for him to come and complete the program, he said,

> *For me it was easy because it…was a decent amount of kids. I felt comfortable in here. It was a small group and we got to know each other, and the teachers got to know us. It wasn't like that at my old high school!*

Vinetha felt the small class sizes played a major part in her completing the program. She states:

> *I liked coming here because I could focus because there weren't a lot of distractions. The classes were small and I really liked that.*

Class size was a key finding from the perspective of the staff as well. One staff member stated,

> *From its smaller, more personal learning environment to the one-on-one educational mentoring, and counseling sessions, students felt comfortable admitting to gaps in their knowledge base as well as articulating their need for help!*

Examples of Resilience

Many of the students discussed a number of issues with which they were able to cope and persevere to complete the program despite hardships. They all attributed participating in Project ReConnect as a vital aspect in their coping process. One of the students, "Robert," mentioned that the stress of living in "the hood" is often unbearable. He stated,

> *I'm around negativity every day of the week in my hood. It's hard to escape! I'm tired of getting high all day, everyday! I'm tired of seeing the crackheads and the hoes in the hood. Being in the program takes me away and I am the first one here and the last one to leave.*

Tam attributes Project ReConnect for helping to show her how to deal with people in various situations. She states,

> *Before I came here, I had a real bad attitude, especially with the teachers. I didn't like when some teachers would call me out, and I would go off on them. The teachers here respect you, and I thank them because they showed me how to deal with people better.*

Discussion

The students in this study struggled academically, socially, and emotionally in the traditional high schools. All study participants identified Project ReConnect as a safe place without a lot of distractions. Several students indicated that they were able to focus and excel in all aspects of the program due to the small class sizes. One participant stated that, at his previous high school, he "felt like a number." Other participants asserted that classes were overcrowded and prevented students from receiving individualized attention. Although the researchers will not argue that small classrooms are a cure-all, fix-all, we do believe that when classrooms are not intimidating due to their large size, students can better navigate through all aspects of the classroom environment.

Implications for Education

Nel Noddings (2002; 1992) have written extensively about the ethics of caring. Perhaps one of the most salient findings from this study for the education community is that students do need caring teachers as well as a caring academic environment. Participants stressed that Project ReConnect staff genuinely cared about their well being. This feeling had a positive impact on their success in the program Additionally, the data analyzed from the staff reveals the importance of a caring environment on the enhancement of student resilience. Caring teachers are critical elements of public education. Therefore, interventions should focus on creating an ethos of caring in schools by encouraging staff to create caring learning environments for their students.

Study Limitations

This study has several limitations; these include the small sample size and use of self-report measures. Due to the nature of self-reporting, there is not any assurance that the participants are giving truthful responses. Since the study researchers were also Project ReConnect counselor and administrator, participants may have felt the need to provide

more socially desired responses. Because of the small sample size, the results are also limited in their generalizability.

Future Research

The results of this study yield promising information regarding an alternative educational program and its ability to foster resilience in disconnected youths. Future studies may want to consider looking into the ethnographies of schooling to gain an in-depth look at the lives of disconnected youths. Examining the impact of various alternative education programs may be a good start. Additionally, conducting large scale, cross-cultural comparison studies may assist in the development of culturally-relevant and appropriate programs for disconnected youths.

Conclusion

The student participants in this study provided invaluable data which can be used to better equip educational programs to foster success and resilience in students at risk of failure. Their collective message is very clear. They fully endorse a small, caring, supportive, and therapeutic educational environment. Project ReConnect staff members have created such an environment where students can freely express their opinions and where students report they are highly valued and respected by the staff.

As a result, these students acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become academically successful. The students have established relationships with caring staff members who have afforded them necessary personal attention and exhibited empathy, understanding, and acceptance toward them. Such support has inspired these at-risk students to flourish, therefore decreasing their chances of remaining disconnected youths.

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Professional Development: Assisting Urban Schools in Making Annual Yearly Progress

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Under the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), all schools are required to demonstrate that all students make annual yearly progress (AYP). This can be difficult, particularly for students in urban schools and even more so for students with disabilities. The authors report on one large urban school district's attempts to provide support to 140 schools that did not meet AYP in the 2003-2004 school year. Two years worth of support through professional development are described, as well as the achievement results for all schools with a particular focus on two case study schools.

The premise of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is to "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic

assessments…holding schools, local educational agencies, and states accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students" (US Department of Education, n.d.). According to the Education Commission of the States (2004), NCLB is a "potent blend of new requirements, incentives, and resources, and it poses significant challenges for states" (n.p.).

Adequate Yearly Progress and Student Performance

One such requirement is having schools meet "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for all subgroups of students (i.e., economically disadvantaged, limited English proficiency, students in major racial and ethnic groups, and students with disabilities). AYP is a state's measure of a year's progress towards achieving state academic standards and the minimum level of improvement that schools must achieve annually. Performance on reading and math assessments is the main indicator of whether AYP is being met, but graduation rates, and other determined criteria as set forth by individual states must be included (Education Commission of the States, 2004). All subgroups, including students with disabilities, must meet performance targets of the percentage of students scoring at or above "proficient" as identified by each state. If students with disabilities do not meet AYP, the school is identified as not meeting AYP. In measuring AYP, the state establishes a baseline, and then sets forth a higher bar. Each year, the bar is raised, until the school year 2013-2014, where all students are required to be proficient.

Florida's Plan

In Florida, a school makes AYP if all the subgroups meet Florida's annual measurable goal in reading and mathematics and attain at least 95% participation on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) or an alternate assessment. The FCAT measures the students' achievement in comparison to the benchmarks in the Florida Sunshine State Standards (SSS). The scores range from

Level 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Students must receive a 2 in order to pass. Proficiency is a score of Level 3, and advanced includes Levels 4 and 5 (Florida Department of Education, 2005). NCLB holds teachers and schools responsible for the proficiency of all students.

Teacher Performance Through Professional Development and Classroom Support

Teacher performance can be influenced by many factors, with professional development (PD) at the forefront. Typical workshop format is not enough; follow-up must be evident. Joyce and Showers (2002) compare the percentage of teachers' attainment of skills in four areas: 1) theory presented (15%), 2) modeling (18%), 3) practice and low-risk feedback (80%), and 4) coaching and study teams (90%). In-class support in the form of coaching, practice, and feedback, provides teachers with a support model, whereby teachers have someone to lean on and from whom to learn, taking the workshop format of PD into a new dimension of teacher-skill attainment. Increasing teacher performance (with the goal of increasing student achievement) is possible through PD, which must consist of teacher support.

Joyce and Showers (2002), found that coached teachers: 1) implemented new strategies more frequently and developed greater skill than "uncoached" teachers; 2) used their newly learned strategies more appropriately than "uncoached" teachers; 3) demonstrated greater long-term retention of knowledge about and skill of strategies; 4) were more likely to explain new models of teaching to students; and 5) understood the purposes of the new strategies.

Fogarty & Pete (2007) describe "rich, robust, and rigorous models of professional learning" (p. 41) as having seven critical qualities in which training is: 1) sustained; 2) job embedded; 3) collegial; 4) interactive; 5) integrated; 6) results oriented; and 6) practical or hands on. The objective of collegial interaction in learning communities is that

follow-up, assessment, and adjustment of instruction result in internal expertise that is then shared by a group of teachers, which Schmoker (2006) describes as imperative to effective professional development. Teacher support, which includes collegial interactions, is an effective strategy for increasing teacher performance.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that shaped this inquiry includes AYP and student achievement, as well as teacher performance through professional development and in-class support (including coaching and modeling). According to Killion (2007) school-based coaching provides 1) an increase in student achievement and 2) a culture of professional collaboration that increases teachers' sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, and teaching performance. These two concepts shaped the school-based support implemented by the central office special education staff to a large urban school district and two target schools in hopes of improving student achievement to improve the schools' AYP.

Method

Participants

A group of 140 out of 195 urban elementary schools in a large diverse school district were identified as needing assistance based on not meeting AYP in the 2003-2004 school year. Data from the 140 schools were analyzed, focusing on the subgroup of students with disabilities. Findings generated a group of schools, which were identified as needing intensive support, and included a focus directed at the special education classrooms. Central office personnel were deployed to the school sites with the goal of providing instructional classroom support to the special education teachers. This article will focus on the overall progress of these schools over a two-year period and the support specifically provided to two urban schools from the 140

schools. In the two case schools, six special education teachers were the focus of on-site support. The subgroup of students with disabilities were targeted in an effort to assist the school in meeting the criteria of AYP. See Table 1 for school demographics of each target school compared with overall means of the larger group of non-AYP elementary schools.

TABLE 1 *School Demographics*

	Means	SD	Target A	Target B
	140 sample			
Ethnicity				
B%	38	35	13	41
W%	8	11	1	3
H%	53	33	86	55
CSS hours	16	32	37	44
LEP %	23	14	47	25
FRL%	79	21	98	92
SE%	17	8	15	15
MI%	29	9	37	37
MS%	48	10	28	40
ATT%	96	.8	95	94
SUS #	39	51	37	23
CS#	26	3	23	25

Key: b= Black, w= White, h=Hispanic, CSS= curriculum support specialists, LEP= limited English proficiency, FRL= free/reduced lunch, SE= special education (not gifted), MI= mobility index, MS= percent of teachers with a Master's degree or higher, ATD= attendance, SUS= suspensions, CS= average class size

Data Collection Procedures

One of the authors, a special education central office administrator at the time, deployed staff to schools that met criteria of needing support. Criteria were based on a variety of data, including, but not limited to: AYP, school

performance on state-wide assessments, mobility, levels of student achievement, and special education population. The deployed staff consisted of teachers-on-special-assignment, referred to as Curriculum Support Specialists (CSS). Each of the CSS was assigned a group of schools to which on-site support in the form of coaching and on-site professional development was provided. The two case studies provide a sample of on-site support and professional development.

CSS were scheduled once a week to engage in dialogue and reflection in collaboration with each other, as well as regular conversations and debriefings with the central office administrator. These opportunities are crucial to the success of the support (Pitton, 2000) and it provided built-in time to share and evaluate, as well as map out action plans for the future. Documentation was essential. Coaching logs were completed by the CSS were maintained from each classroom visitation, which included the follow-up necessary for focusing the central office to enhance the continued growth of the special education teachers. In addition, documentation also included sign-in sheets and actual presentation materials that were maintained for the on-site professional development, both providing a clear picture of learning opportunities being offered through on-site support and targeted professional development, based on the needs of the school. The central office administrator maintained staff work logs, and the CSS created pictorial graphs of documented support.

Both School A and B were provided in-class support in a variety of ways, based on the needs of each school; however, there were similar threads of needs in both schools. Three teachers were targeted at each school for intensive classroom supports.

Inclusion. Both schools were provided assistance with the implementation of increasing the number of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The CSS helped the two schools obtain grant funding to support inclusive classrooms, as well as assisted in the development of an

inclusion action plan to be submitted to the central office. The central office staff arranged for the observation of effective co-teaching models at neighboring schools with similar demographics. During the support phase, inclusion rates indicated an increase in students with disabilities spending 80% or more of their day with non-disabled peers: School A increased their inclusion rate from 27.88% in June 2005 to 44.89% in June 2006. School B's inclusion rate in June 2005 was 17.28%, increasing to 24.65% in June 2006.

Professional Development. Based on a needs assessment, teachers from both schools were also provided professional opportunities via intensive, small-group PD sessions such as: effective reading practices; FCAT Reading, analysis of benchmarks, FCAT strategies and accommodations permissible on the FCAT. Following PD, school-site follow-up was conducted to assist in the implementation of knowledge gained for transfer to the classroom setting.

In-Class Support. A large portion of PD at both schools consisted of providing coaching and modeling through in-class support, which included planning for effective lessons, coaching and co-teaching during the lessons, as well as debriefing opportunities at the end of the lesson through the modeling of effective reading and teaching strategies. Based upon logs maintained by the central office staff, additional coaching and modeling was provided to teachers as needed. For example, School A needed more specific modeling of lessons in guided reading and whole group instruction utilizing grade level texts, while School B required modeling effective multi-age and multi-grade lessons. Additionally, accommodation kits were provided to the six target classes. Math materials and classroom libraries were also provided to both schools, as well as on-site PD of how to effectively use them. PD was provided to help each school be compliant with IEP, documentation, and assessment requirements.

Data Sources

Data sources include a needs assessment survey given to the teachers at non-AYP schools, materials and logs from PD, follow-up surveys with teachers who received support, logs of classroom observations and interviews of target teachers, as well as an in-depth analysis of demographic and achievement data of all 140 non-AYP schools.

Data Analysis

A combination of quantitative data analysis and qualitative methodology were utilized. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) described this type of mixed methodology as a sequential QUAN-QUAL design (quantitative data analysis followed by qualitative data collection and analysis). In addition to collecting school-wide data on each of the 140 schools, the two target schools were studied in depth through the use of a constant comparative process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), where data collected from the teachers through surveys, interviews, and observations were continuously analyzed using a recursive process. The process of constant comparison of data led to the gradual emergence of tentative hypotheses that explained the data. The researchers attempted to show connections between survey responses, interview responses, and classroom actions. Interview protocols were open-ended to capture both expected and unexpected perspectives and information.

Descriptive information about the survey responses (means and standard deviations) of total scores of each of the teachers was calculated. Means and frequencies were run on FCAT achievement data, AYP data, school gains, and school grades.

Results

Adequate Yearly Progress

Table 2 below shows school AYP percentages at the start of CCS interventions (2004) and the year after the interventions (2006) for the 140 schools and the target schools. Improvements in AYP were evident across the

board. Table 2 also shows school grades across the three years and whether or not the school "made gains." The percentage of schools scoring "C" or higher consistently increased over time and the two target schools each increased their letter grade (and made gains) in year three.

TABLE 2 *School Progress*

School Years	% AYP	School Grade (%)					Make Gains?	
		A	B	C	D	F	YES	NO
140 school average								
03-04	88	41	15	23	12	2	0	100
04-05		50	13	19	11	1	80	19
05-06	93	48	21	21	4	0	56	36
School A								
03-04	80			X				X
04-05				X				X
05-06	97		X				X	
School B								
03-04	77				X			X
04-05					X			X
05-06	82		X				X	

Student Achievement

Tables 3 and 4 show the percent of students scoring at levels 1-5 on the reading and math sections of the FCAT. Progress was evident in most grades and levels as indicated by a decrease in level 1s and increases in levels 2 and above meeting criteria. The grade that showed the least amount of progress across the board was grade 4. Both target schools made improvements and improved at greater strides than the larger sample averages.

Two Case Schools

Original needs assessments indicated that professional development and instructional support were needed in literacy. These included implementing the newly-adopted

TABLE 3 *Reading Achievement Data*

	Year	**140 sample**			**School A**			**School B**		
Grade		3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5
	Level 1									
	04	34	21	37	46	41	62	50	33	37
	05	28	21	24	36	40	34	50	33	23
	06	21	24	22	26	38	34	19	36	34
	Level 2									
	04	14	18	19	19	19	21	15	28	29
	05	15	16	20	19	19	20	9	12	17
	06	12	18	19	15	15	27	14	26	16
	Level 3									
	04	30	37	27	28	31	16	21	33	24
	05	33	41	34	29	32	33	24	33	46
	06	38	34	34	38	31	30	32	25	31
	Level 4									
	04	19	21	14	6	8	1	13	8	7
	05	21	24	19	13	8	11	15	16	14
	06	26	20	20	20	16	7	33	9	16
	Level 5									
	04	4	4	3	1	1	0	1	0	2
	05	4	5	4	3	0	1	1	7	0
	06	3	4	4	2	0	2	1	4	3

core reading program, teaching effectively in multi-age, multi-level reading classes, and small-group interventions o instruction, as well as, the use of appropriate accommodations and differentiated instruction for students with disabilities. CSS logs from classroom observations and interviews indicated the need to provide a connection between the instructional aspects of learning and

compliance, as well as the appropriate implementation of grade-level texts (School A) and the need to provide support for instruction in an effective classroom environment (School B). Ongoing logs revealed the target teachers effectively implementing their newly trained skills. Following the school based coaching, two-thirds of the focus

TABLE 4 *Math Achievement Scores*

	Year	**140 sample**			**School A**			**School B**		
Grade		3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5
	Level 1									
	04	28	20	31	25	25	44	44	25	43
	05	21	20	20	25	20	30	38	33	23
	06	17	19	23	17	19	27	17	37	38
	Level 2									
	04	21	24	30	18	33	35	24	31	24
	05	20	24	29	13	30	35	27	24	31
	06	18	22	30	18	18	38	15	28	28
	Level 3									
	04	31	36	21	41	32	17	25	36	26
	05	33	37	26	36	41	23	24	29	23
	06	34	35	25	23	43	24	39	20	21
	Level 4									
	04	16	16	16	15	9	4	6	8	7
	05	19	16	21	18	7	10	8	12	23
	06	24	19	18	33	15	11	24	13	10
	Level 5									
	04	4	4	5	1	0	0	1	0	0
	05	7	4	4	9	1	1	2	2	0
	06	7	6	4	9	5	1	4	2	3

teachers responded to a follow-up survey. Table 5 below indicates the high level of teacher satisfaction with the professional development and improved self-confidence in teaching.

The following excerpts from the teachers capture the professional growth of teachers through this study.

School A

Best Practices was the most helpful professional development I have taken. It provided me with many teaching ideas and strategies to better serve my special education students.

TABLE 5 *Professional Development Survey*

Question	Mean	SD
I feel that the professional development I have attended prepared me to teach my students.	5.25	.96
I am able to provide appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of all of my students.	5.50	.58
I feel confident in my ability to teach the students that I currently have in my class.	6.00	0.0
I feel more confident and prepared after engaging in professional development both workshops and on-site.	5.50	.58
I feel that the on-site support I received from District SPED Curriculum Support Specialist (CSS) made a difference in my teaching.	5.75	.50

Note: 6 =Strongly Agree; 5=Moderately Agree; 4=Agree more than Disagree; 3=Disagree more than Agree; 2=Moderately Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

One of the District Special Education staff members modeled how to write expository and narrative writing essays. It was very helpful for the FCAT Writing Test.

They [supported] me when I was about to leave the teaching career.

School B

> *I truly feel that all the training put together has had an effect on me growing as a professional. Each has contributed to me growing in a different aspect of my job…teaching exceptional education is a multi-tasking, multi-faceted profession.*
>
> *The most beneficial support I have received is the on-site support provided by [central office staff]. Although from the district, she remained grounded in the realities of the classroom and made suggestions that really made a difference. She has been unsurpassed, and her presence is missed.*

Discussion

Although the 140 schools made progress over the three years, the least progress was evident in grade 4. A possible explanation for this is the eventual promotion of third graders who were not proficient by the third year of the study. Additionally, most gains were evident in the third year, particularly in target schools. This was the first time that the FCAT was given following a year of support. This might explain why target schools' gains and grades did not improve dramatically until year three. Target schools showed improvements at greater rates than the overall sample. This was not surprising since the two schools received consistent professional development and in-class support.

According to Fogarty & Pete (2007) on-site professional development "is designed to be more responsive to school-wide goals…" (p. 38). This type of support was evidenced by the collaboration between teachers, administrators, and CSS, while focusing each school's goals and needs. As indicated in previous research, (Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Toll, 2005) when colleagues relied on each other, rapport was established, and trust and respect were maintained, something effective happened: collegiality bonded the group

of learners, thus providing emotional support for change as well as the expertise needed for continued development of appropriate skills. The goal of this professional culture of collaboration became internal at the two case study schools, resulting in internal expertise that was shared by a group of teachers, which Schmoker (2006) describes to be imperative to effective professional development.

The critical qualities of professional development were found to be integrated in the support provided to the two case studies (Fogarty & Pete, 2007). Support and professional development 1) were sustained throughout the school year; 2) job embedded at the school-site; 3) collegial in sustaining the sense of mutually respectful community of learners; 4) interactive in the actual classrooms; 5) integrated through a variety of learning opportunities; 6) results-oriented by utilizing the data collected at the school; and 7) encompassed a hands-on focus that connected the real-world of the classroom with learning outcomes agreed upon by the teachers, school-site administrators, CSS, and central office administrators. These attributes are critical to the change process, and follow the concept that teachers must use it, not just know about it (Fogarty & Pete, 2007).

The coaching concepts identified by Joyce and Showers (2002) were apparent in individual teachers from the case study schools. The special education teachers were willing to take a risk and try new strategies based on their trusted comfort-level with the CSS team, dialoguing and reflecting upon instructional practices, thus exploring the phenomenon of the pedagogy of recognition (Van Manen, n.d.). In addition, ongoing relationships with the school principals enhanced the model, expanding into respectful professional collaboration, which in turn illustrates what Killion (2007) describes as a mutual respect leading to significant impact of coaches working with teams of teachers that produces more substantial results, reiterating what Knight (2007) describes as building a relationship before doing anything else.

An example of this type of relationship between the central office staff and the school site was evident in the principal of School A who was nominated Administrator of the Year for the local chapter of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) by his staff and selected as the district winner by the CEC selection committee. The mutual respect of that principal and his school staff, was evident when seventy-two school-site staff members joined the central office staff, attending the awards reception on his behalf.

Implications and Conclusions

One of the key factors of on-site support is meeting the needs of the teachers and students of that particular setting, thus leading to "sustained implementation of new teaching practices in schools" (Knight, 2007, p. 26). This on-site support provided to the two target schools focused on meeting the individual needs of the special education teachers, which in turn trickled down to the students, as evidenced by an increase in teacher efficacy and self-worth, as well as student achievement. This high level of satisfaction may lead to increased teacher retention, an ongoing problem in urban schools.

Providing on-site support and professional development is a model that requires further research and review, particularly in urban districts. It is a model that follows what we know about effective professional development and engages the learner in all the "right stuff" to assist in the core focus of increasing student achievement. Results were evident in special education classrooms and further extension to general education classrooms would be appropriate.

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Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Urban Contexts

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This article reports findings from a qualitative study of preservice teachers' beliefs about the contexts of urban teaching. Participants were in their first semester of a K-6 licensure program designed to prepare them for urban teaching. Interviews and email reflective journal exchanges with the researcher were the data of the study, and descriptive-analytic findings are organized using a taxonomy of preservice teacher beliefs about urban children, schools, families, and communities. Interpretive generalizations are presented as consistencies and paradoxes across preservice teachers' beliefs about teaching in urban settings.

This article reports findings from the first stages of a longitudinal qualitative study of the perspectives of new professionals as they enter a teacher education program designed specifically to prepare them to teach in urban elementary schools. Future stages of the study will document their progress through their program (including a year's internship), and initial teaching in urban schools. The research question of this initial study is: "What are these preservice teachers' beliefs about urban contexts at this point in their development?" In addition to providing a baseline for ongoing longitudinal research, these analyses offer important insights into how new professionals who select urban teaching as a career think about the children, families, schools, and communities with which they plan to work.

The literature on new teacher socialization (Cochran-Smith, & Fries, 2005; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon,

1998) emphasizes the important effects that preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes have on what they learn in teacher preparation programs and take with them into their teaching. The beliefs and attitudes of candidates preparing to teach in urban settings are especially important influences on how they process information and experiences in their teacher preparation programs. When the majority of teaching candidates preparing to work in diverse urban settings is made up of White, middle class, women (as is the case in this study), the potential for discontinuities between the candidates beliefs and the perspectives of those they are preparing to teach increases (Gay, 1993; Irvine, 1997).

Background

The preservice teachers in this study were all part of the Urban-Multicultural Teacher Education (UMTE) program at the University of Tennessee. Like all K-6 licensure programs at the university, UMTE is based on a five-year model that includes a full-year's internship completed at the master's degree level. Prospective undergraduate students must meet progression requirements, then interview for slots in the program. Students must complete a bachelor's degree with an arts and sciences major and an education minor before the internship can begin.

The UMTE program organizes newly admitted students into cohort groups, and these groups experience the majority of their education minor as an integrated experience during the last semester ("spring block") of their senior year. Students then complete their internship and associated graduate coursework with the same cohort in urban elementary schools that have relationships with UMTE.

The program's expressed purpose is to select and prepare individuals who will be successful teachers in urban elementary schools and who will elect to stay in them. Students' day-to-day program experience involve exposure

to a complex mixture of meaningful activities that integrate applied pedagogical knowledge, in-class experiences, and reflective practice. Theoretical foundations woven throughout the program include elements related to multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, urban education, and critical pedagogy (Anyon, 2005; Banks, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Giroux, 1988; Irvine, 2003; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Method

The overall study is grounded in critical/feminist ontology and epistemology (Hatch, 2002). The research is self-consciously transformative in nature (Carr, 1995; Giroux, 1988). It is based on the assumption that the researcher and participants will interact in ways that can lead to positive change that transforms participants' lives and improves their abilities to contribute to communities in which they teach.

Participants

The participants in this study are 12 members of the cohort that completed its spring block in 2006. All students in the cohort were invited to participate, and all but two volunteered. The participant group was made up of 11 women and one man; nine were European-American and three were African-American students; and their ages ranged from 21 to 44 years. Estimates of socio-economic status were self-reported by the participants to range from lower through middle class (see Table 1). Participants volunteered to be part of a longitudinal study that will track their development as educators through their internship and into their first years as urban teachers.

Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study included open-ended interviews and

TABLE 1 *Study Participants*

Name	Gender	Age	Race	SES
Reina	F	21	EA	M
Judy	F	23	EA	W
Becky	F	24	EA	L-M
Johnetta	F	23	EA	M
Venessa	F	22	AA	P
Janet	F	25	AA	W
Annette	F	21	AA	P
Elsie	F	34	EA	M
MacKenzie	F	21	EA	M
Ernest	M	44	AA	M
Cheryl Ann	F	24	EA	M
Julie	F	32	EA	M

Note: *All names are pseudonyms; F=female; M=male; EA = Euro-American; AA = African American; P = Poverty Class; W = Working Class; L-M = Lower-Middle Class; M = Middle Class

participant-researcher interactive journal writing via email. Twelve participants were interviewed for approximately one hour each in the spring following their admission into the UMTE Program. Interviews were open-ended conversations based on a set of guiding questions developed by the researcher. The focus of the interviews was on capturing participants' perspectives on teaching in urban schools at this early stage of their preparation. Participants and the researcher also exchanged weekly interactive electronic journal entries around the same focus in the spring block.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was guided by Hatch's (2002, p. 192) description of the "political data analysis model." The model includes inductive and deductive processes for

revealing the participants' perspectives. It provides a rigorous method for generating data-based findings, while acknowledging the researcher's political positioning. Interview and electronic journal data were initially parsed by typologies related to beliefs about urban children, schools, families, and communities. Potential generalizations within each typology were generated from an inductive search for patterns, connections, and themes. These hypothetical generalizations were then deductively checked against the entire data set, leaving those solidly grounded in the data.

Findings

Findings are organized based on the taxonomy generated from the data analysis described above (see Table 2 below). The taxonomy summarizes generalizations that were the outcome of an analysis the participants' expressed beliefs about urban contexts. The findings are reported as analytic generalizations from the taxonomy, and excerpts from participants' written comments in their reflective journals (labeled with a letter "*R"*) and responses recorded in open-ended interview transcripts (identified using the letter "*I"*) are presented as data displays to support each generalization. The intent is to use the participants' own words to bring to life the meanings behind the analytic generalizations.

Beliefs about Urban Children

Analysis revealed four beliefs about urban children that held up across the data. The most commonly held belief was that urban children grow up faster, are more independent and more street smart. Maturity, independence, and street savvy were viewed as resilient responses to what were perceived to be the challenging conditions of urban life.

> *They have just a sense of—just this aura that they can do stuff on their own. I think they are*

TABLE 2 *Taxonomy of Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Urban Contexts*

About urban children, these novice teachers believe:

- Children grow up faster, are more independent and more street smart
- Many children have low expectations for success
- Many children start out behind and stay behind academically
- Many children are eager to learn

About urban schools, these novice teachers believe:

- Expectations for children to succeed are low
- Schools are safe, nurturing places for children
- Lack of discipline is a major issue
- Many teachers don't want to be there
- Facilities and resources are substandard

About urban families, these novice teachers believe:

- Many are not involved in their children's education
    a. They feel intimidated by school personnel
    b. Many are overwhelmed by their circumstances
    c. Many don't see the value of education
    d. Many don't care
- Many family situations are not stable
- Many are not providing appropriate parenting for their children

About urban communities, these novice teachers believe

- Poverty is a pervasive fact of life
- Crime, violence, and drugs are widespread

very self-sufficient, and they are strong at a young age. Like they know that they can go to the store, they walk to school, and some of them wash their own clothes when they are only in like second grade. Reina *(I)*

Participants also believed that many urban children have low expectations for success. As will be discussed under interpretations, low expectations were systemic problems that preservice teachers believed permeated urban schools and communities. Urban children were assumed to have internalized the pervasively low expectations of them.

> *Teachers experience resistance when students do not believe that there is a world outside of the life they are currently living, and the students experience resistance when people (whether it is society, parents, educational system) continue to discourage them. They would rather not imagine that things can change than get hurt by hoping that they can.* Venessa, *(R)*

Future teachers in this study believed that many urban children start out behind and stay behind academically. They reasoned that urban students start school behind their middle-class counterparts because of different home and school experiences. Once in school, urban students continue to struggle because the gaps in their early experiences continue to make their academic progress more difficult.

> *Students in an urban school may not have had the opportunities that suburban students have had to prepare them for school. So the number of children who may be on the lower end of the spectrum of achievement is more likely to be higher in the urban schools.* Johnetta, *(R)*

In spite of perceived low expectations and slow progress, participants also believed many urban children are eager to learn. Preservice teachers completed field rotations in three urban and one suburban elementary school; it was natural for them to make comparisons of these experiences.

> *I would say that I have seen much more eagerness to learn in the urban kids. It depends on the age group, but they can look at it as an opportunity to better themselves and their lifestyle, whereas the suburban child may feel like it is just something they have to do.* Janet *(I).*

Beliefs about Urban Schools

The most widely held belief about urban schools was that in them, expectations for children to succeed are low. Participants asserted that they did not share these same low expectations, but their perception was that this kind of thinking was characteristic of urban schools.

> *Some people think that since students are in an urban school that their expectations for actually succeeding are very low. I think that is a load of crap, but that's what people think.* Annette, *(I)*

Participants also believed that urban schools are safe, nurturing places for children. They valued teachers' efforts to provide an environment that participants believed to be a kind of haven from the lack of safety and care that children experienced in their lives away from school.

> *The urban students wanted or at least seemed to want to be there. I felt as though many of them saw school as a safe place where they knew that people cared for them, and they were safe. I feel as though the students wanted and needed that extra bit of attention from the teacher and loved it when it could be given.* Johnetta, *(R).*

At the same time they saw schools as safe havens, these preservice teachers believed that a lack of discipline is a major issue for urban schools. They saw the disruptions caused by student misbehavior as major impediments to

student learning and teacher success. They acknowledged that lack of discipline is one of their biggest concerns.

> *Urban schools have a lot more discipline problems to deal with than suburban schools do. Discipline problems account for most of the gaps in[urban students'] education*. Becky, *(R)*

Another belief was that many teachers do not want to be in urban schools. Although it is hard to say if the participants' views were based on experience or their knowledge of the transience of urban teachers, data analysis confirmed a shared belief that many teachers take jobs in urban schools because those are the only teaching slots available. Participants believed that these teachers are unhappy in urban settings and apply to transfer to other schools as soon as they are able.

> *It is very difficult to get teachers for these schools because of all the problems. Teachers move in and out of the schools… Most teachers are new teachers because it is such an easy job to obtain, although most do not stay in this environment.* Judy *(R).*

Lastly, participants believed that facilities and resources are substandard. They saw the inequities between materials, supplies, buildings, and furnishings in urban and suburban schools to be inherently unfair.

> *The schools I am familiar with don't have the resources that suburban schools do. When there are not enough books to go around, there is not enough copying paper, they expect teachers to work with what they have.* Ernest, *(R).*

Beliefs about Urban Families

The most salient theme that emerged from an analysis of these preservice teachers' beliefs about urban families was that urban parents are not involved in their children's education. A closer look at the data related to this generalization revealed four explanations for parents' lack of involvement. Participants believed that families do not engage with schools because they (a) feel intimidated by school personnel, (b) are overwhelmed by their circumstances, (c) do not see the value of education, and/or (d) don't care. The excerpts below offer examples of how this study's future teachers talked about the explanations.

> *I can see that how schools have so much of an authoritarian approach that the parents might be intimidated by such a restrictive environment that they can't really relate to*. Elsie, *(I)*

> *In a lot of urban schools, the parents are probably not home when the child gets there and would not even have the time to sit down with them.* Judy, *(I)*

> *Some parents do not understand the importance of education as the foundation of a child's future. It is very difficult to teach a child who does not want to be taught and in many homes the importance of education is not being emphasized.* Mackenzie, *(R)*

Study participants also believed that many family situations are not stable in urban contexts. This instability was seen as a negative impact on urban children. Elements of instability mentioned by the preservice teachers included teen parenting, drug use and addiction, frequent moves, lack of stable male role models, and parenting by siblings and extended family members. In the excerpt below, one of the participants reflects on her own childhood, as she talks about experiences of children in unstable, urban families.

> *Some of them have extenuating circumstances that they can do nothing about. Like..having to come home to a mother that is on crack, not knowing when you are going to get fed, or having to live in a roach-infested apartment with two sisters and a brother that you can't really do nothing for because you're only eleven.* Annette, *(I).*

Participants also believed that many urban adults are not providing appropriate parenting for their children.

> *In urban settings, children may not have been taught that when you use the bathroom to wash your hands when you're done and to brush your hair when you get up in the morning, and you don't wear dirty clothes to school.* Cheryl Ann, *(I)*

Beliefs about Urban Communities

Analyses of preservice teachers' beliefs about urban communities produced two related generalizations. The first was that poverty is a pervasive fact of life. As a group, these future urban teachers connected urban communities with the conditions and consequences of poverty. They saw links between student, family, and community poverty and children's and teachers' experience of urban schooling.

> *If families are living in poverty, it makes it difficult for teachers because there may be a high mobility rate among the students. Poverty levels also affect the health of students. If parents do not have the money to feed their children healthy foods or if they do not receive regular medical attention, then more students will be absent from school.* Julie, *(R)*

The second generalization about urban communities was that participants believed crime, violence, and drugs are widespread. In interviews and journal entries, they appeared

to assume that urban communities are unsafe places characterized by drug use and violent, criminal activity.

> *Areas that harbor and breed people who live by a different ethical code than the teachers surround urban schools. I'm not saying that all urban schools are in bad neighborhoods, but realistically, I can guarantee that there are more unemployed, welfare, and criminal citizens living in urban areas than in the suburbs.* Ernest, *(R)*

Interpretations

The findings above are presented as descriptions of a small set of preservice teachers' beliefs about urban contexts. Borrowing from Wolcott's (1994) notion that every qualitative study has (in different proportions) elements of description, analysis and interpretation, the discussion that follows presents interpretations that bring another layer of understanding to the data analysis. Interpretations are divided into "consistencies" and "paradoxes" discovered in the data. As these interpretations are discussed, connections to salient research and theory are made.

Consistencies

Expectations are low across the board. The preservice teachers in this study believed that children in urban environments, their teachers and schools, and their parents and communities had generally low expectations for student success. Although some studies (Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, & Gordon, 2006; Tiezzi & Cross, 1997) indicate negative perceptions among preservice teachers about urban children's chances to succeed, these study participants seemed resist taking on the low expectations of others. However, their perception was that urban students had internalized these low expectations.

Poverty is a powerful force. Participants indicated a strong belief that poverty was the core negative influence in urban contexts. As these future educators sought to rationalize the difficulties of urban teaching, the poverty that they believe characterizes urban settings was their primary explanation. From substandard facilities to low parent involvement, participants cited the effects of poverty as the root cause. Their view mirrors much of the literature on issues in urban settings (Goode & Maskovsky, 2002) and may reflect their desire to avoid confronting issues such as institutional racism and other forms of oppression.

Urban schools, communities, and families are deficient. Like other preservice teachers in the literature (Hollins & Guzman, 2005), the individuals in this study adopted a deficit model as they conceptualized urban schools, communities, and families. They appeared to apply the norms and expectations of White, middle-class America to making judgments about the quality of urban schools, the suitability of urban communities, and the appropriateness of urban parenting (Rist, 2000). Even those participants whose backgrounds were not "mainstream" seemed to adopt this deficit approach to understanding urban contexts.

Paradoxes

Children are eager to learn but perpetually behind academically. Like their counterparts in other teacher education programs (Hollins & Guzman, 2005), these preservice teachers believed that urban children start with significant academic disadvantages that follow students throughout their schooling. At the same time, many study participants believed that the urban children with whom they were working were happy and successful learners. This apparent inconsistency may be partially explained by the participants' overriding belief in the pervasive power of poverty to limit the overall life chances of urban children.

Urban schools are safe havens for children, but these schools are characterized by violence and discipline problems. Whenever educators and/or the general public are polled, a consistent finding is that people believe that schools across the board are failing, but the schools close to them are doing fine (Rose & Gallup, 2006). A similar phenomenon may be at work here. The press, popular media, and the general public promulgate the notion that urban schools are dangerous places full of unruly young people. The participants in this study and other prospective teachers (Gilbert, 1997) have adopted that image. At the same time, these preservice see the schools in which they have done field experiences as calm and orderly safety zones for kids.

The perceived positives associated with urban settings are based on overcoming deficits. Participants had many opportunities to identify strengths in urban students, schools, families, and communities, and some of the participants did so. But the overwhelming pattern was that the strengths found in urban contexts were connected with somehow overcoming deficiencies (Howard, 2003). It is very troubling that even the most positive perceptions of these future urban teachers were based on the assumed negativity of living and going to school in urban settings.

Discussion

It is important to remember that, at the time of the study, these 12 students were just beginning their teacher preparation. These analyses reflect where they were at one point in time, and there is no intent to say they should have been somewhere else. Even though influences of individual life histories are largely lost in an analysis of this type, it is important to note that this group is like other prospective urban teachers in many ways. In their comprehensive review of the literature on preparing teachers for diverse populations, Hollins and Guzman (2005, p. 511) summarize:

> *Many of these candidates seem to enter teacher preparation programs with negative or deficit attitudes and beliefs about those different from themselves. Interestingly… they often express a willingness to teach in urban areas despite limited experiences and conflicting attitudes and beliefs*.

Because it is the job of teacher educators to support the development of future urban teachers, understanding what preservice teachers bring to their teacher preparation is an important starting place for overcoming their limited experiences and addressing their conflicting attitudes and beliefs. Processes that parallel the data collection strategies of this project can be useful tools for urban teacher educators, enabling instructors to gather insights into their students' beliefs and attitudes at the same time they are providing the future teachers with vehicles for expressing their ideas and reflecting on them. Interviews need not be formal, tape-recorded events, but asking questions about beliefs heightens preservice teachers' awareness of the importance of their attitudes and dispositions toward urban schooling. Interactive exchanges via email (or otherwise) can be a powerful mechanism for encouraging reflection around important issues, including the impact of applying a deficit model to understanding urban contexts.

In the UMTE program, we access the beliefs of our students via these methods and others, including weekly seminar debriefings during the internship year. We address these novice urban teachers' beliefs via continuous, interactive face-to-face and electronic communication, as well as through activities such as community mapping projects; interviews with community and school leaders, parents, and students; critical literacy activities; readings and discussions of relevant literature; and role-playing activities designed to help them confront their own prejudices and those of the society that surrounds them. I agree with Hollins and Guzman's conclusion that "unless prospective teachers

have opportunities to rethink and change their attitudes and beliefs, the students who are in the greatest academic need may also be the ones least likely to have access to rich learning opportunities" (2005, p. 482). Whatever their approach, it is imperative that teacher educators find ways to access and address the beliefs of students they are preparing to be the next generation of urban teachers.

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Mentoring in the Community College

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Community colleges are crucial to American economic progress and are the gateways for students of color to enter higher education. The enrollment of students of color has soared in the last three decades, increasing 61.3% since 1986. However, the majority of community college faculty and administrators remains predominantly White. A more diverse faculty must be recruited and retained in community colleges to meet the needs of this diverse student population.

This article is a literature review of mentoring of community college faculty, particularly faculty of color. It asks the question: Is there a connection between mentoring, faculty development, and recruiting/retaining faculty of color? Results indicate formal faculty mentoring programs are considered valuable in recruiting and retaining faculty, particularly faculty of color.

Background

"Community colleges have become the number one provider of education and training for people entering the workforce, or advancing their careers" (Bramucci, 1999, p. 41). A study reported in Phi Delta Kappa (2002) found that

> *Community colleges are crucial to American economic progress. They provide access to higher education for millions who cannot afford the traditional university. They serve the non-traditional learner who must have educational*

opportunities provided at convenient times, and they deliver local workforce training (p.17).

As community college popularity and enrollment have increased, there has been a concomitant increase in the numbers of students of color. African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians have disproportionately, chosen community colleges as their point of entry into higher education (Phi Delta Kappa, 2002), and the enrollment of students of color has increased 61.3% since 1986 (Wilds & Wilson, 1998). Evelyn (2000) reported that 45% of African American students and 55% of Hispanic and American Indian students are enrolled in community colleges and that retention for this group is increasingly a challenge.

As it applies to recruiting and retaining underrepresented faculty, one of the most serious problems facing the community college today, is the shortage of faculty and administrators of color (Phi Delta Kappa, 2002). Vaughn (1996) reported that 89% of community college presidents, and 90% of community college faculty were Caucasian. The distribution of faculty of color employed full-time is 6.4% African American, 4.3% Hispanic, 3.3% Asian, and 1% Native American. These numbers strongly suggest that community college leadership does not reflect the "new" student body (Phi Delta Kappa, 2002). A more diverse faculty must be recruited to best serve the ever-growing multicultural student population.

This is a literature review of selected studies conducted in the last decade on community college faculty recruitment and retention, especially with faculty members of color, through the use of professional development offerings and faculty mentoring. The research question grounding this literature review is: Is there a connection between mentoring, faculty development, and recruitment and retention of faculty of color? If there is, why is this connection important

for community colleges? To answer these questions, research studies from the last decade were reviewed on community colleges, faculty development, and faculty mentoring.

Need for Qualified Community College Faculty

Howe (2000) suggests that exceptionally large numbers of faculty retirements will occur in the first decade of the 2000s and that faculty turnover in community colleges will be unprecedented. During this same time period, undergraduate enrollment will grow as much as 20%. Miller (1997) argued, "the juxtaposition of these two events presents a serious challenge to community college leaders, who may find themselves hard-pressed to identify talented community college faculty who are adequately prepared to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population" (p. 85).

Where will community colleges find these community college faculty members? Cohen and Brawer (1996) stated, "Few community college instructors are prepared in programs especially designed for community college teachers"(p. 78). Grubb (1999) found that experts agree that graduate institutions have failed to prepare future faculty for community colleges. Evelyn (2001) reported, "Graduate schools generally don't supply teachers-in-training with the tools they'll need to succeed in two-year colleges, and they don't show any signs of doing so in the near future" (p. 26). Finally, Gappa and Leslie (1997) called for administrators to "embrace the idea of one faculty, providing professional development programs involve full and part-time faculty in collaborative efforts, often through mentoring programs that pair more experienced full-time faculty with less experienced instructors" (p.1).

Gibson-Harman, Rodriguez, and Haworth (2002) suggest that identifying, preparing, and attracting qualified faculty are essential challenges for community colleges. They argue, "Conceptions of community college quality

should be gauged not only by student learning outcomes, but also by employee's professional growth and their sense of being valued" (p. 77).

Lack of Community College Faculty of Color

Several studies of community colleges found small percentages of faculty of color, especially when compared to the burgeoning student enrollment. Foote (1996) found that "one of the most serious problems facing many of the nation's community colleges is the shortage of minority faculty" (p. 1). The American Association of Community Colleges has recommended that community colleges undertake serious efforts to hire more minority faculty (American Association of Community Colleges, 1998). According to Bowen and Muller (1996), "Community colleges will not reach their full potential as a catalyst for educational and social programs, without increasing their commitment to minority leadership" (p 58). Piercynski, Matraya, and Peltier (1997) state, "it is essential to create a profession that is representative of society to avoid having a teaching force composed primarily of people from majority backgrounds teaching students from predominately minority groups" (p. 205).

There are three major reasons for the importance of having faculty of color (Phi Delta Kappa, 2002): They (a) serve as natural role models for students of color; (b) are better able to meet the learning needs of students of color; and (c) are often bilingual which helps students transcend language barriers.

Faculty Development

Faculty development has been an issue in higher education for at least 30 years Schuster & Wheeler, 1990). Murray (1999) suggests specific components as crucial to the effectiveness of any faculty development program: (a)

institutional support; (b) goal-oriented connections; (c) faculty ownership; (d) collegial support; and (e) the belief that good teaching is valued by administrators.

O'Banion (1994) states that "professional development began to grow in response to the realization that there was a rapid growth of new community colleges (p. 2). Hammons, et. al. (2002) further identified an increased need for effectiveness of the teaching faculty for the following reasons: (a) competition for limited tax dollars; (b) future success dependent on ability of personnel to adapt to a changing environment advent of technological instruction; (c) faculty awareness that they were unable to cope with the needs of increasing numbers of "high risk" students; and (d) recognition by leadership that they needed to become skilled in planning, implementing, and evaluating change. These studies confirm that the success of community college constituents is predicated on how effectively the organization can change.

The existence of a formal, structured, and goal oriented faculty development program requires that the activities must be connected to the individual's personal and professional goals, as well as the institution's mission. Faculty "buy-in" tends to support formal programs because "faculty members need to be actively involved in designing and implementing any faculty development plan. Faculty members will resist any development plan imposed upon them (Maxwell & Kazlauskas, 1992, p. 352). In a national survey of 137 two-year colleges, Murray (1999) evaluated how well community colleges were meeting faculty development challenges.

He found that the colleges used different activities to assist their faculty in staying current in their teaching pedagogy and that there was a "glaring lack of commitment on the part of the leadership for faculty development" (p. 57) at 130 of the participating colleges. For example, 93.1% provided limited financial support for conference attendance. Only 16.2% provided incentives to faculty who presented or published. Expert workshops were held on 87.7% of the

campuses, and 39.2% provided resource centers to increase teaching effectiveness. At 68.5% of the institutions, faculty development was designated as low on the responsibility list. Murray concluded that ad hoc programs do not cause substantial long-lasting change in the classroom.

Murray (1999) suggests that faculty development programs have had very little impact on higher education because efforts have been limited to short-term, "one shot deals." According to Bland and Schmitz (1990), "Whether faculty activities are considered productive or not depends on whether they relate to the faculty member's personal and professional goals and to the institution's mission" (p. 45). Faculty development programs that are a loosely related set of disparate activities are unlikely to produce any real institutional change" (Murray, p. 52). Recently, faculty development has focused on activities to recruit, mentor, and retain a diverse faculty. The results of such a focus, however, are barely visible in college classrooms (Murray, 1999). According to Schuster, Wheeler, and Associates (1990),

> *Colleges and universities, for whatever reasons, have been neither sufficiently alert to the ever-changing circumstances of their instructional staffs nor adequately resourceful in meeting their changing needs for professional development. It is indeed striking how much has been written about faculty growth and renewal and how few campuses have seen fit to develop comprehensive, systematic programs. Splendid conceptual models are available; adequate programs have not taken seed* (pp. 3-4).

Bellanca (2002) states,

> *More than at any other time in their history, community colleges need to plan and provide comprehensive ongoing professional development*

programs for their faculty and staff. Faced with an increasingly diverse student body with varying expectations, learning styles, service preferences, and societal demands, community colleges can no longer respond in traditional ways (p. 5).

Mentoring Community College Faculty

The concept of mentoring has existed for years. Most explanations describe the task as significant counsel between a novice and a wiser, more experienced individual. Mentoring also has been defined in terms of the character of the relationship. Prieur (1994) defines mentoring as "the process by which more experienced and knowledgeable individuals assist less experienced individuals become more proficient in their activities" (Prieur, 1994, p.42). In an ideal educational setting, older, more experienced faculty members spend time providing advice to less experienced faculty members as a means to enhance professional development. The mentor serves the mentee in the following roles: (a) a teacher (b) a sponsor (c) a host , and (d) an exemplar (Engstrom, 1989).

Mentoring plays an important role in every aspect of vocational endeavor. Numerous institutions use mentoring as a strategy to help “perfect” their participants. Engstrom (1989) reported that studies show that mentoring, both formal and informal, can "increase job satisfaction, job performance, employee loyalty, and decrease turnover" (p. 7).

This article defines mentoring in academia as a situation in which a senior faculty member teaches a junior faculty member about the resources, customs, and values of an institution. The senior professor acts as a role model, who serves to guide, assist, teach, and inspire the junior professor. The senior faculty member provides support for scholarly activities and helps the mentee to understand and navigate

political/social barriers within the department and the institution.

The important contribution mentoring provides for junior faculty cannot be overestimated. For institutions that seek to promote the success and retention of their faculty of color, mentoring faculty relationships is a vital, necessary part of community college life. Over the last 20 years, there has been a consistent increase in minority student enrollment and during this period, African Americans, Native American, and Hispanic students have disproportionately chosen community colleges as their entry into higher education. As the number of minority students rapidly increases, similar levels of diversity have not been achieved in faculty hiring. Retention of these students to program completion is an increasingly crucial challenge, and research indicates that students benefit when they have more faculty members with whom they can identify (Bowen & Muller, 1996).

Formal Faculty Mentoring Programs

There are many approaches to mentoring, both formal and informal. An example of formal mentoring occurs when senior and junior colleagues are assigned to work with each other, specifically for the development of the latter. An informal mentoring situation may occur when two colleagues bond and form a relationship of encouragement and learning for the less experienced of the two. Luna and Cullen (1998) contend that there is no single best type of mentoring, but that a formalized system provides some assurance that advice and suggestions are conveyed. They believe that academia should be concerned with mentoring because "not only does mentoring develop the profession; by not mentoring, we are wasting talent. We educate, and train, but don't nurture" (Luna & Cullen, p. 1)

Haring (2002) suggested that mentoring serves psychosocial and vocational functions as well, and that psychosocial functions are more important. The importance

of psychosocial functions is supported by the work of psychologist Erik Erikson. His work relates to life stages and he postulated that, as individual's journey through these stages, their "human personality matures as a new ego quality unfolds through the acquisition of a new strength. Each stage has a special relationship to a basic societal element" (Lahey, 2002, p.332). Erikson posits that the stage of generativity versus stagnation is most closely associated with mentoring. According to Erikson, "Mature man needs to be needed, and maturity needs guidance as well as encouragement from what has been produced and must be taken care of" (Lahey, 2002, p. 332). Nurturing and guiding the next generation is the main principle of generativity and the basic building block of mentoring.

The essential components in successful faculty mentoring programs include: a) a belief in the necessity of a mentoring program, b) a sound curriculum, c) a commitment to diversifying faculty, and d) authentic support from the institution. Through mentoring programs, new faculty hires are acquainted with the culture of the school, classroom concerns, and career issues.

In a national survey of 137 two-year colleges, Murray (1999) found that peer mentoring was provided for new faculty at 34.6% of the institutions, 7.7% paid the peer mentors, and 3.9% provided the mentor with release time.

Mentoring Faculty of Color

As discussion about workplace diversity has increased, the literature has begun to speak to the dilemmas of multicultural mentoring. The issues of race and ethnicity are becoming increasingly important in academia, and the core issues are about trust, comfort, and rapport. Senior people might only act as instrumental sponsors with those different from them. Similarly, junior people may feel more suspicious of senior people who differ from them. Because most senior people in organizations today are still white

men, insisting on the close emotional bond between a mentor and a protégé as the only vehicle for career advancement may unwittingly serve to reinforce the old (white) boys network" (Murrell et al., 1999, p. 32). The question is "when a new recruit to an organization is part of a visible minority, might she or he seek instrumental connection with mainstream senior people and psychosocial support from other minority individuals who may be somewhat marginalized?" (Murrell et al., 1999, p. 32).

In education, many faculty of color find it difficult to form and sustain relationships with Caucasian male faculty mentors (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). To be an effective mentor, one must cultivate understanding of the experiences of various cultural backgrounds. This task may be challenging for Caucasian faculty members because of societal dynamics involving race and ethnicity (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001).

A scarcity of faculty members of color above junior rank weighs against minority graduate students' access to mentoring by colleagues of color. Further, faculty members of color at the junior level face time constraints and publishing pressures that inhibit their ability to mentor graduate students. Other stressors may include worrying about succeeding and progressing toward tenure, coping with ambiguity, lack of mentoring by senior faculty, loneliness and intellectual isolation, and limited time to meet professional demands (Cockrell, Mitchell, Middleton, & Campbell, 1999). "Weak mentoring relationships, fewer networking opportunities, and limited access to both informal networks and key departmental information may also affect the professional growth and development of minority scholars" (Cockrell, et. al., 1999, p. 11).

According to the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report (1995),

> *Mentoring within an institution provides an avenue for empowering educators. Mentoring promotes*

> *faculty productivity, advocates collegiality, and encourages a broader goal of attracting, retaining, and advancing faculty members. Mentoring supports professional growth and renewal, which in turn empowers faculty as individuals and colleagues* (p. 5).

Several researchers champion the benefits of mentoring for both mentor and mentee. Luna et al. (1998) state, "Teaching and research improve when junior faculty are paired with mentors. Proteges become empowered with a mentor, and mentors themselves feel renewed through the sharing of power and collegiality" (p. 3). Another study of 235 associate and full professors of education found that those who were mentored were more likely to mentor others (ASHE-ERIC, 1995).

Conclusion

Faculty mentoring is an effective strategy to effectively recruit and retain junior faculty members and is beneficial for both mentor and mentee. Current research suggests that mentoring is vital to the psychosocial and career development of new faculty, and that faculty development programs should focus on providing ongoing, substantial curriculum to foster new hires. In higher education, it is especially crucial that faculty of color be nurtured and empowered so that they develop a strong sense of collegiality, a deep understanding of their role at the community college, and recognition of the positive impact that they can have on the students whom they serve.

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Screening for Early Learning Problems within an urban Population: The Brief Academic Competence Evaluation Screening System

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The Brief Academic Competence Evaluation Screening System (BACESS; Elliott, DiPerna, & Huai, 2003) is a multi-phase instrument designed to assist educators in the identification of students who are likely to experience early learning problems. The BACESS was used in eight elementary classrooms (n = 71) in southern California. Each phase of the BACESS was found to be highly reliable, and the BACESS was found to share concurrent validity with the California Standards Tests. Teacher feedback via an evaluation survey indicated that phases 1 and 2 of the system were time efficient and useful.

Educators have been screening elementary school students for future academic and behavior problems since the 1940's (Gredler, 1997). The rationale behind screening for future academic problems is based on the theory that special learning needs, analogous to medical diseases, progress linearly and become worse over time (Severson & Walker, 2002). If special learning needs can be identified earlier, educators have a better chance of intervening and correcting problems before they become pervasive. If properly developed and validated, screening systems that are linked to quality interventions can reduce referrals to special education and facilitate an identification process that is proactive.

Demand for screening instruments has increased over the past 50 years, both because of a growth in the number of intervention programs available for at-risk students, and because of legislation that includes greater accountability for academic failure. In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which indicated that universal screening systems for reading should be adopted in order to help low-achieving students meet high academic standards.

In addition, a recent report from the National Research Council (NRC, Donovan & Cross, 2002) recommended that states utilize universal screening methods for reading and behavior problems in order to improve the early identification of students at-risk for academic difficulties. The report indicated that universal screening could help correct problems such as disproportionate minority representation in special education and the gap between academic assessment and intervention. The NRC recommended that screening systems should: incorporate multiple tiers, be developed with input from large-scale research centers, and be implemented at a federal level. An accurate and practical screening system for early identification of special learning needs would meet these criteria.

Teacher Ratings of Academic Performance

Teacher ratings are one relatively accurate and cost effective method of evaluating students' learning abilities. Gerber and Semmel (1984) came to this conclusion after reviewing a decade of literature. They noted that teachers generate the initial referral for most potentially at-risk students, and that approximately 70% of students whom teachers refer are eventually classified with a learning disability. The authors attributed this high success rate to the fact that teachers have daily contacts with students, and have a meaningful context in which to evaluate students' performance. Other researchers have obtained findings consistent with those of Gerber and Semmel (1984). Two

studies published by Gresham and colleagues (Gresham, MacMillan, & Bocean, 1997; Gresham, Reschly, & Carey, 1987) indicated a high concurrence between special education recommendations and teacher opinions of academic ability.

In the earlier study (Gresham et al., 1987), teachers confirmed that 96% of students diagnosed with a learning disability indeed had a learning disability. In the later study (Gresham et al., 1997), teachers agreed with the diagnoses of 91% of students with learning disabilities, 95% of students exhibiting low achievement, and 100% of students with low IQ's. Demaray and Elliott (1998) asked teachers to rate student performance via the Academic Competence Scale of the Social Skills Rating System – Teacher Form (SSRS-T; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The correlation between teachers' evaluations via the SSRS-T and students' academic achievement scores on the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Brief Form (K-TEA; Kaufman & Kaufman, 1985) was moderately high (r = .70). Flynn and Rahbar (1998) found that teachers who were provided a 29-item rating scale were able to evaluate students' academic performance much more accurately than when asked to informally identify students that were struggling academically. Collectively this research indicates that teacher ratings are an acceptable method for identifying students who may have early learning problems.

Brief Academic Competence Evaluation Screening System (BACESS)

The BACESS is a screening instrument based on teacher ratings that can fill the role described in the report from the NRC (2002) and NCLB (2001), by helping to identify students who are at-risk for academic failure at an early age. The BACESS (Elliott, DiPerna, & Huai, 2003) was conceptualized as an outgrowth of the Academic Competence Evaluation Scales (ACES; DiPerna & Elliott,

2000), a set of rating scales that measure student academic skills and enablers. As presently conceptualized, the BACESS is a three-phase system involving teacher nominations of struggling students, teacher ratings based on grade level expectations, and comprehensive ratings against national norms. During Phase 1, teachers nominate all students in their class based on comprehensive scoring rubrics for reading, language arts, math, and social behavior, into one of five different levels.

In Phase 2, teachers rate students passing through Phase 1 on five key academic skills and five key academic enablers. Academic skills are the content specific skills (e.g., uses numbers to solve daily problems) that help students perform in particular subjects, while academic enablers (e.g., participates in class discussions) are attributes that help students in all academic areas. In Phase 3, teachers complete the entire ACES for students who advance through Phase 2, in order to obtain nationally normed scores for academic skills and academic enablers.

The current study is part of a line of research developed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the BACESS in multiple educational settings, in order to determine whether the instrument is appropriate for use on a state- or district-wide basis. In one study involving 25 teachers and 285 students in Wisconsin, Phases 1 and 2 of the BACESS were found to have high reliability coefficients within the context of relatively short screening tools (Kettler, Elliott, & Albers, 2007).

The two phases together were found to have sensitivity (.67) and specificity (.80) comparable to other academic screening instruments, when achievement proficiency tests were used as an outcome measure. While this study provided promising evidence for the BACESS in a primarily European American (88%) and high achieving population (78% attained proficiency in reading, language arts, and mathematics), it remains to be determined whether the instrument would perform as well in other settings.

Conceptual Framework

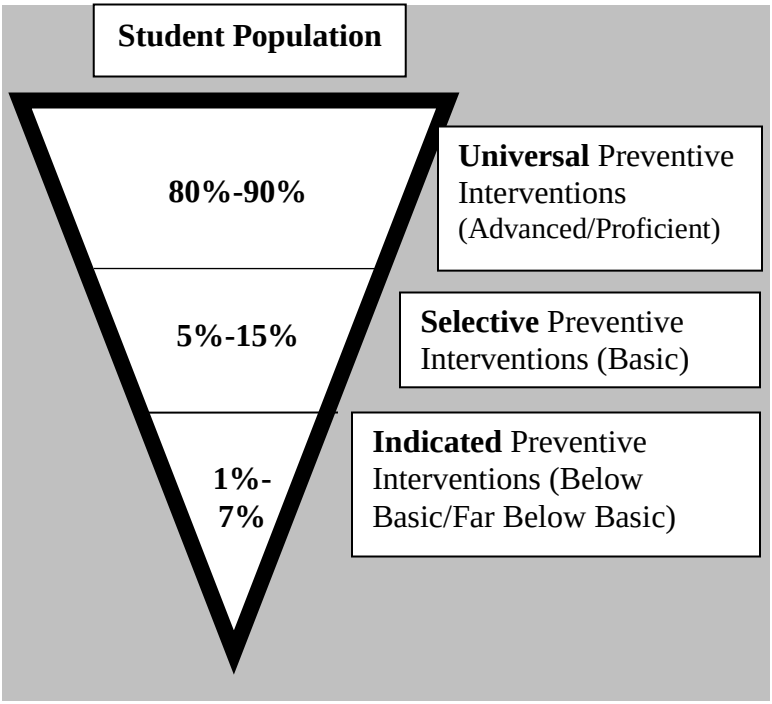
The conceptual framework for evaluating the BACESS and many academic screening instruments is based on three main theoretical foundations. The first foundation is that students experience a continuum of preventive intervention needs, as described by the three-tiered framework (Larson, 1994). The second foundation is that educational and psychological assessment tools should be evaluated via a systematic process, informed by the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999), that addresses the reliability, validity, and utility of an instrument for its intended purpose. The third theoretical foundation is that because the purpose of a screening instrument is to identify the early stages of a problem, rather than to measure a construct, Bayesian conditional probability analyses are a helpful way to characterize concurrent validity (Bennett et al., 1999).

Walker and Shinn (2002) wrote that students who are identified as struggling should be provided interventions conceptualized within Larson's (1994) three-tiered model commonly used within the public health domain. The tiers of the model correspond to three categories of students identified by Walker and Shinn (2002): (a) typically developing students, (b) students who are at elevated risk, and (c) students who show signs of life-course persistent difficulties.

Gordon (1987) suggested using the terms *universal*, *selective*, and *indicated* to describe this spectrum of prevention and intervention needs, and also provided the term preventive intervention. In 2001, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) adopted these terms, rather than primary, secondary, and tertiary, due to the perception that they more accurately captured the preventive nature of interventions at all three levels.

In the state of California, the terms Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic, and Far Below Basic are used to describe student performances in each academic content area during proficiency testing. Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized relationships between the model of universal, selective, and indicated preventive interventions (Gordon, 1987; NIMH, 2001), and the model used in the current study based on proficiency test results in California.

FIGURE 1. *Hypothesized Relationship between the Three-Tier Model and Proficiency Test Results*



The key concern with any assessment tool is whether its scores are valid representations of the constructs that they are intended to measure. However, before an instrument can be proven valid for a purpose, it must be proven reliable. A reliable tool is one that measures or identifies the same trait

consistently.

Reliability is estimated by calculating the equivalence of scores attained from a measure under conditions that should produce relatively equivalent scores (e.g., the same rater and a stable construct at different times, two subsets of items from the same scale at the same time, two raters of one construct at the same time, etc.). One way to estimate reliability for measures that have a small number of items is to calculate the correlation between each item and the total of all of the other items on the scale (Walker et al., 1988). This estimate of reliability is referred to as item-total reliability, and has the advantage of being exempt from error due to data being collected at different points in time, or being submitted by different raters.

A similar method of characterizing reliability, coefficient alpha, indicates how well a larger set of items fit together to measure a single construct. All of the aforementioned advantages of item-total correlations apply to coefficient alpha. Once evidence of an instrument's reliability has been established, the issue of whether it has construct validity for its intended purpose can be considered.

Construct validity is the degree to which an instrument measures that which it is intended to measure, or identifies that which it is intended to identify. Validity based on relationships with other variables is one form of construct validity evidence mentioned in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, 1999) that is very important for evaluating a screening system, because a screening system is intended to discriminate between the presence and absence of a condition (e.g., the presence or absence of early learning problems). Validity based on relationships with other variables can be further classified by whether the two variables are measured at the same time (i.e., concurrent validity) or at different times (i.e., predictive validity). The focus of this study is concurrent validity.

One method of characterizing the accuracy of screening

systems for dichotomous outcomes has gained popularity in educational sciences: Bayesian conditional probability or sensitivity/specificity analyses (Bennett et al., 1999). Bayesian conditional probability analyses require an independent variable that screens students into two different classifications (i.e., early learning problems vs. the absence of early learning problems) and a dependent variable that serves as a "gold standard" and also divides students into two classifications (i.e., students who are experiencing early learning problems and students who are not). The analyses are based on the fact that the combination of the two variables yields four possible outcomes: (a) a student may be screened and identified as having an early learning problem and be actually experiencing the early stages of a learning problem, (b) a student may be screened and identified as having an early learning problem but not actually be experiencing the early stages of a learning problem, (c) a student may be screened and not identified as having an early learning problem but actually be experiencing the early stages of a learning problem, or (d) a student may be screened and not identified as having an early learning problem and not be experiencing the early stages of a learning problem (Bennett et al., 1999).

The possible outcomes are depicted in Table 1. From these four outcomes, a screening system can be evaluated on the following Bayesian conditional probability indices: sensitivity (the likelihood that a screener will correctly identify a need), specificity (the likelihood that a screener will correctly not identify a need), positive predictive power (the likelihood that an identified student is one that has a need), and negative predictive power (the likelihood that a student who is not identified is one who does not have a need). This framework can be useful for evaluating the decision rules or cutoff scores of a measure because it accurately reflects how an increase on any one of these indices tends to co-occur with a decrease on another.

TABLE 1 *Possible Outcomes within a Bayesian Conditional Probability Framework*

		Eventual Outcome	
		Early Learning Problem	No Early Learning Problem
Screening Indicator	At-Risk	a	b
	Not At-Risk	c	d

Note: Sensitivity = a/(a+c); specificity = d/(b+d); positive predictive power = a/(a+b); and negative predictive power = d/(c+d). This Figure is adapted from Bennett, et al. (1999).

Research Questions

The BACESS has been shown to be a reliable and accurate screening instrument when used with a primarily European American, Midwestern sample with a relatively low base rate of academic learning problems (Kettler et al., 2007). The current study was designed to replicate previous findings in an urban sample of primarily Latino American students with a relatively high base rate of academic learning problems. The following research questions were inspired by the need for a reliable, valid, and useful broadband academic screening system:

- *Is the BACESS a reliable predictor of early learning problems?*
- *Is the BACESS a valid predictor of early learning problems?*
- *Do teachers find the BACESS and each of its phases useful?*

Method

Participants

Participants in the current study included teachers and students from eight classrooms in an urban elementary school in southern California. All eight teachers in the sample were female, including four European Americans, two Asian Americans, and one African American (one teacher did not report ethnicity). Teachers in the study taught classrooms that included a mean of 19.14 (*S.D.* = 0.99) students. The student sample was 60% female and 94% Latino American. The sample included 39 first grade students, 18 second grade students, and 14 third grade students. Concurrent validity analyses were performed on the subset of 27 second and third grade students who participated in proficiency testing during the year that the BACESS was administered.

Data Collection Procedures

Brief Academic Competence Evaluation Screening System. Under evaluation, the BACESS is described in detail in the Introduction section of this manuscript.

Evaluation Survey. The Evaluation Survey was based on an instrument developed by Huai (2004) for users of the BACESS to provide feedback regarding the instrument. It includes seven questions related to the instrument answered on a four-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Agree*, and 4 = *Strongly Agree*), prompts for teachers to estimate how much time they spent on the first two phases of the BACESS, and provides opportunities for brief written responses to open questions.

Background Information Questionnaire. The Background Information Questionnaire was completed by teachers to share details on their demographics and experiences. It includes questions about gender and ethnicity, as well as grade level, classroom size, and previous

experiences with teaching, pre-referral intervention, and the ACES system.

California Standards Tests. The California Standards Tests (CST's) were designed to measure students' mastery of content standards in English-Language Arts and Mathematics. Both tests consist of 65 multiple choice questions. Previous versions of the test have been found to be highly reliable and valid for measuring students' mastery of California content standards (California Department of Education, 2003, 2005).

Procedure

Teachers participated by completing the BACESS, the Evaluation Survey, and the Background Information Questionnaire. Students participated by completing the CST's in Mathematics and Reading administered to all students in grades 2 through 11 in California. Although completion of the BACESS and the CST's occurred during the same time period, it is important to note that teachers did not have access to the results of the CST's when completing the screening system.

Data Analysis

The reliability of Phase 1 of the BACESS was characterized by calculating the correlations between scores in each content area (Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, and Social Behavior) and a sum score based on all four areas. The reliability of Phase 2 was characterized by calculating Cronbach's alpha. Concurrent validity between the BACESS and the CST's was characterized via Bayesian conditional probability indices taken by second and third grade students. The utility of the BACESS was evaluated via descriptive quantitative and qualitative analysis of Evaluation Survey answers. The reliability and validity of Phase 3 were already well established and documented in the ACES manual (DiPerna & Elliott, 2000).

Results and Discussion

Reliability coefficients for phase 1, estimated by the correlations of each individual subscale with a total score from the sum of subscales, ranged between r = .81 and r = .91. Cronbach's alpha for Phase 2 was r = .94. These reliabilities are quite high considering they refer to short phases from a multi-stage screening instrument.

Concurrent validity evidence indicated adequate performance for the BACESS with regard to agreement with the CST's. Table 2 depicts agreement between the BACESS and proficiency as determined via the CST's within the subsample of students in 2nd and 3rd grade. The BACESS was sufficiently specific (.68) and sensitive (.60) for this purpose, and the positive predictive power (.88) of the instrument was quite high. This finding indicates that the BACESS identified almost exclusively students who needed help, reducing the possibility that resources would be wasted. The quality of the instrument as characterized by negative predictive power (.30) was low, indicating that too high of a proportion of students who did not qualify via that BACESS actually were showing signs of early learning problems. The danger associated with such low negative

Table 2 *California Standards Tests Proficiency Level by BACESS Qualification*

		Eventual Outcome	
		Early Learning Problem	No Early Learning Problem
Screening Indicator	At-Risk	15	2
	Not At-Risk	7	3

Note: Sensitivity = .68; specificity = .60; positive predictive power = .88; and negative predictive power = .30.

predictive power is that too many students with learning problems remain unidentified.

Via the evaluation survey, teachers indicated having spent an average of 54 minutes (*S.D.* = 27 minutes) completing the first two phases of BACESS. On average, 23 minutes (*S.D.* = 13 minutes) was spent using Phase 1 and 31 minutes (*S.D.* = 16 minutes) was spent using Phase 2. The am ount of time spent completing Phase 3, obtaining nationally normed academic skills and enablers scores that link to prereferral interventions, was previously determined to be less than 20 minutes per individual (DiPerna & Elliott, 2000). All eight teachers agreed that the time spent on Phases 1 & 2 was reasonable, and that the BACESS as a whole was useful. Only four of seven teachers indicated that the BACESS is easy to use, primarily citing Phase 3 as being the most difficult.

Implications and Conclusion

The BACESS is a highly reliable screening instrument when used within an urban, primarily Latino American elementary school environment. As currently constructed, the instrument appears to be related to achievement test proficiency scores (i.e., the CST's), although negative predictive power is low. More evidence needs to be collected, with a larger sample and of a predictive nature, before results of the current study can be generalized with confidence.

While teachers see Phases 1 and 2 as time efficient, helpful, and useful, Phase 3 is seen as difficult to complete, and may be more appropriate for professionals with a background in psychological assessment to interpret. The practical implications of the current findings are that teacher ratings organized within a screening system appear to be an acceptable method for identifying early learning problems. Previously shown to be an accurate screening system for academic problems within a relatively high achieving

population (Kettler et al., 2007), the BACESS may also be an acceptable screening tool for use in an environment in which the majority of students (81% in the current sample) do not obtain proficiency across reading and mathematics.

This finding is important because variations in base rate affect the attainability of high scores on the various Bayesian conditional probability indices. In the current sample, a high proportion of the students identified by the screening system are ideal candidates for selective preventive intervention prior to referral for special education. Future revisions of the BACESS should be aimed at maintaining this level of success, while decreasing the rate of false negative cases among academically challenged populations.

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Preparing Mathematics Teachers for Elementary High-Poverty Schools: Perceptions and Suggestions from Preservice Teachers

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The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics articulates an ambitious vision of a high-quality mathematics program. Achieving this vision requires competent and knowledgeable teachers who can support all students in learning mathematics concepts with understanding. Effective mathematics teachers are especially needed for high-poverty schools since low-income students score below their peers in all mathematics content areas. This study documents the perceptions of preservice teachers who completed a mathematics practicum experience in an urban elementary school. Problems are identified and suggestions offered by the preservice teachers as they strived to develop into effective mathematics educators at urban high-poverty schools.

The value of learning mathematics in today's global society –a society of extraordinary and accelerating changes has never been greater, and will continue to increase dramatically (National Council for Teachers of Mathematics

(NCTM), 2000). Therefore, the need for mathematical literacy for all students is at critical levels. The National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century (2000) released the Glenn Commission Report, which cited four compelling reasons why all students need to become competent in mathematics and attain substantial understandings in this content area: (a) the pace of change in today's global workplace and economy, (b) the need for mathematics in decision making and problem solving, (c) national security interests and concerns, and (d) the intrinsic value of mathematics education.

Pedagogy and Student Achievement

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) mathematics assessment is the only nationally ongoing assessment of mathematics achievement in the United States that gauges student mathematics achievement in grades 4, 8, and 12 (Rampey, Lutkus, & Dion, 2006). NAEP data suggest that urban students are not experiencing instructional practices consistent with the recommendations suggested by the NCTM (Lubienski, 2002).

Wenglinsky (2002) looked at how mathematics achievement levels of more than 7,000 students on the 1996 NAEP mathematics assessment were related to measures of teaching quality. He found that student achievement was influenced by both teacher content background and teacher education or professional development coursework, particularly in how to work with diverse student populations. Students performed better when teachers provided hands-on learning opportunities and focused on higher order thinking skills. Wenglinsky stated, "Regardless of the level of preparation students bring into the classroom, decisions that teachers make about classroom practices can either greatly facilitate student learning or serve as an obstacle to it" (p. 7). Teachers' pedagogical decisions and activities make a difference in students' mathematics achievement (NCTM,

2000). Students' understanding of mathematics is shaped by the teaching they encounter in school (NCTM, 2000).

Analyzing NAEP data, Lubienski, McGraw, and Westbrook (2004) found six factors associated with school experiences related to race/ethnicity: (a) nature of classroom experiences, (b) type of instructional support, (c) amount of instructional support, (d) form of mathematical task, communication, and assessment, (e) types of instructional tools used, and (f) teachers' educational background.

Lubienski et al. (2004) found that race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status are highly correlated. For example, they found that 3% of White eighth graders attend school in which more that 75% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch; however, 34% of Black and 30% of Hispanic students attend such schools. Teachers of Black and Hispanic students lagged behind teachers of White students in instructional support needed to teach mathematics.

They also found that students who qualified for free or reduced lunch and Black and Hispanic students were more likely to be assessed using multiple choice tests than White students. They also found that Black and Hispanic students used computers for drill and practice and White students were more likely to use computers for simulations and demonstration of concepts in school classrooms.

Elementary Teacher Preparation and Pedagogy

Shifts in the elementary mathematics curriculum have led to a substantial increase in the content knowledge needed to teach elementary mathematics (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005). Elementary teachers need not only to be able to teach arithmetic, but they must also be able to teach geometry, algebraic concepts, data analysis, and probability. In addition, they must be able to teach problem solving skills, represent mathematical concepts in multiple ways, connect mathematical concepts within mathematics and to other

subject areas, and be able to analyze students' thinking about mathematics (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005).

Reys and Fennell (2003) found that many preservice elementary teachers were uncomfortable with thinking of themselves as mathematics teachers even though they would be the primary persons who organize and deliver mathematics instruction for elementary school students. These preservice teachers may be uncomfortable because they do understand the mathematics content well, do not know how students learn mathematics, and/or are unable to use instruction and assessment strategies to help students learn mathematics with understanding (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005).

Method

Participants

Forty-two preservice teachers were participants in this study. Among this sample, thirty-four were undergraduate teacher candidates, while eight were graduate teacher candidates. All subjects were female between the ages of 21 and 40, (mean age = 30 years), with 86% Caucasian (N = 36), and 14% African American (N = 6). All subjects identified their socioeconomic level as middle-class or upper, middle class. This was the first urban high-poverty school placement for each of the candidates, although the subjects were three to five years into their teacher preparation program.

All participants were enrolled in an elementary school mathematics methods class which focused on children's developmental levels in learning mathematics, effective mathematical pedagogy and instructional skills, and responding to the needs of diverse student populations. Each candidate was required to complete a 15 hour field-based practicum experience at an urban high-poverty school located within the metropolitan area. Requirements of the practicum field experience included teaching particular mathematics content to individuals and small groups,

developing, implementing, and assessing a prescription plan for students struggling in mathematics, and assessing the effectiveness of their prescription plan.

Three high-poverty, Title I schools with similar demographics and student populations served as the practicum sites, and thirteen classroom teachers acted as practicum supervisors for the study subjects. They were selected by each site's Mathematics Specialist based on scheduling needs of the subjects and no other criteria.

Data Gathering Procedures

The primary data analyzed for this study were responses to the following open-ended written interview questions which were collected at the conclusion of each subject's practicum experience:

- What challenges do elementary teachers in urban schools confront in teaching elementary mathematics productively and with understanding?
- What mathematics instructional practices do you see being used in the classroom in urban schools?
- What do you suggest that teacher preparation programs do to assist you in your development to be a successful mathematics teacher in urban schools?

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis was utilized to examine participants' responses to the written interviews. This method of analysis involved the identification of interpretive themes and categories that emerged from the data (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990). The inductive analysis process began with the research team's thorough reading of each written interview to gain a sense of the range of the responses and identify any reoccurring themes. Tentative themes were then refined after

the research team collaboratively reread, reflected on, and discussed each of the subject's written responses.

Results and Discussion

Question 1: What challenges do you perceive that elementary teachers in high-poverty schools must confront to teach elementary mathematics productively, and with understanding?

Preservice teachers perceived six major challenges to teaching mathematics productively. They included: (a) Low Readiness Levels, (b) Low Student Expectations, (c), Student Misbehavior, (d) Lack of Parental Support, and (e) Social Problems. Response distributions are presented in Table 1 below

TABLE 1 *Challenges of Teaching Mathematics in an Elementary High-Poverty School*

Identified Challenges	Response Number	Response Percent
Readiness Levels	40	93%
Expectations	39	93%
Student Behavior	31	74%
Parental Support	29	69%
Social Issues	23	55%

Note: n = 42

The greatest number of responses, (93%) identified student readiness levels and low expectations of urban students (93%) as the greatest challenges facing elementary mathematics teachers in high-poverty schools. Readiness levels encompass the vast array of students' mathematical abilities within one grade level classroom and the teacher's ability to differentiate instruction in order to meet their

individual needs (Tomlinson, 1999). Because students' mathematical cognitive development varies, it is imperative that teachers focus on their pedagogical decisions that benefit all students (Geary, 1996; Mewborn, 2003; NCTM, 2000; Van De Walle, 2007).

Furthermore, according to the NCTM (2000), "All students, regardless of their personal characteristics, backgrounds, or physical challenges must have opportunities to study – and support to learn – mathematics (p. 12). However, meeting this need can be particularly overwhelming for prospective teachers at high-poverty schools. For example, one subject noted:

> *I was surprised that so many students were on different levels to learn particular skills in mathematics. Some students couldn't multiply, and many had difficulty with reading. This made story problems especially difficult. How in the world can I teach two-digit multiplication when so many of the students can't multiply?"*

Another subject articulated her surprise of the readiness levels of fifth grade students:

> *Students in this class are at a much lower level than the fifth graders at a suburban elementary school located in a neighboring city]. I only observed a few [students] who I would consider being at grade level.*

Equally challenging is the lack of behaviors demonstrated by practicum supervisors that promote high-expectations (93%) of urban students. Teacher expectations are demonstrated through a vast array of specific teacher behaviors, categorized under three strands: (a) Personal Regard, (b) Response Opportunities, and (c) Feedback (Brophy & Good, 1986). For example, taking an interest in

students' personal lives and providing equitable response opportunities are behaviors that promote high expectations, and are categorized under Personal Regard and Response Opportunities, respectively. According to Lavoie (1996) and Haberman (2005), many teachers in high-poverty schools often "give up" on challenging students; they tend to blame the student for their failures, instead of taking responsibility for their own inability to effectively teach them.

Many participants noted some alarming behaviors demonstrated by their practicum supervisors that communicated low student expectations:

> *Within five minutes upon entering the classroom, I knew who all the bad students were. The teacher had them sitting in desks facing the wall in back of the classroom.*

And yet another said:

> *I don't think my teacher or the students like being here. It's not a happy place.*

Student behavior (74%), parental support (69%), and social issues (55%) were also identified as challenges to teaching mathematics in urban schools. Many subjects noted the amount and range of discipline concerns and the impact these behaviors had on the overall climate of the classroom, especially as it relates to instruction. For example:

> *I'm surprised the teacher got anything done during their math period. Joseph continually left his seat, and disrupted the other students. He didn't even attempt to be quiet. The teacher ignored him at first, and then they both got into an argument. I can't believe how Joseph talked to Ms. James (Cooperating teacher, a pseudonym).*

Managing student behavior is a particular concern for a vast majority of urban teachers. Haberman and Richardson (1990) reported that discipline problems of students are a leading cause for teacher attrition in high-poverty schools. Haberman (2005) and the Alliance for Excellent Education[AAE] (2002) also reported that problematic student discipline continues to be a major factor impacting teacher retention.

Many of the subjects commented on the lack of parental support and the debilitating conditions in the students' community. For example:

> *Í can't believe the conditions in the neighborhood, and how people can live there. Now I see why they have low test scores.*
>
> *The students are just so needy, and the atmosphere is so demanding. I'm not sure if I would ever want to teach here.*

Overall, the subjects' responses may indicate a lack of compassion or cultural understanding involving the dynamics of high-poverty areas and schools. The majority of the sample was composed of White, middle-class women (n = 36; 86%), whereas the student population at their practicum sites were students of color and from lower socioeconomic levels. This alone has serious implications; the subjects may have developed negative or distorted beliefs, attitudes, or understandings whether at the conscious or unconscious levels, about race, culture and context (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Gay, 2000; Kincheloe, 2004; Haberman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The challenges that participants identified are typical of urban schools (Brown, 2002; Haberman, 1995 & 2005; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, Randell, Rousseau, 2005). High-quality teachers are able to overcome the challenges of urban schools and achieve success

(Haberman, 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that preservice teachers be paired with supervising teachers who are successful in this urban, high-poverty environment.

Question 2: What mathematics instructional practices do you see being used in the classroom in high-poverty schools?

Two broad themes emerged from the data: (a) lecture, or teacher directed, and (b) constructivism, a hands-on approach.

Lecture, or teacher-directed instruction, was observed by 27 of the subjects (64%) and constructivism was observed by 15 of the subjects (36%). Although lecture was observed by a greater percentage of the subjects, it's not necessarily the best approach to teaching mathematics (NCTM, 2000). Response distributions are presented below in Table 2.

TABLE 2 *Current Mathematics Instructional Practices*

Identified Practices	# of Responses	Percentages
Lecture, Teacher Directed	27	64%
Constructivism, Hands-On	15	36%

Note: n = 42

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) introduced the *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* (2000) which reflects the basic precepts that are essential to providing a high-quality mathematics instructional program. Exposing students to authentic, attention-grabbing, mathematics activities that will spark greater interest and understanding of mathematics is the new direction called for by the NCTM (2000). However, many mathematical classrooms continue to use antiquated instructional practices that are far removed from the

researched-based pedagogy currently advocated (Mathematical Association of America (MAA), 2001; NCTM, 2000).

Lecture or teacher-directed instruction can viewed as programmed instruction where drill and practice are a major component (Cathecart, Pothier, Vance, Bezuk, 2006). This methodology was observed by 27 of the subjects (64%) as their supervisors' main approach to teaching mathematics.

> *My supervisor used the same old approach that my teachers used when I went to school.*
>
> *All I ever see is worksheets. The students are so bored with them.*

Educational research from the past 60 years supports the notion that drill and practice alone does not guarantee mathematical understanding and immediate recall. Student competence or mastery of a particular concept or skill does not necessitate extensive drill and practice activities (Bjork & Drunckman, 1994; Hiebert, 1990)

Constructivism, or mathematical knowledge constructed by through interactions of the students and teacher, is considered a more hands-on, student-centered instructional approach (Cathecart et al., 2006; Cobbs, Yackel, & Wood, 1991; Davis, Maher, & Noddings, 1990; Goldin, 1990; Yackel & Cobb, 1990). Constructivists believe that students must play an active role in developing mathematical understanding, rather than receiving information from the teacher (Cathcart et al., 2006). Manipulatives play an instrumental role in assisting students to develop a conceptual understanding of different mathematical concepts and skills. Research indicates that instruction that centers on the use of manipulatives produces greater mathematical gains and achievement when compared to instruction not utilizing them (Fuson & Briars; 1990; Suydam & Higgins, 1977; Wearne & Hiebert, 1988).

During their practicum, participants noted differences between constructivist and teacher-directed classrooms and described the constructivist classrooms in this way:

> *The students were really involved. Although it was loud at times, they were really getting it [concept being taught].*
>
> *The teacher really created an engaging environment. Students were talking to each other and the higher students were helping those at lower levels. She posed real life problems for the students to figure out as they worked with the manipulatives.*

The fact that a higher percentage of the subjects observed mathematical instructional practices that many view as outdated, ineffective, and not student-centered raises concerns. Haberman (2005) asserts that urban teacher preparation requires extensive field work under the direction of effective teachers, whose task is to model best practices. Because field experiences and cooperating teachers (practicum supervisors) have such a significant impact and influence on the development of future teachers, an influence that can extend to the first three years of teaching, it is imperative that they be presented with best teaching practices and pedagogy **(**Tabacbnick & Zeichner, 1984).

Question 3: *What do you suggest that teacher preparation programs can do to assist you in your development as a successful mathematics teacher in a high-poverty school?*

Three recommendations emerged from the data: (a) More experiences in urban schools (100%), (b) Pairing with high-quality teachers (83%), and (c) More focus on understanding the dynamics of high poverty schools (71%). Subjects' response distributions are provided in Table 3.

Field experiences in the classroom setting are a critical component of teacher development (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Dewey, 1938; Gallego, 2001). They provide opportunities for the preservice teachers to explore and practice mathematical teaching strategies, make connections from mathematical theory to practice, and to understand

TABLE 3 *Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs*

Recommendations	# of Responses	Percentage
More Urban Field Experiences	42	100%
Effective Supervisors	35	83%
Focus on High-Poverty Schools	30	71%

n = 42

student's mathematical development. Not only do preservice teachers need to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to teach mathematics with understanding, they must also develop an understanding of teaching mathematics in a school culture that is often new to them. All the subjects (N = 42; 100%) identified the need for more urban high-poverty school field experiences. Additionally, 71% of the subjects (N = 30) stated that more opportunities to understand the culture of high-poverty schools need to be provided.

The literature reveals that student teachers often attribute their instructional methodology and dispositions to their cooperating teacher, more than to their teacher preparation coursework (Conderman & Pedersen, 2006; Fairbanks, Freedman, & Kahn, 2000; Richardson-Koehler, 1988; Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004). Teaching in an urban environment was a new experience for the subjects, and therefore, the need to be placed with

effective teachers to assist and guide them in understanding the students, school, and community, as well as aligning their pedagogical practices with the cultural experiences of the students is of utmost importance.

Summary and Implications

This research focused on 42 preservice teacher's perceptions of teaching mathematics in a high-poverty, urban elementary school setting. These preservice teachers provided suggestions for teacher education programs as they struggled to develop into quality mathematics teachers for urban schools. The subjects identified several challenges for teaching mathematics with understanding in urban schools. The challenges they identified are typically associated with high-poverty schools—student misbehavior, low student expectations, and societal problems (Kopetz, Lease, & Warren-Kring, 2006; Kozol, 1991; Haberman, 1995, 2005; Olson & Jerald, 1998).

While the literature reports that many teachers may not have the necessary mathematical content knowledge to teach with understanding (Mathematical Association of America, 2001; NCTM, 2000), the preservice teachers in this study did not identify this as a particular challenge. The challenges they identified had more to do with teaching in an urban school than with teaching mathematics. This is especially significant since *No Child Left Behind* emphasizes content knowledge test scores (PRAXIS I and II) as the means to define "highly-qualified" teachers without addressing the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed by teachers to meet the demands of urban teaching (McKinney, Fuller, Hancock & Audette, 2007). Once these teacher candidates have a better understanding of working in urban schools and with low-income students, further research is needed to determine if they experienced challenges specific to mathematics content and its subject specific pedagogy.

It is worth noting that the perceived challenges of urban teaching should be addressed in teacher education programs (Claycomb, 2000). If preservice teachers' perceptions of urban teaching are not positive, they may not consider accepting a teaching position in urban schools. Realizing that not all teacher candidates have the ideology or dispositions for urban teaching, negative perceptions of urban schools may discourage those candidates who otherwise would make excellent candidates for teaching in this setting. The work of McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson & Robinson (2006) confirms this notion. Although their research focused on student teachers, they concluded that if student interns felt they were not successful during their urban internship, they may be less willing to accept an urban teaching position.

Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy (2001) conclude that there is a lack of knowledge and expertise in how to best prepare urban teachers. This study's subjects offered suggestions for preparing urban teachers including: (a) more urban mathematical field experiences, (b) placement of preservice teachers with effective urban mathematics teachers, and (c) teaching about cultural understandings necessary to cope with the complex realities of urban teaching. Again, the subjects focused on the 'urban' aspect of the practicum and not the teaching of mathematics or mathematical content knowledge.

Traditional teacher education programs may not provide quality urban field experiences or experiences that provide preservice teachers with a cultural understanding of urban communities, schools, and students. Additional research needs to be conducted to determine what constitutes a quality urban field experience (Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Quality mathematics field experiences must occur under the supervision of effective teachers – teachers who will model best practices and behaviors. The data may suggest that teacher preparation programs may need to play a more instrumental role in the selection of practicum supervisors to assure preservice teachers are placed with

effective teachers. Additionally, criteria may need to be developed to define effective urban teachers.

Many of the current subjects witnessed instructional practices by their practicum supervisor that were not aligned with the *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* (NCTM, 2000). Because of the instrumental role cooperating teachers play on developing novice teachers, they need to model instructional strategies that are standards-based **(**Tabacbnick & Zeichner, 1984). If practicum supervising teachers can not or do not do this, it may be beneficial for the preservice teachers to be provided with mathematics specialists to model standards-based practices for teaching mathematics with understanding. A mathematics specialist serves as a support for teachers and administrators who want to examine instructional practices within their schools so that they can work to improve mathematics teaching and learning (Nickerson & Moriarity, 2005). As such, they might be able to play an instrumental role in developing preservice teachers for mathematics instruction in urban settings.

The literature has made clear that the quality of a mathematics teacher is a strong predictor for student achievement in mathematics (Boaler, 2006; Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; Sutton & Krueger, 2002). Because of the disparities in the mathematics achievement between minority and majority populations (NAEP, 2002), the need to provide highly-qualified mathematics teachers for high-poverty schools has reached critical levels. Providing carefully-planned mathematical field experiences for preservice teachers can be one approach to prepare urban educators. However, the data from this investigation suggest that certain factors such as understanding the culture of urban, high-poverty schools and being placed with effective urban mathematics teachers are of utmost importance for providing preservice teachers with a quality experience. After all, all students are entitled to a world-class mathematics education program (NCTM, 2000).

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Resilience Development of Preservice Teachers in Urban Schools

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Retention of teachers in urban schools continues to plague public schools. Could universities increase the likelihood that teachers will stay in urban schools longer by preparing them for some of the adversities they may face and helping them develop resilience in relation to these challenges? Could we produce resilient educators before they embark on their career path? The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of two preservice teachers in urban student teaching placements. It extends the research of Sagor (1996) and Bernshausen and Cunningham (2001) and applies the concept of Competence, Belonging, Usefulness, Potency and Optimism (CBUPO) to an urban student teaching experience.

Teacher education programs in the United States face a challenging and critically important charge. They are responsible for generating 2 million new teachers by the next decade (Olson, 2000). Teacher preparation programs are responsible for producing teachers who are ready to face the many challenges of public schooling. But, preparing teachers is just part of the challenge. As big, if not a bigger challenge, is that of retaining teachers. Teacher attrition and transfer continues to be a concern and denotes instability in the teaching force (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, Weber, 1997).

In the new millennium, teachers in all schools need the skill set to "bounce back" from adverse conditions. Adverse conditions are often very prevalent in urban schools. If

teachers are not able to press through trying times, they are likely to leave the field or become increasingly dissatisfied with their career (Ingersoll, 2001). Ideally, teacher preparation programs would produce resilient educators.

Conceptual Framework

Urban Schools and Retention Issues

Inner cities can be difficult places to live and teach, presenting unique factors compared to suburban and rural counterparts (Patterson, Collins & Abbott, 2004; Sachs, 2004). These factors can often compromise the education of students and the teachers who teach them (Patterson, et al; 2004). The teacher who chooses an urban school must maintain an ideal of service despite unrelenting conditions that constantly, both directly and indirectly, sabotage them (Weiner, 1993). Until recently, few scholars have recognized that the problem in urban schools is not recruitment but retention (Salvador & Wilson, 2002).

Fewer resources (Darling-Hammond, 2003), poorer working conditions and facilities, limited access to textbooks and supplies, fewer administrative supports, and larger class sizes contribute to the challenges of teaching in an urban school (Harris, 2002). In addition, teachers are responsible for working with many students and families who have a wide range of needs (Darling-Hammond, 2003) with less parent involvement, lower student motivation and less than satisfactory academic skills (Bondy & McKenzie, 1999). These are just some of the factors making urban schools different and challenging environments in which to teach.

In addition to the challenging conditions, the literature details various reasons why urban schools may have a difficult task in retaining teachers. Racial, political and economic divides (Weiner, 1993), insufficient preparation (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999; Quartz & Associates, 2003; Sachs, 2004), job dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 2001), and retirement compound the already taxing environment.

Resiliency

A fitting interpretation of resiliency related to a study of preservice teachers in urban schools is the capacity to successfully manage obstacles in the road before us while maintaining a straight and true path towards life's goals (Brooks & Goldstein, 2003). Resiliency equals "a unique, powerful combination of tenacity (willingness to keep trying in the face of set backs), optimism (belief in the probability of success), and impact (commitment to standards)" (Bernshausen and Cunningham, 2001, p.6). Simply put, resilience means achieving positive life outcomes in spite of risk (Werner, 1995). Central to the concept and development of resiliency are protective factors. Protective factors are "characteristics within the person or environment that mitigate the negative impact of stressful situations or conditions" (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 8) such as those prevalent in urban school systems.

Sagor (1996) created the acronym "CBUPO" which stands for the following terms as they apply to enhancing and developing resiliency in children: Competence, Belonging, Usefulness, Potency, and Optimism. Bernshausen and Cunningham (2001) examined the importance of resiliency on teacher preparation and retention by applying CBUPO to teacher education programs that subscribe to the Professional Development School (PDS) model. This study is an extension of the work of Sagor (1996) and Bernshausen and Cunningham (2001) by applying their findings to an urban student teaching experience.

Preservice Teachers and Resiliency

Preservice teachers must recognize and develop the resources that will sustain them and increase resilience as they enter their initial stage of the profession (Bobek, 2002, p. 202). Leaving resiliency development up to teachers once they get into the field is a gamble when trying to maximize retention. Bernshausen and Cunningham (2001) believe

teachers who are experiencing stress must be taught resiliency. A teacher candidate who gives evidence of resilience, of taking charge to solve problems may add to the school in important ways that bolster student achievement and school success (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004).

Method

Participants

To examine the ways in which a preservice teacher exhibits resiliency, a descriptive qualitative study was conducted. Using ethnographic and phenomenological tools, the lived experiences of two preservice teachers placed in urban student teaching placement were studied. Each participant was a second semester senior enrolled in the Integrated Bachelors/Masters program at the University of Connecticut majoring in special education.

All student teachers are concurrently enrolled in EGEN 297- Student Teaching Seminar, a three-credit course instructed by the researcher. After receiving an information sheet describing the study on the first day of class, students were asked to indicate whether they would be willing to participate on a separate demographic form. Because classroom observation was critical to the study, the principals of the schools where the student teachers were placed received a letter describing the study to notify them research would be taking place in the schools. Two students volunteered to participate in the study.

Allison. Allison is a white woman and a college senior in her early 20's enrolled in the Integrated Bachelors/Masters (IB/M) program at the University of Connecticut. Allison's mother passed away when she was in the beginning of her college career, which had a profound impact on her. The relationship she had with her father was strained at the time of the study. During student teaching, Allison transitioned from living with her father to living alone in a condo. She is an only child.

Brooke. Brooke is also a white woman and a college senior in her early 20's enrolled in the IB/M program at the University of Connecticut. Brooke stated that her father's influence was important in her choosing to become a special education teacher. Coming from a strong nuclear family, Brooke lives at home, and gathers a lot of support from her family. She has two younger brothers, one a student at the same university, and the other in a rural elementary school. Brooke's faith is important to her and she attends church on nearly a weekly basis.

Data Collection Procedures

Participant Observations. The researcher's role in City Public Schools (CPS) as Professional Development Coordinator (PDC) was an important factor in data collection. The primary role of a PDC is to serve as a liaison between the public school partner (City) and the university (UCONN).

From participant observations, field notes were collected, coded and analyzed as data. These data came from informal interviews, classroom/school observations, and school-wide interactions with members of the school community.

Interviews. Three formal iterative in-depth interviews were conducted over the course of the spring semester while the preservice teachers were in their student teaching placements. In addition, informal interviews took place at appropriate times such as after classroom observations.

Material Culture. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) material culture can assist to "better understand the social worlds" being studied (p. 198). Reflective journals, e-portfolios, and critical incident assignments from class are examples of items used as material for this study.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Field notes, material culture and transcribed interviews were

coded, sorted and categorized to identify similarities and differences among the data. The data were reviewed several times over several months to allow for patterns and themes to emerge (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher used Sagor's (1996) five attributes, Competency, Potency, Usefulness, Belonging and Optimism (CPUBO), as the analytical framework for this study and Richardson et al's (1990) internal and environmental protective factors.

Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Rigor

The researcher employed five strategies suggested by Rossman and Rallis (2003) to "enhance the credibility and rigorousness with which you conduct a qualitative study" (p. 69). The nature of the researcher's role in the public schools and university allowed for a "prolonged engagement" necessary to provide more certain insight into the phenomenon. Various sources of data over multiple points in time and using different methods of collecting data ensured triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants were given the opportunity to review all data sources to elaborate, disagree or validate the researcher's conclusions.

The public school and university served as the community of practice, where certain individuals were utilized as critical friends. The community of practice and critical friends provide a forum for the researcher to discuss ideas and theories as they emerge from the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as "peer debriefing", the process allows for an unveiling of the researcher's mind to gain clarity, confirmation or new direction.

Results

Competency

Allison and Brooke's competence, the first of Sagor's (1996) resiliency attributes, was repeatedly tested while student teaching. Both encountered cognitive dissonance

during their student teaching experience that led them to contemplate issues around their general competency as future educators. Specifically emergent as challenging were procedural skills such as time management, classroom management and lesson planning. Being confronted with feelings of incompetence seemed temporary, but repeatedly reduced their confidence and self-efficacy. Another situation which provided great insight into Brooke's perception of her competence was the university's evaluation process. Both student teachers worked throughout the semester to derive meaning from what they were experiencing in order to strengthen themselves personally and professionally.

Neither Brooke nor Allison appeared very self-aware of their strengths or what they used as protective factors when faced with adversity. The concept of self-awareness relates closely with self-confidence, self-efficacy and an individual's perception of competence. Both women could easily state multiple things they could be better at doing or needed to improve upon, such as lesson planning and classroom management.

Belonging

Belonging, one of Sagor's (1996) attributes to enhancing resiliency, seemed void from Allison and Brooke's lives during the semester in two ways. Neither Brooke nor Allison could report a sense of belonging to the school or classroom in which they were placed. Also missing was a strong connection with the university, a component to the program that both students noticed, valued and yearned for on a more regular basis. Further exacerbating a diminished sense of belonging was an apparent variability in what experiences and opportunities preservice teachers were being afforded. For example, student information they were privy to during their placement was not consistent and changed the experience as a result.

One of the variables impacting the experiences Brooke and Allison had during their student teaching placement was

the cooperating teacher. These relationships proved to be complex and convoluted, important and influential to both women. Cooperating teachers seem to have a considerable impact on how a student teacher feels in terms of belonging.

Potency and Usefulness

Potency and usefulness are two separate resiliency attributes that Sagor (1996) cites but were combined into one for the purpose of this study due to the contingent relationship one had on the other. Despite having a desire to teach in urban schools, both student teachers reported awe and surprise at the conditions and challenges presented in the settings. Allison and Brooke felt they could have been better prepared for the cultural, economic and political complexities of the environment. The dissonance surrounding theory and practice puzzled and frustrated them, but both women remained steadfast to civic service and social justice for children as cornerstones of their careers. Feeling potent, as though they were having an impact, was very important to them. The harsh realities urban schools can sometimes present only seemed to fuel their desire to serve.

Optimism

Sagor (1996) describes increasing optimism and thus resiliency as a result of the enhancement of competency, belonging, and usefulness/potency. This study corroborates the theory that optimism is contingent on the other resiliency attributes. It demonstrates that Allison and Brooke had days when they felt defeated, incompetent, unpotent, and unsure if they belonged in teaching. They also had confident days, when they felt they were making a difference and having an impact on their students' learning. Both women indicated that they could not see themselves anywhere else except in the urban schools they were placed. Brooke's journal provides insight into an optimistic day:

It is a real confidence booster when you start to see

> *yourself and feel yourself getting better. I'm wondering at the end of the two weeks left of this experience, if I will feel prepared or if I will feel like I still need lots of guidance. I was really proud of what I was able to accomplish with my students today--I hope there will be more days like this* (Brooke, journal, 4/8/05).

A week later, Brooke, considering the end of her student teaching, contemplates with optimism what she will do in the future:

> *I almost feel as though it is my duty to continue to come back and support this school with my education and resources. I feel safe at this school, and I love it. I feel almost as though it is becoming a second home* (Brooke, two weeks before student teaching ended).

Allison reflected on her experience and described it as "the best thing that ever happened to me". Considering everything she had been through this semester, it was surprising to hear her have this outlook. She further explains that it was very difficult but also "I think it's been great though. I don't know how to put this, great but painful, painfully great" (Allison, Interview 2, p. 38). Allison is someone who sees the opportunities that crisis can sometimes present. She describes her optimistic passion for urban schools, "It's so worthwhile, I think it's the most worthwhile place to teach, there's nowhere else that I want to go (Allison, Interview 3, p. 2).

Discussion

An important aspect to note in the study was what protective factors contributed to student teachers being able to handle adversity. When asked directly what buffered them

against hardship, Brooke and Allison had a very difficult time articulating protective factors or their individual strengths, which suggested a diminished sense of self-awareness.

Self-Awareness

The importance of self-awareness toward the path of resilience was established in the literature and confirmed in this study. Some surprising data that emerged from the study was Allison and Brooke's lack of knowledge of what sustains them in their lives. With some prompting, they began to identify things that enriched their lives and what they considered their strengths. The conversations around topics of self-awareness were a struggle. Allison identified "working hard" as her strength. Brooke eventually needed a lot of prompting and said she was a "good friend" and good at "crafting things" such as scrap booking. Both of the participants were intelligent, caring, reflective, seemingly introspective people as evident in their ability to enter into a highly competitive program and participate meaningfully in seminar discussions.

It appeared as though Allison and Brooke had given little thought to what assisted them in getting through adversity despite their apparent usage of many protective factors such as humor, flexibility, a strong commitment to civic service/social justice, seminar, the ability to make meaning from their experiences, role models, and the support of the cooperating teacher and university supervisor.

Assisting preservice teachers to identify ways to rejuvenate, nurture and protect themselves during times of difficulty may enhance their ability to sustain harsher conditions. Being able to overcome adversity, or becoming more resilient, could enhance teacher's ability to stay in-service longer, especially in areas where retention is an issue, such as urban schools. It would greatly benefit preservice teachers to be aware of internal and environmental protective

factors, which ones work for them, and how to insulate themselves during adversity through their implementation.

Nieto (2003) conducted a study of seven highly respected, award winning, urban high school teachers to find out why they remained teaching in the Boston Public Schools. Teachers described hope and possibility for their students and education in general. They spoke of feeling anger regarding the injustices their students faced, and desperation to stay teaching despite such little support and resources. The opportunity to shape the future, a strong commitment to social justice and powerful interactions with their students were reasons these teachers gave for not leaving urban schools (Nieto, 2003). Several of the experiences relayed by Allison and Brooke reflected the work of Nieto (2003) and illustrated why they felt the inclination and commitment to teach in city schools.

Perceptions of Resilience

While discussing how resilient they perceived themselves to be, Brooke was able to joke that she has not "exactly had the most positive, warm, wonderful experiences" at the school where she was placed, and adds "I have to be resilient if I keep coming back here". She attributed the primary reason for her desire to return to this school to the kids and states, "as much as I feel some support from some staff members while other staff is distant, it is the students that keep me coming back to this school". Brooke views herself as a tougher person now, but "not in a bad way, in a good way". She sees "toughness" as a necessity to survive in an urban school in order to deal with things that would "normally would have ruined or upset her day."

Allison described her resilience now as "resilient but with limitations". After learning what her limitations were and understanding herself better, she realized she is now "resilient with knowledge behind it versus just blind like I can do it, it's no problem" (Allison, Interview 3, p. 22). Perhaps what Allison meant is that she realizes she may need

to access resources to help her maintain the high level of functioning she was used to prior to student teaching.

Allison described the journey her resilience took over the semester, whereas Brooke related her resilience to a level of perseverance over a longer period of time. When we think of Allison and Brooke's resilience in terms of Sagor's (1996) attributes of Competency, Belonging, Usefulness/Potency, and Optimism, every situation and interaction likely contributed to the adversity they faced or to the protective factors that buffered them to combat the adversity.

Necessity of Adversity

Many of the situations that Allison and Brooke faced during student teaching are not mutually exclusive to urban schools, but could be indicative of any placement. Situations perceived as adverse are catalysts for the development of resilience (Bobek, 2002). Rushton (2000) describes feelings of dissonance as normal and part of an adjustment process that can contribute to the refinement of skills, albeit slowly and sometimes painfully; an improved self-efficacy through perseverance can result. Allison and Brooke both came to understand their experiences this way. Lane (2003) emphasizes "cognitive dissonance may be necessary for novices to confront their own beliefs and images and acknowledge that they need adjustment…student teachers need to understand that benefits may accrue from immediate discomfort" (p. 4).

Despite the challenges, Brooke and Allison decided to return to complete their Master's internship in the same urban district they were placed for student teaching. In 2006, Brooke accepted a job teaching special education in the school where she student taught. Allison accepted a job in Brooklyn, New York also teaching special education. Both women seemed to experience a metamorphosis throughout their experience. Their resilience did change as a result of student teaching and the adversity they faced during that time. It can be determined that resiliency is not a static

state, but continuously evolving through a variety of exposures and experiences. Through the identification and utilization of protective factors, Allison and Brooke appeared to have acquired greater feelings of competence, a sense of how to fit, understood the usefulness and potency of their presence, and embraced their ebb and flow of optimism.

Implications

Some preservice teachers desire to become social justice educators, despite knowledge of the political unrest and economic hardship that compromise urban schools (Oakes, Franke, Quartz, and Rogers, 2002). We must learn what makes teaching in urban schools a fulfilling career and build upon that knowledge by supporting preservice teachers towards a career as change agents. The development of resiliency and protective factors may be a way for teacher education programs to arm preservice teachers with additional tools to buffer adversity in urban ones.

Bobek (2002) describes teacher resiliency, the ability to face and adjust to adversity while increasing one's competence, as a critical element in teacher retention and classroom success. Despite what we know about new teachers, the support they need, and the challenges of urban schools, districts continue to place the most inexperienced teachers in the most difficult schools and classrooms, setting beginning teachers up to feel like failures, reducing their self-confidence, leaving them defeated (Colbert & Wolfe, 1992) and with little choice but to leave urban schools. Even the most prepared teachers could falter in this situation if not armed with the artillery of resources needed to support them.

The resources needed to support new teachers are rarely available in urban schools, and ultimately new teachers are left on their own. Urban teacher failure and shortages will likely continue if new ways are not considered in preparing teachers for urban schools (Matus, 1995). Proactive and conscientious attention to resilience development while

preservice teachers are in their teacher education programs may assist and support a new generation of teachers to stay in the teaching profession longer.

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Urban Teachers Examine Reading Instruction through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

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What constitutes effective reading instruction for urban and ethnically diverse learners has been the topic of a great deal of debate. Particularly, during this time of sweeping mandates and increased calls for accountability. The response from urban schools to The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) serves as the backdrop for this paper which will examine reading instruction through the eyes of four urban elementary teachers. Data were collected through interviews, observations, focus groups, and document analysis. Findings address the impact of teachers' culturally responsive approach to reading acquisition, the implementation of research-based culturally responsive reading instruction strategies, and the role of race, culture and language in teaching and learning.

The implications of the alarmingly high rate of illiteracy in the United States are costly and profound. School drop-out rates, unemployment, and crime are all associated with low literacy levels (National Institute of Literacy, 1997; Simmons & Kameenui, 1998). This is particularly distressing for those vested in the academic success of ethnically diverse students in urban schools. Critical issues associated with literacy, disabilities, and race have been linked throughout history and are still inextricably intertwined.

Over 80 percent of students with disabilities experience significant reading deficits (Lerner, 1989), and the majority of these students are served in general education settings (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Yet, historically general and special educators have not been effectively prepared in the diagnosis and remediation of reading deficits in traditional teacher preparation programs (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Researchers have noted that if reading deficits are not remedied by fourth grade, they will persist and students will continue to read below grade level through high school (Lyon, 1995). This leads to disturbingly low rates of transition and retention of students with disabilities at the secondary level (Sheehey & Black, 2003).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has monitored the literacy achievement of students around the country for over 25 years. African Americans have consistently scored below a basic level of proficiency in grades 4 and 8. According to Au (1993) "…African American, Hispanic American, and disadvantaged urban eleventh graders read only slightly better than seventh graders in the nation as a whole" (p.2). Although the achievement gap between students of color and their White counterparts has narrowed, the gap still persists (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law by President Bush in January of 2002. NCLB is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The purpose of this act is "…to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (Title 1, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). Surely, there are few objections to the ideal of ensuring that all students have a fair, equal, and significant education. However, what is objectionable are the methods relied upon to ensure students

access to high-quality educational experiences and consequently their success.

The most prominent of these methods represents a focus on stringent accountability in the form of standardized assessment measures. These high stakes tests are designed to ensure students meet proficiency on a number of basic skills and demonstrate yearly progress, particularly students specified in subgroups such as racial/ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Fritzberg, 2004).

The unintended consequences of such mandates in the current politically-charged climate in education has resulted in a number of urban schools, which serve predominately students of color, facing punitive sanctions for failing to meet adequately yearly progress as measured by standardized assessment measures (Townsend, 2000). Unfortunately, these sanctions exacerbate the problems currently facing urban schools across the country and fail to address the myriad of contextual variables associated with teaching and learning in urban settings (Shealey, 2006).

How students are educated in the areas of reading and mathematics has changed drastically in recent years and reflects a renewed interest in measuring student performance through a narrow lens. This has resulted in limited opportunities for educators to make decisions about instruction based on meeting the academic, social, personal, and emotional needs of all learners.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical and conceptual framework of socio-cultural language and literacy acquisition. Socio-cultural theories emphasize the social aspect of learning and the context in which students construct meaning. (Meachum, 2001; Vgotsky, 1986). Further, socio-cultural theories embody the following key

elements: literacy, construction of meaning, and socio-cultural context (Hammerburg, 2004).

Literacy within a socio-cultural context extends beyond reading and writing to include the type of text, the skills needed to be literate in a particular context, and the identity of the reader. The construction of meaning is a critical element of literacy and language development.

Additionally, meaning construction is an interactive process and involves students relying upon knowledge and identity resources to enhance comprehension of various forms of text (Hammerburg, 2004). Finally, socio-cultural context includes the purpose and environment in which learning takes place as well as the cultural backgrounds of learners. The premise of socio-cultural theories of language and literacy lies in the understanding that literacy development is framed by the identity of the learner and the ways in which the learner makes sense of multiple forms of text in varied contexts. Culturally responsive teaching represents an application of socio-cultural theories of teaching and learning.

Irvine & Armento (2001) report that the term, *culturally responsive teaching*, is often used interchangeably with other terms such as culturally responsible, appropriate, congruent, compatible, relevant and multicultural. These terms all imply teachers are recognizing and valuing the cultural contributions of their students and use this knowledge to inform their practices and employment of instructional strategies (Gay, 2000).

Method

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What instructional methods do urban elementary teachers use to provide culturally responsive reading instruction?

- What elements of culturally responsive teaching are exemplified by effective reading teachers?

A qualitative research design was chosen due to the nature of the questions. Variables contributing to a culturally responsive approach to reading instruction are not easily identified; theories about this approach need to be developed. According to Gay & Airasian (2003) qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into why things are the way they are, and how participants in a particular context perceive things.

Setting

King Elementary School is located in the southeast region of the United States. The school district serves approximately 60,000 students. Of the total student population, 35% are from ethnically diverse backgrounds. The school is located in low to lower-middle class neighborhood. Many of the students are bussed in from around the county. However, a large number of the students live in the neighborhood surrounding the school.

King Elementary serves approximately 700 students, approximately 90 percent of whom are from ethnically diverse backgrounds, predominately African Americans. Additionally, 80% of the student population receives free or reduced-price lunch. King, like many urban schools across the U.S., has recently faced a number of challenges including budgetary restraints and a consistently high teacher turnover rate. Yet, standardized testing represents the most problematic and emotionally demoralizing issue currently facing school personnel and students. One of the major initiatives at King Elementary is the implementation of a school-wide reading program which involves direct and explicit instruction in the areas of decoding, fluency, and comprehension for all students.

Participants

The author engaged in purposeful sampling to identify

participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). With assistance from the school reading specialist, the author contacted all of the teachers in grades 2 and 3 and requested permission to observe them during their instructional block designated for reading. Teachers in these grades were selected because currently they face tremendous scrutiny from the district and state level due to the administration of standardized assessments beginning in grade 3. The author elicited the expertise of the school principal and reading specialist in identifying excellent reading teachers in the aforementioned grade levels who were considered successful in providing high-quality reading instruction and meeting the needs of diverse learners and their families.

Preliminary classroom observations were conducted with teachers who volunteered to participate and those identified by the reading specialist and principal. An observational rubric developed by the author based on the work of scholars in multicultural education (i.e. Gay, Ladson-Billings, Nieto, Tharp & Gallimore) served as a tool in examining components of teaching as well as teacher-student interactions. Based upon data collected during classroom observations and teacher consent, four teachers, two from each grade level, were selected from a total of thirteen teachers in grades 2-3 to participate in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Four data gathering procedures were utilized in this study. They were: observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis.

Observations. The author observed these four general education teachers in their classrooms two days a week for 60-90 minutes per observation. Classroom observations included field notes on teachers' instruction and interactions of the teachers with their students.

Interviews. Additionally, the author conducted two individual semi-structured interviews with each teacher. The interviews focused on the following areas: philosophy and

beliefs about the teaching of reading, instructional methods, family/school collaboration, and the impact of contextual variables on teaching and learning. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes in length and was audio-taped.

Focus Group. One focus group interview was conducted with all the teachers at the end of the six-week period in order to clarify data collected in observations and provide opportunities for dialogue on the topics discussed in individual interviews. The focus group interview lasted 90 minutes and was audio-taped.

Document Collection and Analysis. Curriculum-based assessment is defined as any set of measurement procedures that use direct observation and recording of a student's performance in the local curriculum as the basis for gathering information to make instructional decisions (Deno, 1985). For this study, I analyzed pre- and post-test results of the *Curriculum-Based Measurement in Oral Reading.* It is administered by teachers and is a component of the basal series used by first and second grade teachers. The *Curriculum-Based Measurement in Oral Reading Fluency* was selected due to the nature of fluency as a precursor to reading comprehension and for assessing deficits in word recognition (Shinn & Good, 1992).

Other documents collected by the author included previously administered informal reading assessments, teacher records, student school records, student work samples, and a record of teacher referrals to the Student Study Team. This team serves as an intervention initiative to which teachers recommend students who are viewed as at risk for special services based on their current academic and/or social performance. These documents provided additional understanding of the activities included in the instruction of reading.

Data Analysis

Data were entered into the Atlas.ti Visual Qualitative Data Analysis Management Model Building Program for the

following purposes: to facilitate the storing and organization of files, to search for themes, to verify crossing themes, to diagram and create a template of the process of data analysis. According to Creswell (1998) qualitative software provides the following advantages: provides an organized storage file for easy accessibility, helps the researcher to locate pieces of information easily, and the program provides the author with an opportunity to analyze the data line by line and make meaning of each sentence and idea.

Analysis of the data began with the open, axial and selective coding of the interview transcripts and observational data. This process of defining categories of information through coding involved reading the transcripts and observational data line by line (Creswell, 1998), as well as reviewing themes from research literature in an effort to formulate a database of codes. By assigning primary documents such as interview transcriptions and observational data to the software program, the author was able to maintain this database in a common location for future review and analysis. Furthermore, the classification and categorization of codes consequently led to the development of a theoretical framework, which guided the analysis and interpretation of the findings (Glesne, 1999). The data analysis process was ongoing and involved constantly comparing events and documents in an effort to further develop theories and understandings (LeCompte, 2000).

Findings

Teacher Beliefs

The author found that the teacher participants' beliefs and attitudes on what constitutes quality reading instruction were consistent with the assertions presented by a number of researchers advocating a balanced approach to reading (Freppon & Dahl, 1998; Pressley, Rochrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). Additionally, the ability of the teachers to provide effective reading instruction situated in an

environment that acknowledges and honors students' cultural backgrounds is heavily influenced by contextual factors inherent in teaching and learning in the urban context and an over reliance on high stakes testing. Insights into how teachers' beliefs and philosophy about reading impact their classrooms practices were derived from triangulated data from all data sources.

Two of the teacher participants held a constructivist orientation toward literacy. Both teachers have graduate degrees in reading, and their classroom environments and routines reflect their understanding of current trends in literacy instruction and the learning styles of ethnically diverse students. Below one of the teachers, Stacy, a European American second grade teacher, shares her philosophy on reading instruction.

> *Well...they [students] really need a balanced program. I think we get away from that here. I think we spend an awful lot of time on...um...one strategy, which is sounding out a word when there are so many different strategies...You know...the whole goal of reading is for meaning, and I think people get caught up if students can sound out words then they read. That's not true. You need to be able to understand what you're reading.*

All participants agreed that efforts by the school to address the underachievement of many of its students in reading, by adopting one single approach is inadequate and fails to effectively meet the diverse needs of their students. Currently, the school provides direct instruction to all students utilizing a pre-packaged, scripted program.

Overall, all of the teachers reported the need to address skills development in reading through explicit instruction and embedded connected activities. Patty, a third-grade African American teacher, who represents a more traditional orientation toward literacy acquisition, believes students

benefit greatly from extended opportunities for explicit skills instruction. Patty shares her frustration regarding the tension, which exists between meeting demands for accountability and providing balanced reading instruction.

> *You know the focus is so heavily on skill reading. There is not a whole lot of time for discovery learning, and you know fun type of activities that are still educational. I feel like I don't have any time to do anything this year.*

Instructional Methods in Teaching Reading

The following instructional strategies were implemented by all of the teacher/participants and were found to be effective in working with ethnically diverse learners with and without disabilities:

- Literacy centers,
- Direct instruction,
- Guided reading,
- Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), and
- Modeling.

Brief descriptions of each instructional strategy are provided below.

Literacy Centers. First, literacy centers constituted the most frequently used instructional strategy. They were utilized to provide embedded skills instruction to students. The content of the centers varied for each grade level and teacher. The purpose of literacy centers is two-fold: to provide skills instruction in meaningful and social contexts and to build the motivation of students toward reading. A critical element of literacy centers is the focus on students' processing through the integration of reading and writing.

Direct Instruction. Direct instruction refers to the teaching of reading skills by focusing on three components: organization of instruction, program design, and teacher presentation techniques (Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui,

1997). The teachers participating in this study agreed that explicit and systematic skills instruction is essential to developing students' reading skills. All students at King Elementary were required to participate in one hour of direct instruction in the area of reading. However, the teachers strongly believed that students should also be provided with opportunities to explore meaning construction in collaboration with others, as well as to develop their critical thinking skills. For this reason, the teachers Based on their instructional practices, the teachers in this study advocated and implemented a comprehensive literacy program in each of their classrooms.

Guided Reading. Guided reading provides students with guided practice in applying skills they were taught explicitly. This process also involves teachers talking, thinking aloud, and questioning throughout the procedure. The grouping for guided reading varies from whole-class to small groups depending upon the goals of instruction. The teachers at King Elementary participated in a professional development initiative which emphasized the use of guided reading following direct instruction.

Drop Everything and Read (DEAR.) DEAR time is an example of how teachers provided students with opportunities to engage in independent reading. DEAR time and independent reading activities resemble real-world activities. In each, students have the opportunity to choose their own books based on their interests and later utilize these books in their independent writing lessons. The teachers reported that students responded positively to the opportunity to self-select texts based on their interests. Teachers ensured that all texts offered during independent reading time were grade-appropriate.

Modeling. Modeling represents one type of scaffolding or using instructional strategies to take students to a higher level of learning. Scaffolded instruction, which utilizes modeling and demonstrations, is a key element of early reading instruction (Strickland, 2002). By modeling the

process of thinking aloud on a daily basis, teachers assist struggling readers in understanding the processes at work while engaged in reading and writing activities. Students, particularly ethnically diverse learners, benefit from teacher and student modeling.

*Culturally Responsive Teaching***.** The roles and responsibilities of culturally responsive teachers have been categorized as cultural organizers, cultural mediators, and "orchestrators" of social contexts (Diamond & Moore, 1995). Each of the categories embodies the beliefs that teachers understand how culture operates and is manifested in classroom dynamics and student academic achievement. Key elements of culturally responsive teaching displayed by the participating teachers were: caring, high expectations, understanding of the role communication and language in learning, and sensitivity to student learning styles.

Caring

One of the major pillars of culturally responsive teaching is the power of caring (Gay, 2000). Noddings (1992, 1996) asserts that teachers must recognize their perceptions regarding caring and those of their students. According to Irvine (1999) "the ethos of caring and 'other-mothering' embody what teaching is all about" (p. 249).

Leslie, a third-grade Latina teacher, refers to her students as "my children." As a first year teacher, Leslie is being mentored by Patty, an African American veteran teacher, with more than 20 years of experience. What Leslie has learned in her brief tenure is that her most important job is to care for her students. Leslie asserts, "You know they come from very different backgrounds and…what goes for one doesn't go for another. What I do know is that they are all my children."

Caring is expressed explicitly and implicitly through attitudes, expectations, and behaviors. All of the teacher/participants in the study demonstrated a consistent caring for their students. They display a caring for their

students' entire being, not just their academic success. In expressing such caring, these teachers embraced the wholeness of education rather than relegating their role as teachers primarily to academic issues.

High Expectations

The power of caring is demonstrated by teachers' ability to identify non-caring attitudes and behaviors (Gay, 2000). The influence of non-caring attitudes and behaviors and/or low teacher expectations leads to ethnically and linguistically diverse learners experiencing differential treatment, which may lead to faulty assumptions and misdiagnoses about students' abilities (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). Culturally responsive teachers have high expectations and standards for all of their students. Britney, a second-grade African American teacher, who received her teaching credential from a local historically Black college, discusses her interpretation of high expectations and her desire to prepare her students for greatness.

> *I guess you would say…I push them even more because I know the expectations are so much higher because statistics would say this and statistics would say that. So, I find myself pushing them even harder. I'm glad I get to push them harder in 2nd grade because that sets the foundation, that is the basis and from there you want them to just succeed when they go to the other grades.*

Britney's experience at a historically Black college provided her with a deep understanding of the historical significance of teaching African American students and the positive impact her own teaching can have on the lives of her students as well as their families and communities.

Communication

Language is a part of culture and communication, and teaching and learning coexist in the context of the classroom. Thus, culturally responsive teachers recognize the importance of addressing these relationships and their implications on students' learning. Teachers' attitudes toward the home language and/or dialect of their students directly impact how students view themselves and their potential for success (Au, 1993; Washington, 2001). Stacy describes her experience working with one English Language Learner.

> *In the beginning of the year, I had a little girl in here from Mexico. She spoke hardly any English. I was pretty much walking around with a Spanish dictionary, and I was labeling the whole the room in Spanish and English and things like that...but you just really try to make sure that you're taking kids from where they are and bringing them up.*

Stacy also discussed her understanding of how students' primary dialect may present challenges in assessing reading deficits. Stacy reports her experiences in her master's program as well as working in urban schools contributed to her ability to model standard English for students, while at the same time, affirming who they are and encouraging growth in their native language.

Sensitivity to Learning Styles

Study participants are sensitive to varying student learning styles and cultural patterns of learning. They provide opportunities which maximize the potential of their students and orchestrate opportunities for students to succeed academically. By acknowledging the importance of the learning patterns and styles of culturally diverse learners, Britney, a music education major in her undergraduate program, shares how she uses popular and classical music in the classroom to engage and educate students. She is able to

capitalize on her students' strengths in an effort to impact student outcomes. She says the following.

> *Well, I think, for sure, you have to use hands-on activities, especially in the area of reading. For example use, teaching spelling words and having students manipulate the letters, which impacts their reading ability, instead of using worksheets.*

By attending to essential elements of culturally responsive teaching within the realm of reading instruction, schools situate the education of ethnically diverse students within a socio-cultural framework which addresses issues such as race, culture, language, and disability in a meaningful and relevant manner. It is most appropriate that these variables are addressed in the teaching of reading. For often during the process of culturally responsive reading instruction, students experience the concepts of liberation and emancipation, and teachers' expectations of them are manifested in students' successful reading .

Discussion and Conclusion

The implications of this study offer insights into how general education and special education teacher candidates are prepared in the area of literacy instruction as well as in professional development. The study's findings underscore the need for further examination of teachers' beliefs regarding ethnically diverse students and the impact of these beliefs have on their literacy instruction. Additionally, teacher preparation and professional development for general and special educators should include opportunities for candidates to reflect upon the implications of teachers' beliefs on their practice, as well as the most effective strategies to change negative, biased attitudes toward urban students, Further, it is critical for future research in teacher

education to be able to link the dispositions and behaviors of successful urban teachers to skills and knowledge gained in teacher preparation programs.

In terms of addressing the area of cultural competence, the principles of multicultural education must be adopted by teacher education programs. A large number of teacher preparation programs address diversity in their mission statements. Yet, a commitment to diversity is not evidenced in course content or field experiences which represent the core of teacher preparation programs. Thus, it is imperative that teacher preparation programs respond to calls for greater accountability by increasing recruitment and retention efforts of ethnically diverse teacher candidates, as well as by providing programs and activities to help teacher candidates learn how to abolish the achievement gap through culturally responsive teaching.

In qualitative research, participants' stories reflect their understanding of the phenomenon under study. The cultural nuances represented in their school site, and the students and families they serve are unique. Thus, being able to generalize the findings of this study to other urban settings is not the intention of this study. Rather, the author sought to highlight the work of culturally responsive teachers in one urban elementary school in the face of increased demands and limited resources.

The findings underscore the need for further research on teachers' beliefs about ethnically diverse students and the impact these beliefs have on literacy instruction. Teacher preparation should include opportunities for candidates to reflect upon how teacher beliefs affect literacy pedagogy and effective strategies for changing negative attitudes toward urban students who are acquiring literacy proficiency.

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Risk and Urban School Transition in Early Adolescence

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This is a comparison study of 244 early adolescents attending sixth grade at either an urban elementary school or an urban middle school. Utilizing four data collection instruments, it compares the adolescent groups' degrees of loneliness, levels of positive self-concept, academic competence, problem behaviors, and social skills. Results indicate that, when compared to the comparison group, the at-risk students present higher levels of loneliness and problem behaviors and lower levels of academic competence, self-concept and social skills across both school contexts. The results are relevant to school adjustment and success as well as providing support for local policy decisions when transitioning students to middle school.

Becoming an adolescent is associated with a variety of new experiences, expectations, and stressors (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). In sixth grade, many young adolescents transition from elementary school to middle school settings and, during this transition, early adolescents encounter a variety of new

experiences related to changes in school structure, academic standards, classroom organization and teacher expectations (Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, & Kurlakowsky, 2001). Some of the new school experiences associated with educational transitions include changes in instructional strategies and student-teacher relationships (Midgley, Feldlaufer & Eccles, 1988). Some researchers have suggested that these changes may be related to an increase in challenging behaviors for some adolescents (Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988). Past research has indicated that school transitions during early adolescence can be linked to lowered academic achievement (Blyth, Simmons & Bush, 1978; Crockett, Peterson, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989;). Additionally, research indicates a drop in students' academic self-concept during periods of transition (Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991).

Although there are numerous studies that focus on the at-risk child, the term is broadly defined. In the literature, students at-risk are defined as those with (a) academic underachievement (Schwartz, 2005), (b) poverty (Burns, Senesac, & Symington, 2004), (c) social or emotional disabilities (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005) and (d) peer rejection (Gresham & MacMillan, 1998). In a previous school-based study, at-risk students were differentiated from their peers by having lower academic skills, higher rates of classroom behaviors, lower social skills, lower self-concept, and more rejection from their classmates (Gresham, Lane MacMillan, Bocian, & Ward, 2000). Children who were defined as being at-risk by these parameters were found to have lower academic success (Gresham, et al., 2000).

Educational transitions may influence ratings of student characteristics including academic competence, loneliness, self-concept, the development of social skills, and challenging classroom behaviors. The purpose of the current study is to examine the characteristics of sixth grade students who have made the transition to middle school compared to

those students who have not yet made this transition. Additionally, this study will compare at-risk students and those not considered at-risk within both the transition and non-transition groups.

Based on the literature, it was anticipated that students who transition to a middle school setting in the sixth grade would experience higher levels of loneliness and problem behaviors and lower levels of teacher rated social skills, self-concept and academic competence than their peers who had not yet transitioned.

Method

Participants

Participants in the present investigation were 244 sixth grade students enrolled in 29 urban schools in five southern California school districts. Data for this study were gathered as part of a five-year, federally funded research project designed to investigate the effects of different educational placements on at-risk students' social and affective outcomes (Gresham & MacMillan, 1998).

Their third grade teacher identified the participating students as being either "at-risk" or "comparison". The sole criterion for "at-risk" was that the teacher would refer the student to a pre-referral intervention team. The comparison group approximated the referred sample in terms of gender and ethnicity and was described by the same teachers as being "average students." Ethnicity and gender demographics for the total sample included 60% male (*n*=139); 40% female (*n*=105); 42% Caucasian; 13% African American; 41% Latino; and 1% Asian. This sample closely resembled the ethnic distribution in the geographic region.

Data Collection Procedures

Three data collection procedures were utilized in this study, two for the students and one for their teachers. Students completed a *Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction*

Questionnaire and a *Student Self-Concept Scale.* Students were assessed in small groups at quiet locations on each campus. Teachers completed a *Student Social Skills Rating System*. Teachers completed the rating system during their preparation time and returned them via mail. Data were collected approximately four weeks into the sixth grade academic school year.

The Social Skills Rating System-Teacher Version (SSRS-T). The SSRS-T (Gresham & Elliot, 1990) contains teacher ratings of 30 behaviors distributed equally among three social skills domains (cooperation, assertion and self-concept) and 18 behaviors equally distributed across three-problem behavior domains (externalizing, internalizing and hyperactivity). The SSRS-T also contains a nine-item teacher rating of the students' academic competence. This study utilized the Problem Behavior Internalizing subscale score, the Social Skills standard score, and the Academic Competence standard score. The SSRS-T shows acceptable levels of internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were computed on the present sample during year one of the study and ranged from .83 through .97.

Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire (LSDQ). The LSDQ (Asher & Wheeler, 1985) consists of 16 primary items and eight filler items, rated on a five-point Likert scale reflecting the degree to which each item is a true description of the student and ranges from (1) "That's not at all true about me," to (5) "That's always true about me." These items assess children's feelings of loneliness ("I am lonely at school."), feelings of social adequacy versus inadequacy ("I am good at working with other kids from my class."), or estimations of one's status among peers ("I can find a friend in my class when I need one."). Scores on the 16 primary items are summed to yield a total raw score ranging from 16 (low loneliness) to 80 (high loneliness). Coefficient alpha for the LSDQ are reported above .90.

Cronbach's coefficient alpha reliability computed on the current sample indicated adequate internal reliability (r=.79).

Students Self-Concept Scale (SSCS). The SSCS (Gresham, Elliott & Evans-Fernandez, 1992) is a 72-item multidimensional scale of self-concept that provides norm-referenced scores. The dimensions tapped by the SSCS include academic, self-image and social self-concept along with an overall self-concept composite score. The self-image domain measures general self-concept. The academic domain includes items relating to students' perceptions of academic or academically-related performance. The social self-concept domain measures students' self perception in social situations. Cronbach's coefficient alphas ranging from .74 to .86 were computed on the current sample.

Results

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed to examine the two levels of placement and two levels of risk status on measures of loneliness, self-concept, academic competence, problem behaviors and social skills. The MANOVA showed a significant multivariate group effect, F (3, 14) = 7.35, p < .0001, that accounted for 59.67% of the variance. Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) are presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1 *Variance Means and Standard Deviations*

	At-Risk No Transition	Comparison No Transition	At-Risk Transition	Comparison Transition
Social Skills	95.4 (14.86)	108.54 (15.04)	91.89 (13.99)	102.21 (9.47)
Problem Behaviors	105.15 (15.09)	93.52 (12.99)	105.34 (16.98)	91.26 (9.37)
Academic Competence	86.75 (9.69)	101.70 (11.83)	88.59 (9.17)	101.63 (7.10

Loneliness	36.13	33.52	36.96	34.25
	(11.66)	(10.69)	(10.20)	(10.64)
Self	99.93	103.36	101.50	103.60
Concept	(15.37)	(14.68)	(18.54)	(14.20)

A series of one-way ANOVAs were computed to identify which dependent variables contributed to the significant effects of levels of group membership by educational placement. Teacher-rated academic competence differed between groups, F (3,198) = 31.79, $p < .0001$ and accounted for 33% of the variance, as did teacher-rated problem behavior, F (3,198) = 10.34, $p < .0001$. Teacher-rated social skills were also a significant factor, F (3, 198) = 12.68, $p < .0001$ and explained 16% of the variance between groups. Self-reported global self-concept did not significantly differ between the groups, F (3, 198) = 0.47, $p < .7061$ nor did the self-reported degree of loneliness F (3, 198) = 1.42, $p < .23$. Transition to middle school was not identified by differentiating scores on loneliness, academic competence, self-concept, social skills, or problem behavior for either the at-risk or comparison groups.

Post hoc Tukeys analyses show that most variables differentiated the at-risk and comparison groups. The at-risk group had the lowest scores of teacher-rated academic competence and social skills and the highest ratings for problem behaviors. The at-risk sixth grade elementary students did not significantly differ on any measure from the at-risk sixth grade middle school students. Similar findings were noted for the comparison group.

Table 2 shows a strong negative correlation between teacher-rated problem behaviors and teacher-rated social skills evidenced in middle school at-risk group r (53) = .757, $p<.0001$; elementary at-risk group r (79) = -.748, $p<.0001$; and elementary comparison group r (57) = -.794, $p <.001$.

As Table 3 demonstrates the relationship between student and teacher-rated problem behavior and social skills was weaker for the middle school comparison group r (20) =

-.47, p <.04. This highlights the characteristics of the at-risk sample and is consistent with previous research on at-risk students in different educational environments.

TABLE 2 *Correlation Coefficients for No Transition Elementary School Placement*

	Social Skills	Problem Behaviors	Academic Competence	Loneliness	Self Concept
Social Skills		-.470*	.475*	-.288	.468
Problem Behaviors	**.757****		-.333	.231	-.308
Academic Competence	**.755****	**-.725**		.057	.064
Loneliness	**.043**	**-.031**	**-.086**		-.776**
Self Concept	**.201**	**-.097**	**.334****	**-.173**	

Note: ***** = significant at $p < .05$; ** = significant at $p < .001$. The at-risk group is in bold below the diagonal, and the comparison group is above the diagonal.

TABLE 3 *Correlation Coefficients for No Transition Elementary School Placement*

	Social Skills	Problem Behavior	Academic Competence	Loneliness	Self Concept
Social Skills		-.794**	.668**	-.400**	.316**
Problem Behaviors	**-.748****		-.489**	.454**	-.217
Academic Competence	**.557****	**.377****		-.197	.107
Loneliness	**.287****	**-.128**	**.157**		-.413**

Self Concept	**-.029**	**-.044**	**.036**	**.504****

Note: * = significant at *p<.05;* ** =significant at *p<.001.* The at-risk group is in bold below the diagonal, and the comparison group is above the diagonal.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine affective and academic outcomes in early adolescents identified as at-risk or comparison, who have either transitioned to urban middle school or remained at an urban elementary school environment in the sixth grade. Based on prior research, it was expected that students who remained in the elementary school setting for the sixth grade would experience lower levels of loneliness and problem behaviors and higher rating of self-concept, teacher-rated social skills and teacher rated academic competence. Conversely, we expected that students who transition to a middle school setting, in the sixth grade, would experience more loneliness and problem behaviors and have lower scores of teacher rated social skills, self-concept and teacher rated academic competence. Results only supported group differences by at-risk status, and there was no effect for transition.

These findings support conclusions from an earlier study that at-risk status is associated with social and academic difficulties in school (Gresham, et al., 2000). The current findings suggest that risk status is more predictive of difficulty than the impact of the environmental variables associated with the transition to middle school settings. These findings may be counter intuitive based on the findings from previous studies that indicate a decrease in self-concept and academic competence for students transitioning to middle school settings (Blyth, et al., 1978; Crockett, et al., 1989; Feldlaufer, et al., 1988; Wigfield, et al., 1991). The sampling of students in these studies may be impacted by the risk status of the students who participated in the study. The current sampling procedure clearly delineated the students considered at –risk from their not-at-risk peers. The lower rates of academic competence, social skills, and self-concept, and the increased rates of loneliness and problem behaviors are clearly accounted for by the at-risk status and not by the fact that the students transitioned

from an elementary school setting to a middle school setting.

This study provides data for an area of limited investigation that is the middle school transition experiences for the early adolescent identified as at-risk or comparison. Yet, the data from this study suggest no obvious difference regarding these students reaction to the transition to middle school. Specifically, these findings suggest that early adolescents transitioning to middle school in the sixth grade to not suffer from a decrease in academic competence, a drop in self-concept, are not more lonely, do not have more problem behaviors, and do not have lower social skills. Early transition to middle school is not detrimental to the child's social or affective self. Local educational policy makers and families may utilize these findings in making decisions regarding placement options for their early adolescent students. Additionally, this research may provide relief or diminish parental anxiety associated with the sixth grade.

More important are the group consistencies across placement settings. Our findings suggest that average students do equally well regardless of educational placement. The same findings held for students identified as at-risk. The importance of the sustained lower levels of social skills, self-competence, and academic competence and higher levels of problem behavior and loneliness of the at-risk group should not be overlooked. Future research should be focused on the student characteristics associated with school success in middle school settings and how students at-risk can be supported in these settings. Additionally, future research should take into account at-risk status when investigating student characteristics associated with making the transition from elementary to middle school to determine the extent to which student characteristics may be affected by transitions.

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Principals' Perceptions of Educational Change: Critical External Agent Support to K-12 Schools

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This research reveals the type of support that is imperative for principals working with external agents in low-performing urban schools as required by federal and state legislation. Nine principals, in four urban districts, two aided by one external agency and seven aided by another, were followed in year-long case studies. Mixed methods for data collection, including interviews, school site visits, professional development evaluations, surveys, and focus groups, were used along with anecdotal material. The results provide insights for school districts, external agents, and principals seeking to maximize the support they receive in response to the urgent need to accelerate and maintain student achievement.

Thousands of schools and districts in the U.S. are faced with the task of rapidly raising student achievement, particularly in low socio-economic (SES) communities. Federal legislation (2002), *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), and state school improvement programs have mandated that low-performing schools become accountable through specified measures to increase achievement based on standardized test results. One of these requirements includes contracting the

work of external agents to provide support to the schools and districts**.** While the targets for student achievement and essential program components are specific, the types of support provided by county offices of education, universities, or private entities vary widely.

This study explores the perceptions of K-12 principals regarding the role of external support providers in bringing about educational change. Faced with the possibility of being transferred, losing their jobs, and/or having their schools "taken-over" by the state, principals have great concern about the effectiveness of the support programs in this climate of high-stakes educational change. Through a year-long case study of principal perceptions, the investigators examined the role and effectiveness of two distinct external support providers within several schools in four large, urban school districts all made up of at least 75% Latino students and at least 60% in poverty.

Conceptual Framework

Public K-12 schools today must provide a quality education for diverse populations of students who often come from backgrounds different from the teachers and administrators, and ensure that each student achieves the standards set by the state and federal governments (Trumbell & Pacheco, 2006). Challenged with rapidly changing demographics, educational critics assert that schools have been unable to meet the needs of the increasing majority of their students. The population of children of color and students living in poverty is growing in the nation's schools.

The percentage of U.S. public school students who are racial or ethnic minorities grew from 22% in 1972 to 42% in 2003, primarily due to growth in Latino enrollments. In 2003, the minority public school enrollment of 54% exceeded the White enrollment of 46% in the West (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

Furthermore, in 2005-2006, students of color comprised nearly 70% of the population in California, while over 70% of the teachers were White (California Department of Education, 2006). Additionally, for every 100 students in public schools in California, 23 lived in poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Unfortunately, these marginalized children remain significantly below their peers on all measures of academic achievement, including grades, standardized test scores, rates of graduation, and percentages entering college (California Department of Education, 2006) and the gap is continually increasing (Carey, 2004).

As a response to the achievement gap, strict accountability guidelines have been established through state and federal legislation to ensure that low-performing schools and districts improve. In the federal *NCLB* legislation (2002) and state accountability processes, the external support provider is seen as a neutral body that can be effective in gauging obstacles and successes, and can provide "unbiased" information to school and district leaders. In California, county offices have become critical to serving as external support providers. However, professional development institutes connected with universities and even private entities with high fee structures are also garnering an increasing amount of the school support market (California Department of Education, SAIT Presentation, June 2006).

Critical to the success of this support provider model is an understanding of educational change. It is not sufficient to follow state and/or federal mandates infusing data analysis into schools, facilitating collaboration and shared leadership (Lambert, 1998, 2003), and providing training opportunities on standards-based curriculum and instructional strategies. The effectiveness of external support providers is linked to their understanding of change theory.

The long list of failed education reforms has led experts to believe that a mandate for change is far from sufficient to ensure achievement of one's purpose. Many educational reforms are designed by experts outside the schools and have

failed because those in charge of the efforts had little or a distorted understanding of the culture of schools. Successful implementers understand the structure of the organization, sacred traditions, power relationships, and how members define themselves and their roles (Wenger, 2002).

The school culture, like that of any other major social institution, is political. This culture includes the behavior of people (students, teachers, administrators, parents) and the stability and transformations in classroom, school, and school system structures in terms of seeking, allocating, and using power. Introducing, sustaining, and assessing school reforms are political processes, since they ultimately alter or threaten to alter existing power relationships, particularly if a reallocation of resources is involved (Boleman & Deal, 1997; Sarason, 1982).

The literature on educational change emphasizes a need not for superficial first-order changes, but for deeper, second-order changes in the cultures and structures of schools (Cuban, 1990; McKeever, 2003). This effective implementation of innovations requires time, personal interaction and contacts, reflective dialogue, training, and other forms of people-based support. Today's high-stakes accountability movement, however, has principals and teachers working with a sense of urgency and little time to implement deep change (Lambert, 1995).

Educational research has highlighted the importance of personal contact among implementers, and between implementers and consultants, in order for the challenging process of unlearning old roles and learning new ones to occur.

> *…It is not that easy to accomplish fundamental change even with large resources, commitments from a variety of essential partners, and even by focusing on a small number of schools…the hardest core to crack is the learning core – changes in*

> *instructional practices and in the culture of teaching toward greater collaborative relationships among students, teachers and other potential partners…to restructure is not to "reculture." Changing formal structures is not the same as changing norms, habits, skills and beliefs* (Fullan, 1993, p. 49).

Successful change, according to many, is best described by the new science of complexity or chaos theory where the link between cause and effect is non-linear with paradoxes and contradictions. Creative solutions arise out of conditions of uncertainty, diversity, and instability. Self-organization occurs through political interaction and learning in groups (Fullan, 1999; Stacey, 1996; Wheatley, M., 1992, 2002).

Reform must focus on the school as a learning organization--continuously acquiring and using new and better knowledge. Knowledge creation is not simply the acquisition of best practices but rather the ability to generate and learn new ideas (Schechter, 2002). Success is a result of embedded interaction inside and outside the school which converts explicit knowledge (words and numbers shared as hard data) to tacit knowledge (skills and beliefs which are below the level of awareness).

Neither top-down strategies (not addressing tacit knowledge) nor bottom-up strategies (not converting tacit knowledge into usable, shared explicit knowledge) are effective. Crucial is the role of the school principal in this conversion of knowledge, mediating external and internal forces toward purposeful knowledge creation (Fullan, 1999; Singe, 1990).

Method

This study was conducted to examine the perceptions of K-12 principals regarding the role of external support providers in supporting school change. This type of inquiry

is not possible solely through quantitative measures, such as surveys or numerical data analyses. Therefore year-long case studies during the 2004-2005 school year employing mixed methods were utilized (Creswell, 1998; Jaeger, 1998; Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003).

Principal surveys and focus group sessions conducted at the end of the school year provided qualitative data for analysis of principals' perceptions of the educational change process utilizing external support providers. Descriptive statistics, t tests for independent groups, and analysis of variance were employed to examine data.

The qualitative portion of the investigation utilized three methods of data collection with the school principals: open-ended responses to the evaluation of each professional development session by the external support providers, individual interviews, and focus group conversations. Principals were interviewed individually at the beginning and end of the program. They were also informally asked at each training session about their needs. Formal interview and focus group data developed into transcriptions and notes from the informal conversations provided clear trends. School site visitations provided background and context. All qualitative data sources were triangulated and analyzed by a team of two researchers for common themes.

Data Sources

These case studies included nine different school principals, in four different Southern California school districts. Two of the schools were served by one external agent, and the seven other schools were served by another. Across all case studies, similar quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. Trends in data gathered from principals across all schools were identified (Creswell 1998; Jaeger 1998; Patton 1990; Yin 2003).

Results

Quantitative Findings

T tests for independent means across 44 survey variables relating to the effectiveness of the work of the support providers showed a significant difference at the .01 level in regard to only one independent variable—the district in which principals worked. This variation in response by district is illuminated by qualitative focus group and interview data and is addressed below.

Qualitative Findings

While quantitative data analysis revealed significant differences among principals in regard to their attitudes toward external support based on school district, focus group and interview data elaborated on these differences and resulted in three common themes across principal responses. They were: principal input and school culture, principal support, and Defined roles for principals and districts.

Principal Input and School Culture. Principals asserted that the external agents needed to design the entire program *with* them so that it would be truly beneficial to their school sites. Many principals expressed a belief that the external support providers often designed professional development and other reform measures without consulting the principal or truly understanding the culture of the school.

> *I can't really say that it [the external support] has been totally supportive. XXX [the external entity] is basically having teachers and administrators attend institutes they provide. The agent worked with the math department first for a year prior to receiving the Comprehensive School Reform grant. The*

math teachers weren't really happy. We tried to have meetings with them to let them know what we wanted. They would come once a month to math and leadership department. meetings, but they didn't really provide what we wanted. We were hoping that the trainer would work on ELD instruction. She touched on it a couple of times, but it didn't amount to much (Administrator, District A).

Several principals shared that the program should be customized in its initial development.

I want someone to come in, to look at our needs, and tailor our program to those needs. There are some things that can be generalized about schools urban environments, but every school has a particular culture because the people there shape that culture. And that particular community shapes that culture and all things don't fit all schools (Administrator, District B).

In a focus group of principals from District B, one principal shared how he attempted to customize the support provided by the external agents.

We brought the XXX support providers to our site to go beyond what we were getting. We wanted to tailor it to our school. When we did that we had impact (Principal, District B).

As their programs progressed, principals felt that they needed to be consulted and serve as partners with the external agents in planning the next steps, changing plans, and identifying new and unexpected resources that might now be needed to further the schools' goals. Several principals shared that their knowledge of the

school culture and community was not always utilized by the external support providers as decisions were made.

> *I want the external entity to provide something that teachers really buy into. If they don't, there will be no transfer into instructional change when they are at the school site* (Administrator, District C).

The more professional development a principal had received, the more he or she expressed a readiness for unique, customized support.

Principal Support. Principals expressed the need for a mentor or coach to provide feedback and support as they attempted to lead the change efforts at the school site. Many principals shared that they wanted the processes modeled and a non-biased "external expert" to help guide the change in school culture and practices.

> *I believe support providers should come in without preconceived notions. Even though the provider has looked at least at our test scores and demographic data. I believe the provider should always be open-minded* (Teacher, District C).

> *So we have all bought… book. And we are going to through a chapter a month and ask how that translates for each grade level. But it would be nice to have a support provider maybe sit in on those monthly meetings and give us suggestions and ideas and to help us implement it. You know it is one thing to get all this information but then again how does that translate into practice? To help just hold our hands so that we can effectively translate it into practice* (Administrator, District C).

Principals in all of the districts were unanimous in their desire for a mentor or a coach—someone to, at the very least, serve as a "sounding board."

Defined Roles for Principals and Districts. Finally, principals experienced confusion and ambivalence about their role in what was designed to be a systemic change effort with the district office. It was a situation in which they were often unsure of the decision-making latitude they had been given to deviate from district-wide policies. Districts B and C had actually contracted with the county support provider for the schools while the schools in districts A and D had selected their own external agents who were university based. The principals in those districts with the most highly centralized authority in the district office were most uncomfortable in making the bold changes needed for high-impact school change.

> *I feel as if I am caught in the middle between what [the external agent] is recommending the school do and what my district will allow us to do. The district assigned the Assistant Superintendent to work with us, but she rarely shows up to the trainings. Every time we request permission to implement x's recommendations, it seems we are stopped by the district* (Administrator, District D).

> *Our district is great; we can do whatever we want at the school level as long as we increase student achievement and abide by the union agreement. It's been hard, though, to bring about a change in culture. I've only been here three years. We've made a lot of changes, but the beliefs of the teachers are strong, and the union prevents us from asking teachers to spend any time after school for*

meetings or trainings. We have to pay for everything. I feel like my hands are often tied (Administrator, District A).

Discussion/Conclusion

It is unequivocal that the principal is the fulcrum upon which changes in teaching and learning at the school site rest (Fullan 2003; Lambert 1998, 2003). As this key figure enters into unstinting relationships with district office staff, school site leaders and staff, parents, and now highly involved external agents, it is essential that principals have both a clear sense of their responsibilities and their authority to make decisions. In turn, external agents must work to ensure that these needs of the principal are fully met.

In looking to further reform efforts, it will be critical to support not only the principals' strategic role, but to do so with a full understanding of the culture and particular context of each school and its district (Argyrols, 1993; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Scion, 1987).

The four study districts, in terms of student achievement and school demographics, were far more similar than different and deeply representative of California's most challenged districts. They were also remarkably consistent in their principals' insistence that they needed the freedom and systemic support to be truly responsive to school culture. Urban education must be recognized as being impervious to cookie cutter models. Such support provider efforts are a burden rather than a boon to urban principals. Further research should focus on savvy, responsive, support for each school, district, and urban teacher leader.

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A Vision to Serve: The Experiences of Five African American Urban Teacher Leaders

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History denotes a small number of African-Americans have held leadership roles in educational public and private school systems across the country. However, during the last decade black women have pioneered and forged new frontiers as educational as leaders within urban schools. Because of these contributions, more should be known regarding the visions that motivate such women, specifically as it relates to urban leadership and teaching. This phenomenological study examines the visions of African-American women urban teacher leaders who seek administration within urban schools early in their careers and also discovers how others may be so encouraged.

The removal and decline of African Americans as educational leaders began in early American history. Slaves who were subject to keeping house often could sit near a lesson given to their master's children and, as onlookers, become familiar with the alphabet and the sounding of words. To educate their people, these slaves would use what they learned from their masters and study anything on which they could get their hands. Because they were not thought of as equal, there was no written literature that they could practice, so the Bible was used as a teaching tool. These slaves, both women and men learned and then taught. When slavery was abolished, freed slaves were allowed to set up

their own schools. Teachers were given used supplies and textbooks to teach with and conditions were certainly unequal (Reid-Merritt, 1996).

Following the Emancipation Proclamation, the rush for "Negro" education expanded. In 1867 the federal government assigned over $5 million to supplement funds for school buildings, teachers, and teachers' salaries through the Bureaus of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Reid-Merritt, 1996, Woodhouse, 2002). African Americans took the initiative to establish free schools for black youths; black leaders began to found industrial schools and normal training institutes. Merritt (1996) further explains that the federal initiative for African Americans was well under way until the 1876 election compromise of Democratic candidate Samuel Tilden and Republican Rutherford Hayes. The ballots of the election were close. Four states contested the votes, and they were recalled.

After a year of disagreement, the Democratic Party agreed to have Republican candidate Hayes as president in exchange for the end of the Reconstruction. For African Americans, this meant the end of progress. Hayes appointed a Confederate leader to his advisory cabinet and efforts to make African Americans equal citizens were eliminated.

All educational gains and employment opportunities for blacks were eradicated after this election. African Americans that successfully established schools before the election fought to keep them. Because of segregation, blacks did not have the freedom to attend white schools so enrollment in black schools increased. Educators who were fortunate enough to complete college before the civil rights movement often attended historically black institutions. Career options were limited for the graduates; however, because of their nurturing school environments, students were often extremely successful (Reid-Merritt, 1996).

In 1954, Brown *v. Topeka Board of Education* declared segregation unconstitutional. While a milestone, the ensuing civil rights movement brought about displacement of several

thousand African American teachers and principals (Fenwick, 2001). These educators had reached significant stature in a time of racial inequity. They had a commitment to their communities, and some of their credentials surpassed those of their white counterparts (Fenwick, 2001). During desegregation and the civil rights movement, African Americans were often dismissed from their posts in formerly segregated schools and replaced by white teachers and principals in the gradually integrating schools (Irvine, 1988).

Because of the historical treatment of blacks in the U.S. educational system, it is still a current concern. Across the nation, there are nearly 12.5 million students in public and private schools who are categorized as receiving Title I funding (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2004, U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Minority groups, specifically African American and Hispanic, are overrepresented in Title I schools (Fenwick, 2001).

In the K-12, Title I, schools 90% or more of the student population are students of color and speak a first language other than English (Fenwick, 2001). According to current research reports, the number of minority school students is increasing (NEA, n.d.). The nation's K-12 students are seeing an ever-increasing mix of races among their peers, yet they are still taught mostly by all-white teachers (Howard, 1999). The NEA (n.d.) further substantiates this claim through the U.S. Department of Commerce report that more than one-third of students in today's public schools are people of color. By the year 2025, at least half will be. Meanwhile, only 13 percent of their teachers are minority. More than 40 percent of schools across America have no teachers of color on staff.

The important issue of narrowing the achievement gap between different ethnic groups has become an important issue in the United States. However, because of the diversity of teaching faculty does not resemble the student population, the issue of narrowing the achievement gap can not be remedied without increasing teachers of color (National Collaborative of Diversity in The Teaching Workforce,

2004). In the 2004 report from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the data presented about the disparity between students of color and teachers of color was alarming. The shortage of minority teachers, specifically in urban schools, may be attributed in part to some expanded professional opportunities that have opened in the post civil rights era, the horizontal shifting and some declines of minority college enrollment, inadequate pre-collegiate teacher preparation, or certification barriers in the teaching profession (Fenwick, 2001; Gordon, 2000).

According to Northouse (2001), underutilized women and people of color are the untapped value that organizations of all types need to enhance creatively. Women of color, specifically African-American educators, bring a wealth of knowledge and wisdom to urban schools and communities where their effectiveness and expertise is needed. This is especially true of principals who deal with large numbers of students on a daily basis.

At the present time, African American women are earning masters and doctoral degrees at an all time high and surpass the number of African American men earning the same degrees (Rusher, 1996; NCES 2002; 2004)). If more institutions of higher education could develop urban school leadership programs that support women, they would become more diverse, and students could identify with their cultural counterparts. This would in turn provide educated minorities the opportunity to serve in urban communities where they are willing to serve and are needed.

The purpose of this study is to examine the visions of African-American female teachers who hold or seek administration and teaching in urban schools. Over 100 years have passed since noted black educator and school founder, Mary McLeod Bethune, envisioned and founded a school for African American girls. Yet, her ideals still provide an excellent conceptual framework for this study. Grounded in the educational concepts of Bethune, this study asks the

question: What visions motivated these African-American women to pursue urban teaching and school administration?

Conceptual Framework

The women in this study are very similar to Bethune; they are visionaries. They believe that it takes a vision for what they want in predominantly African American schools. They also chose to do their work in urban communities where they feel they can be most effective. This study seeks to understand the vision of these educators by investigating their perceptions with regard to the life personal goals, community involvement, and historical forces which have influenced their career choice. Like Bethune, the five participants, share a common desire to improve their communities, urban areas with high minority populations.

Bethune incorporated three educational concepts, visions which are carried out to this day, "head-heart-hand". By incorporating the head, used to describe knowledge, Bethune believed that with knowledge, others would be drawn. Once the knowledge was attained, she wished her students to incorporate their heart, "her highest priority," (Smith, 1995, p. 105). The heart was a means of creating an environment to foster knowledge of Christian principles and Biblical teachings, and helping others. The concept of the hand represented the training of Blacks for jobs in the work force (Reid-Merritt, 1996). This study attempts to identify how the three educational concepts held by Bethune, permeate through the participants' decisions to teach and lead in urban schools. Figure 1 below illustrates Bethune's concepts and lead in urban schools.

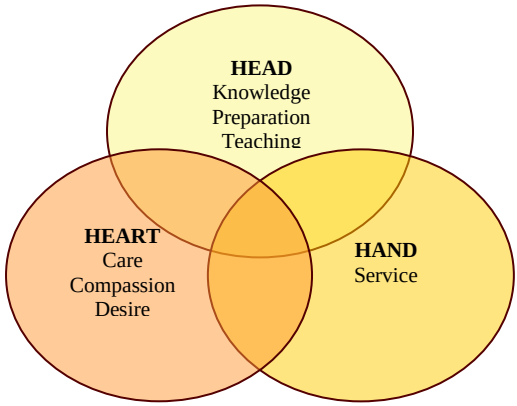
Method

The phenomenological approach to research allows the researcher to utilize the study of direct experience;

these experiences are taken at face value and attempt to understand the meaning of events and reactions to ordinary people in a particular situation (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2002). By seeking to understand why

FIGURE 1

Conceptual Framework Diagram: Head, Heart, Hand



a particular group of these African American women choose to pursue teaching and administrative roles in urban schools, the author needed to explore their life experiences to show their emerging leadership. The author chose phenomenology as this study's research approach because it facilitated conducting in-depth interviews with the participants, observing them in their urban classrooms or schools, and uncovering their visions of their present and future contributions to urban schools.

Participants

Potential participants were identified through "snowball sampling," after speaking with colleagues and other educators about the study's purpose (Creswell, 2002). The researcher organized an informal luncheon to meet the potential participants. During the luncheon, ten women talked about experiences in education, future career goals, and personal lives. Five women were selected for the study: Donna, Linda, Tanya, Annette and Elle (all pseudonyms). Each aspiring urban administrator taught in urban school districts and has completed a master's degree. Three are currently pursuing doctoral degrees in school administration.

Each participant was selected for her dedication to teaching urban youths and her desire to lead schools. The researcher's decision to limit the age and number of years in education was based on recent vacancy announcements and job searches that indicate a minimum of two to five years of educational experience. The women ranged in age from 27 to 33, and all were African American.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were gathered by conducting in-depth interviews with five participants from various schools and cities in urban locales across a western state. Each participant was interviewed three times for a half hour to two hours each session. The interviews were semi-structured. The first interview focused on commitment to achieving an education, the second interview focused on future career goals, and the final interview focused on why each participant chose to teach and lead in urban schools. All interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed and coded into themes.

In addition to the interviews other data gathering methods were used. The researcher spoke with each participant's school administrator and colleagues and asked them to describe the participants. The administrator interviews were transcribed but not recorded. The participants were also observed in a working capacity, either teaching, mentoring, or performing some administrative

duty. For Elle, a local magazine featured her as an "Excellent Educator." The researcher used the article as another data source because her fellow teachers and students were quoted within the text. Twenty-four interview questions were posed to the participants including such questions as the following:

- Why did you decide to become a teacher?
- How do you feel about public education?
- What was your educational experience growing up?
- Why do you think educational administration is something you want to pursue?
- What kind of leader do you want to be?

Data Analysis

Triangulation, member checks, and an in-depth interview review processes were all used to ensure validity (Creswell, 2002; Ary, Jacobs, Raveigh, & Sorenson, 2005). The first source for triangulation was participant interview data. The second source came from informal observations of each participant in the schools, and the third source was from interviews with the participant administrator.

Member checks were established so that each participant could review interview material and verify that what had been transcribed was an accurate depiction of what they stated. To analyze the interviews, data were transcribed and coded into major and minor themes. After coding the interviews based on the major themes of education (head), family (heart), and community (hand), the data were collected and sub-themes emerged (Creswell, 2002).

Findings

Mary McCloud Bethune incorporated three essential educational concepts, three aspects of educational vision which are still practiced today. They are: "head, heart, and hand" (Smith, 1995). The head, was used to convey the

importance of knowledge. Bethune believed that people's innate search for knowledge would draw them into education. She also wished her students to incorporate their heart in teaching; this was "her highest priority," (Smith, 1995). The heart was a means of creating an environment to foster knowledge of Christian principles, Biblical teachings, and reaching out to others. The concept of the hand represented the training of blacks for jobs in the work force (Reid-Merritt, 1996). Patricia Reid Merritt (1996), studied phenomenal African American women. As educational leaders, she found that their personal role model had been Bethune, they noted that Bethune was one of the most influential black women of the twentieth century.

Bethune consistently used these three concepts as a springboard for further educational development until she emerged in higher education. From the concepts of head, heart and hand, the coding of the transcribed interviews for each participant yielded connections with a visionary African American educator who founded these principles more than a century ago. The major themes from the five women participants' focused on education, family, and community. Each sub-theme centered on "Head"-Education; "Heart"-Commitment to family, career, and schools and "Hand"-Desire to give back to the community through working in it.

Each participant indicated the desire and need to thrive as teachers and future leaders in urban schools. Since the collection of data has ended, four of the participants are successful urban school principals in elementary and secondary schools. The remaining participant, Annette, is still committed to teaching in an urban high school.

It is imperative not to create a stereotype that all African American women in pursuit of leadership incorporate the same ideals. Each woman in this study is unique. Study participants should not be viewed as a group, but rather as individuals who happen to be African American women with a common vision. From each woman's vision, they captured Bethune's head, heart, and hand concept collectively.

Head: Drawn to Teaching through the Quest for Knowledge

Donna: Personal Vignette of a Born Leader. *I began teaching as far back as I can remember. I always had a classroom. I was excited when my mother gave me siblings because they made my class come to life. My father, who is a minister, saw that I had great instructional potential so he assigned me to teach Sunday school when I was fifteen.*

I opened an early childhood learning center with my mother at the age of eighteen. I began to feel very passionate about becoming a teacher. I attended junior college and earned an Associate's degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education. Then I received my Bachelor's degree in elementary education and began to teach as a fifth grade elementary teacher.

As the years went by, I started to see the politics behind school doors. I studied through a master's cohort and received my Master of Education in Administration, Supervision, and Principalship. I was about to become a Principal, but I had to leave after my brother was killed.

I am presently teaching at an urban middle school in the East and aiming for an administrative position. I am also working on creating a Freedom School (Charter School) to build the esteem and literacy of inner city children.

I have chosen the field of education because it is my passion. I feel that I have the vision and the ability to make changes in the lives of children.

Donna expressed her passion for schools. She grew up in a suburban neighborhood to a family that had what they needed to maintain an upper middle class lifestyle. Donna did not indicate that she had a direct relationship with urban schools. However, because the area in which she grew up was so close to the inner city, she often witnessed urban life experiences first hand.

My heart goes out to the urban area. That's where my heart is! That is where I want to be because I see the need; you can do work for that community. It [the work] makes a big difference.

Donna shares characteristics she feels make good school leaders.

…Good leaders make plans of improvement, present them, and follow through. As an effective leader, you need to know your material and …the culture of the school itself. You have to have organizational skills, know how to you pull things together to make them work. You have to have a determined mindset to say, 'This will happen'

Head: Choosing to be a Positive Thinker & Life-Long Learner

Linda: Vignette of an Optimistic Leader. *I am an African American leader. I am a successful single mom. I have a vision for my life, and I reach back to my community to develop a vision for others. I attended an urban high school that is…historically known for producing the best and brightest African American students. I enjoyed being surrounded by people of color so I pursued my bachelor's degree at a historically Black university. I am embarking upon my 11th year in the classroom and have taught all grade and all subjects. I have learned that it is best to have experience to be a successful administrator; I will take an administrative position this coming year.*

I have often been put in leadership roles throughout my teaching career. My most recent principal forced me to reflect on my career goals. I believe she is the one person who motivated me into going into administration. With [her] help, I was molded into a life-long learner. I am [now]a lead teacher and acting principal.

Linda knows how an urban school district is run and knows the inequities that children endure within them. She attended school in the same urban district in which she now teaches, and her own children also attend school in the same urban district. Linda takes an optimistic approach and feels the best way to improve urban schools is to "maintain the culture and involve the community."

She is an advocate for the school district in which she works. Her family has watched the district improve through four generations. Historically changes have taken place in the area and what may have seemed like inequities through the outsiders' eyes, look more like improvements to Linda.

> *...I believe I am a leader and a role model first, because of my commitment to the kids. Because of my commitment to students' learning, I will go the extra mile and stay late to help.*

Heart: Vignette of a Woman Determined to Succeed

Tanya: A Subtle Transformer. *I grew up in an urban area with two other siblings. I am the middle child out of three girls. Both of my parents are college graduates and instilled the importance of education and higher education within us. At the age of 37 years old, my father passed away, and left my mother a single parent.*

I attribute all of my success to my mother and father; they instilled many important morals and values in each of us. Religion, education, and family were all stressed as critical components in life. My strength is derived in part from my mother. Watching her successfully cope with the unexpected deaths of my father, my grandmother, and my sister taught me strength and endurance.

My grandmother also left within me the importance of history. She, was very knowledgeable about African American history and our family history and would never let

us forget where we came from. I allow my sorrow to serve as motivation for me. I strive to be successful in their honor.

I graduated with top honors from the all black high school in 1993. I then earned a bachelor's degree in Special Education. I continued on to receive my Master's degree in Education Administration. While obtaining my master's, I worked as a Special Education teacher at two urban schools.

Tanya, is a soft spoken, charming leader who grew up surrounded by a loving family. She was raised to pursue the highest educational aspirations, and she has been consistently drawn to becoming an urban school leader.

> *…If I had a choice to lead in an elite private school or an urban public school, I would definitely go to the public school. I would implement the best possible practices and mold that school around them. I would make learning activities in the public school like those in elite private schools, so the students could get the same opportunities.*

Tanya speaks about her present role as an African American administrator with mostly White colleagues in a predominately minority school district.

> *Presently, I am the only African American in an administrative position in this school district and one of only three African Americans out of a school staff of 100. This is in contrast to the student population which is continuously growing and largely African American. In addition to my role as an administrator, I also am a doctoral student. I want to strive toward a position as a superintendent.*
>
> *Being in the position that I am in, demands respect, in part. Although, at times it feels that because of*

the color of my skin, some teachers look down or do not respect me as they would my Caucasian counterparts. I also strive, in this environment, to be somewhat perfect. I feel like all eyes are on me and that people are want to see me make a mistake or fail…I know that I have to work twice as hard anywhere I go…Consequently, I strive to always do things right.

Heart: An Educator of Compassion and Acceptance

Annette: Vignette of a Strong, Inspirational Leader. *I am the sixth child of seven children. My dad was a very loving father and dedicated husband in spite of the fact that his father was an alcoholic and a woman beater. My mother is not an educator, but she has always been a great teacher. The way she studied and researched helped her make better decisions, and our lives were better.*

My father always worked two or three jobs to make ends meet, and my mother worked as a maid and a cook. Once my aunt suggested that we should apply for welfare, but my mother believed that God would supply all our needs. She always said that no child of hers would ever be on welfare. She said that welfare was just another form of slavery to keep black people poor and in a position of servitude. She said that we could be whatever we wanted to be. My father's perspective on welfare was that he was going to be a better father than his father was. He said that at no time would his family be living off the government.

Sometimes things were rough; we would come home and there was not any electricity. My parents would say that poverty was a generational curse that would be broken with us. When times really got hard, my father got a janitorial job cleaning a seven-story bank tower. We children were his cleaning crew. I was about ten or eleven years old, and we continued to do this until I was about fourteen.

My teenage years were very good; I excelled in all subjects, particularly music. My mother realized my

potential and worked an extra job so that I could take piano lessons. During these years, I made some decisions. I decided that I would never disappoint my parents. I thought that the best way for me to honor my parents would be to finish school and go to college and get my degree.

I am now a college graduate and working on my master's degree in education administration. I am the first to graduate from college in my family.

Annette has been teaching for six years and believes that it is time to use her leadership outside of the classroom.

> *I teach in an urban school. I see great potential in this building; however, funds need to be allocated to meet more of the needs. I don't think our goal should just be to keep up with curriculum across the country; we need to collaborate with the community.*
>
> *…These kids need good administrators who are out "to bat" for them.…I want to become an administrator because there has to be leader who will pull the best out of each individual. I often see leaders that are in it for their [own]self-glory. It shouldn't be like that.*

Hand: A Vignette of an Educational Worker

Elle: The Confident Leader. *The bike I received as an eight-year old for Christmas was not a form of child entertainment; instead, it became my entrepreneurial asset. Despite the three-mile ride to Grandma's house to work, I looked forward to getting paid $20 a month to purchase more supplies for my candy business. At that time, candy was in great demand in my neighborhood, and I was glad to provide 'customer satisfaction.'*

Through the years, I developed a strong sense of independence and need to become self-sufficient in whatever I attempted. While my classmates were enjoying high school life, I worked every weekend from nine o'clock at night until six o'clock the next morning. I gained some valuable life-long skills. Independence, communication skills and an ability to be quick on my feet are merely three characteristics that would shape and mold my personality as well as my destiny.

Elle was raised in a single parent home with her mother and two sisters and was highly influenced by her mother's strength.

> *As a single parent, my mom proved herself to be hard working, determined, and resilient and reminded my sisters and me that "nothing worth having in life comes easy. You must work hard in everything that you do!" Despite the times when food was scarce, showers were cold, and lights were out, I knew that if I continued to have faith and determination, the circumstances would change.*

Elle refused to let circumstances stop her from achieving. She attended urban public schools and experienced unfair circumstances as a student.

> *In the urban schools I attended, teachers didn't even encourage students to pursue a high school diploma. They told us to go to voc-tech or get our GED. The highest level of education that they felt we could achieve was an associate's degree at a community college. I attended schools where more emphasis was placed on behavioral [control] …than academic success.*

It is important for Elle to go back to her urban community to teach and become an administrator to change the inequities she experienced.

> *Now I know that I would not want anyone else to experience negativity like that. The school that I teach in now feeds into the same school where I graduated. I am making a difference so that these kids know high school is not the end all.*

By providing examples of leadership and describing both negative and positive ideals of public education, study participants identified their leadership style and what emphases they would stress in their future administrative roles. Table 1 below shows their foci of their leadership work that they intend to pursue as administrators.

Discussion

By seeking to understand the lived experiences of each woman connecting themes to past research and Bethune's theoretical framework emerged. While the literature dealing with aspiring black women leaders in urban schools is growing, there is literature on those who have made it (Mertz, 1994 & 2006). The most influential issue to the women that have made it in urban leadership was their desire and vision for where they wanted to be and take the schools in which they work. It is important to show the bridge that Donna, Linda, Annette, Tanya and Elle share with other urban leaders who were determined to make their dreams and visions for where they see education come true.

Past literature states the notion that African American women have an innate motivation to become what society says they could not (Benjamin, 1997; Reid-Merritt, 1996; Washington, 1995). This researcher has identified five

women who are currently educational leaders and have overcome many obstacles such as age, poverty, and race. Although African American women seeking positions in educational administration are not often written about or asked to share their experiences in a broad audience, the five women in this study did. The lives of five young women that

TABLE 1 *FOCI OF LEADERSHIP WORK - HAND*

Foci of Leadership	Donna	Linda	Tanya	Elle	Annette
Resources & Funding	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to Public Info & Technology	✓		✓		
Personal Satisfaction	✓	✓	✓		✓
Visionary Work	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Personal Role Model	✓		✓	✓	
Cultural Diversity	✓	✓	✓		✓
Challenges & Problems	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Revitalization of Public Education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Equity	✓		✓	✓	
Service Need	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Democratic Management			✓	✓	✓
Discipline		✓	✓		✓

aspire to become leaders are encouraging and insightful. These women have a true understanding of urban education and what it means to be a black female educational leader in

today's society. Donna, Linda, Tanya, Annette, and Elle are from various backgrounds. Yet, they each had life experiences that encouraged them to change and improve the lives of other students and the community.

After having examining the importance of these educators' visions to their careers, this study adds to the literature concerning vision of African American women. It explores how being a visionary helps you reach career goals despite obstacles that may stand in the way. The visions of these five who are urban teachers and leaders helped them reach and continue to strive to new educational and personal levels development.

Implications and Conclusion

While each participant had her own education views and vision, some common themes developed. The participants each noted that teachers were a strong component of quality education and, that without good teachers, the system will fail. Participants also talked about the reasons they would like to pursue administration in urban schools. The most prevalent reason pointed to giving back to the community and seeking a way to restore a broken education system, especially for minorities in urban schools.

There is a strong connection between the life experiences and views of these participants in this millennium time period (of conducting the interviews) and the head-heart-hand concepts posited by Bethune in the early 1900's. Each study participant evidenced connections with the head-heart-hand educational concept initiated by Bethune.

In the findings, the key element from each participant's educational experience and career goals stemmed from the vision they have for urban schools. These women had role models as young people and used these role models as motivators to pursue their personal goals and career goals.

This was one of the primary factors that influenced each woman to continue towards the administration track.

It is our hope that further research will build upon this study and ask additional questions that will lead the research in the direction of the "why" behind the study. More research needs to be conducted on the relationship between the visions and practice of present-day African American female educational leaders and significant historical, educational concepts from Bethune and other black educators who are advocates for the improvement of urban education.

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