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Field Experiences in High-Need, Urban Settings: Analysis of Current Practice and Insights for Change

Chandra J. Foote and Catherine P. Cook-Cottone

High-need urban districts face many challenges in their efforts to overcome the large gaps in achievement demonstrated by their students. This study focuses on a strategy to overcome these challenges by better preparing future teachers for service in urban schools through quality field experiences at these sites. Teacher educators and urban school teachers who host teacher candidates during field experiences completed a questionnaire regarding their views about placements in high-need urban districts. A thematic analysis of their responses summarizes their beliefs about the most and least beneficial forms of field experiences, the most prevalent challenges in establishing quality field experiences, and the most successful strategies that facilitate the development of quality field experiences. The discussion compares the views of teacher educators with practicing teachers and recommends strategies to enhance field experiences in high-need, urban schools.

KEY WORDS: field experience; high-need; urban teacher preparation.

Our nation's largest urban schools are considered to be among the most challenged. Labeled as "sliding schools" (Myers and Goldstein, 1997) and

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"schools in a cycle of failure" (Reed and Davis, 1999), our urban districts strive to attract competent and motivated teachers to combat the enormous educational, social, and cultural barriers placed upon urban youth. The issue of attracting competent and motivated teachers to high-need, urban schools is complex and multifaceted. Over the past 20 years, teacher educators as well as school district personnel have implemented a variety of strategies to address the problem; yet the shortages remain. One promising strategy that teacher education programs have undertaken is to enhance the preparation of teachers for urban schools by providing field placements at these sites. Though there has been some research, the outcomes have been varied and the effectiveness of this strategy remains unclear. It appears that although quality placements may inspire teacher candidates, field experiences in urban schools can also cause culture shock, cognitive dissonance, and a lack of efficacy among future teachers (Rushton, 2000).

While most teacher educators readily accept this charge, a best-practices model is needed to guide efforts. That is, teacher educators need to better delineate the specific field experience characteristics that effectively facilitate high-need urban employment. With a clearer understanding of the nature of compelling experiences, teacher educators can more easily and readily become active agents of change. Accordingly, in order to develop a better understanding of the characteristics of quality urban field experiences, this study examines the perceptions of teacher educators and practicing teachers who have been involved in the placement of teacher candidates in urban, high-need schools. It is hoped that the results of this study will assist teacher educators in their efforts to establish placements that promote the competency and willingness of future teachers to work in these sites.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The unique challenge of the high-need urban school setting lies in appreciating the rich diversity while addressing the intrinsic and perpetual academic need. Students enrolled in high-need, urban schools come from very diverse backgrounds. Nationwide, 40-50% of the students who are English language learners, 50% of the students from minority backgrounds, and 40% of the lowest-income students are educated in urban schools (Lippman, Burns, and McArthur, 1996). The Council of Great City Schools, a national organization composed of 57 large city school districts, reports that its member schools

"...serve 6.5 million students, of whom 40% are African-American, 30% are Hispanic, 21% are white, 6.4% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and .6% are Alaskan/Native American. Just over 60% of students in Great City Schools are eligible for

free/reduced lunch, 21% are English language learners, and 11.4% are students with individualized education programs" (Council of the Great City Schools, 2000, p. 7).

Further, the National Center for Education Statistics reports pervasively lower reading scores among 4th grade students in central city locations (<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2002/section2/indicator07.asp>, February, 12, 2002). According to the National Assessment of Education Progress students in urban, high-poverty schools score lower on achievement tests in 8th grade and are less likely to complete high school on time. These reports indicate that at the 12th grade level, 75% percent of the students in high-need schools lack basic skills in math, and 80% lack basic skills in science. Long-range projections suggest that as young adults these students will also experience much higher poverty and unemployment rates than students from other schools (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/96184ex.html>, January 8, 2002).

These statistics illustrate the current situation and justify the strong national, state, and local plea for equity and change. One reaction to these circumstances is an attempt by teacher education programs to more adequately prepare future teachers for service in urban schools. National and state teacher education accreditation and regulating agencies have made a firm request that teacher candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet the needs of *all* students in part by participating in field experiences at high-need urban sites. Specifically, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in its revised 2000 standards requests that teacher candidates "interact with exceptional students and students from different ethnic, racial, gender, socio-economic, language and religious groups" (NCATE, 2001, p. 31). Further, the New York State Department of Education in its Part 52 regulations requests that teacher candidates work with students in high-need schools describing these sites as those with high rates of student poverty and limited English proficiency.

Studies on the effects on teacher candidates of field experiences in urban and diverse schools are complex and, at times yield contradicting results (e.g., Cook and Van Cleaf, 2000; Fry and McKinney, 1997; Nelson, 1998; Weiner, 1990). That is, it is unclear that these experiences lead to better-prepared teachers. Furthermore, to date these studies have a notable and likely significant limitation: they have not explored the mediating factor of *need*. In other words, the research on urban and diverse field experiences does not appear to differentiate between high-need and average- to low-need settings. Statistically, it can be inferred that urban and diverse schools in the United States are more likely to also be experiencing need, but this is not always the case. Teacher educators must pay attention to this salient mediating variable for it will likely increase validity of efficacy research as they attempt to establish field placements in high-need schools.

Due to the many challenges in high-need urban schools, teacher educators are often compelled to intervene in the cycle of despair by more effectively preparing teachers for roles in these schools. One of the most critical factors in the development of teachers is quality field placements. Yet, there is a notable lack of research addressing the specific concerns of field experiences in high-need, urban schools. Characteristics of high-need urban schools may have led to the lack of research in this area. For example, high-need urban schools face many internal challenges making it hard for them to cultivate the professional growth of teacher candidates. Specifically, the National Education Association asserts that teachers in high-poverty schools have less teaching experience and are less likely to hold a Master's degree than their counterparts in low-poverty areas. Furthermore, they indicate that teachers in these schools are more likely to be teaching core subjects for which they did not major or minor in college (NEA, 2002 www.nea.org/lac/papers/low.html). These statistics taken with the shocking rate of teacher absenteeism and transfer (Ascher, 1991; Maxson, Wright, Houck, Lynn, and Fowler, 2000) suggest that the novice classroom teachers in these settings might not provide the best mentoring environment for teacher candidates. This is, perhaps, why high-need schools and teacher education programs have not traditionally had strong partnerships that support teacher candidates as they develop their craft (Krei, 1998). In sum, it appears that the lack of experienced mentors, appropriate teaching assignments, solid teacher attendance and continuity, as well as dearth of academic partnerships has created a climate that has systematically discouraged research on effective high-need urban field experiences.

To address the need for research in this area, this study, therefore, was designed to explicate the major themes at issue in high-need urban field placements in order to provide a framework for further empirical examination. Accordingly, teacher educators and P-12 teachers who host teacher candidates, were surveyed about the types of field experiences commonly provided in high-need, urban schools. Respondents were asked their views about the benefits and challenges of field experiences at these sites and strategies that may be implemented to facilitate the development of high-quality placements in urban schools. It is expected that as a result of this theory-generating inquiry:

1. Teacher educators will have a clearer view of the types of field experiences in high-need, urban districts that may be most beneficial.
2. Teacher educators will have a better understanding of the challenges involved in creating quality field experiences in high-need urban schools.

3. Teacher educators will gain insight into successful strategies that may facilitate the development of quality field experiences in high-need urban schools.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Sample schools

A list of 32 high-need urban school districts in New York State was generated using the *Statistical Profile of Public School Districts* (The University of the State of New York, 1998). Each school district in the state was provided a Need to Resource Capacity Code (N/RC), which was calculated by dividing the district's estimated poverty percentage by its combined wealth ratio (a measure comparing the district's wealth to the state average wealth). An N/RC code of 3 or less denotes an urban or suburban school in high-need. Additionally, each district was categorized according to its district type with a score of 3 or less being an urban school and a score of 4 or 5 identifying suburban or rural districts, respectively. The 32 high-need urban districts were identified as the total population of districts with a score of 3 or less on both the N/RC code and the district type code.

Measures

Higher education faculty and practicing teachers were asked to complete a semi-structured survey consisting of a checklist and open-ended inquiry questions generated for the purpose of this study.

Field Experience Survey of Teacher Educators

The teacher educator survey asked respondents to review a checklist of 32 high-need, urban districts and note which of these districts they commonly place teacher candidates for field experiences. Through written response to open-ended questions, they were further asked to describe the types of experiences completed in each of these districts. Finally, they were asked to indicate which types of experiences were most and least beneficial to teacher candidates, and which strategies they found successful and problematic as they attempted to develop field placements at these locations.

Field Experience Survey of Practicing Teacher

The practicing teacher survey asked respondents to identify the teacher preparation programs from which they accepted teacher candidates and specify the types of field experiences these teacher candidates complete at their school. They were further asked to respond to open-ended questions about which types of experiences they felt were most and least beneficial to teacher candidates, and which strategies they found successful and problematic as they attempted to partner with institutions of higher education to develop quality field experiences.

Teacher Educators

The Higher Education Task Force on Quality Inclusive Schooling is made up of faculty from more than 20 teacher education institutions from across New York State. At least one faculty member from each of the institutions served by the task force was asked to respond to interview questions regarding field experiences in any of the 32 high-need urban sites identified for this study. At the summer meeting of the task force, faculty from each region were asked to acknowledge informed consent to complete the Field Experience Survey of Teacher Educators and were given the survey with 40 minutes to complete the items. The surveys were collected at that meeting for analysis. The survey was also posted on the task force listserv so that faculty members who were not in attendance at the meeting would have an opportunity to respond to the inquiry. Completed surveys were accepted for two weeks after the initial distribution at the task force meeting.

Practicing Teachers

A list of principal names and addresses for each of the schools in the 32 districts was generated from the New York State Department of Education website. Informed consent letters, copies of the Field Experience Survey of Practicing Teachers, and stamped, self-addressed envelopes were mailed, to 90 of these principals selected at random with a designation for equal numbers of elementary, middle, and high school principals so that the results could be generalized across school levels. Each principal was requested to sign the consent form and distribute the survey to a faculty person in his or her building who frequently worked with teacher candidates from teacher education programs in New York State during field experiences. Two weeks after this initial distribution a second follow-up letter, survey, and return envelope were distributed to a 30-principal sub-set of the initial sample. This sub-sample was contacted to reduce the mailing costs of distributing the

survey to the entire sample again. A re-mailing to all non-responders was conducted 12 weeks after the initial mailing.

Data Analysis

The responses to the survey items completed by higher education and practicing teachers were analyzed separately. Initially, an inductive thematic analysis of responses was conducted for each participant group (teacher educators and practicing teachers; Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). As each survey was analyzed, responses were placed in summary tables using an emerging code system. That is, themes were created as guided by survey response content. Next, in order to provide convergent validity, the survey responses and codes were reviewed by two additional data analysts. Subsequently, themes and placement of survey responses in particular thematic categories were discussed and revised. A summary of the types of field experiences, most and least beneficial forms of field experiences, the most prevalent challenges in establishing quality field experiences, and the most successful strategies that facilitate the design of quality field experiences was generated based on a thematic analysis of the responses.

RESULTS

Teacher Educator Participant Demographics/Quantitative Results

Twenty-two responses to our inquiry were received from task force members. These responses represented the views of faculty from 19 teacher preparation programs in New York State. Three institutions had 2 faculty members respond to the inquiry. Only the first response from each institution was included in the quantitative/demographic reporting of results. In all, responses were received from 12 private institutions and 7 public institutions. Demographic profiles of responding institutions indicate that they are representative of the 100+ colleges and universities preparing teachers in New York State. The largest responding institutions enroll 12,000-13,000 students and the smallest enroll 900-1000. Institutions with faculty responding to the questionnaire were also geographically evenly dispersed across the state.

Faculty from the responding institutions indicated that they placed teacher candidates in field experiences in 63% of the high-need, urban districts identified within New York State. One program indicated that it placed candidates in 10 of these districts and one program indicated that it did not place candidates in any of the districts. The average number of urban districts in which a program placed candidates was 2.4, with the modal

response being 1. In all, the 19 institutions identified 42 high-need, urban district placement locations with 43% of these locations being in "Big Five" schools including Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers, and New York City.

The descriptions of the types of field experiences in high-need urban schools were quite varied. Student teaching was the most frequent type of placement indicated by 89% of the responding teacher educators. This response was followed most closely by what was described as a pre-student teaching experience associated with methods coursework. This type of experience, identified by 74% of respondents, was sometimes deemed a practicum or junior participant experience. Early fieldwork, including classroom observation and tutoring, was suggested by 68% of responding teacher educators. Much less frequently reported were experiences such as mentoring (11%), a field assignment in which candidates were required to interview an urban teacher (5%), and a field period in which teacher candidates lived and taught in a large metropolitan setting for a brief period prior to student teaching (5%).

Teacher Participant Demographic/Quantitative Results

Of the surveys that were mailed to the 90 school-building administrators for distribution to teachers who typically interact with teacher candidates in high-need, urban schools, 27 were completed and returned. Those teachers responding represented 17 different districts across New York State. Three of the "Big Five" school districts were represented in the responses. The majority of responses came from Central and Western New York sites with only one response coming from what might be considered a "down-state" site. Teacher candidates from 34 different higher education institutions were accepted for field experiences in these districts. Of these institutions, 53% were private and 47% were public. Approximately 12% of these institutions were junior or community colleges.

Most of the responses included descriptions of the field experience such that the teachers' perceptions of the nature of the experience could be categorized. The most frequent type of field experiences hosted within the responding schools included student teaching; 85% of the schools indicated this type of experience. School building respondents from 52% of the schools described hosting a pre-student teaching or junior participant experience. This experience required teaching a few lessons but was not considered a full-fledged student teaching encounter. Forty-four percent of the sites described an observation experience, and 15% described a tutoring or volunteer experience.

Emergent Themes for Quality Placements

The remaining open-ended survey questions for both teacher educators and practicing teachers were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach for grounded theory development. As such, these themes are identified below without interpretive analysis or information related to the number of teacher educators providing responses related to the theme. The authors identified three general categories of themes for each set of responses: (1) responses referring to issues that were characteristic of the field experience site, (2) responses referring to issues characteristic of the teacher preparation program, and (3) responses referring to characteristics of the field experience itself. In order to enhance readability, the themes identified by teacher educators and practicing teachers are listed according to these three categories.

Beneficial Urban Experiences

A survey question asking teacher educators and practicing teachers to identify the types of urban experiences that are most beneficial to the development of teacher candidates resulted in the identification of a number of themes. Field experience site-based themes identified by teacher educators are identified in Table 1, alongside sample survey responses offered by this participant group.

Practicing teachers provided no responses that reflected site-based issues that were beneficial to high-need urban field experiences. Characteristics

TABLE 1.
Site-Based Characteristics of Beneficial Field Experiences Teacher Educator Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Teacher candidates have exposure to diversity	A. For our students the chance to work with students from cultures other than their own has been a real benefit
B. The experience includes a highly qualified and skilled mentor teacher	B. The classroom teacher must have the skills to mentor and nurture candidates
C. School administrative supportive	C. Strong administrative support is critical
D. The university or college and the school have reciprocal and cooperative relationships	D. I believe that all field experiences must be mutually beneficial.

TABLE 2.
Teacher Preparation Program Characteristics of Beneficial Field Experiences Teacher Educator Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. The experience has clear competencies or standards that must be addressed	A. We have a list of competencies (depending on the course) that students must exhibit to be successful.
B. The experience allows for the development of teacher candidate competencies	B. Experiences are offered in a sequence with increasing amounts of time required and increasing expectations.
C. The experience involves quality university/college supervision	C. The experience requires close supervision by full-time faculty.
D. The experience provides a service to other	D. In a Jesuit institution, we support the ideal of "service to others".
E. The university or college and the school have reciprocal and cooperative relationships	E. The experiences include action research and mentoring activities with partner schools.

related to the teacher education program were also identified as important factors contributing to quality field experiences. The themes suggested by teacher educators are presented in Table 2 with representative responses.

Practicing teachers also identified an issue that related to the teacher education program's contribution to the quality of the field experience; see Table 3.

Teacher educators and practicing teachers identified a variety of characteristics related to the experience itself that contribute to its perceived quality. Teacher educators' responses are presented in Table 4 and practicing teachers' responses are presented in Table 5 below.

TABLE 3.
Teacher Preparation Program Characteristics of Beneficial Field Experiences Practicing Teacher Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. The experiences includes a variety of activities for the teacher candidate to complete	A. We attempt to involve our student teachers in a variety of working situations ranging from: small group instruction, large group instruction, team teaching, and working and planning.

TABLE 4.
Field Experience Characteristics of Beneficial Placements Teacher Educator Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Teacher candidates reside in the community as a group	A. We have a field group that goes to [large city] and lives there and works at a high need school.
B. Teacher candidates are paired with other candidates	B. Our use of pairs of candidates allows us to be more selective in our placements.

TABLE 5.
Field Experience Characteristics of Beneficial Placements Practicing Teacher Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Teacher candidates are fully integrated within the setting as in student teaching	A. We encourage a more involved experience where students actually participate in the instructional program.
B. Experiences are progressive over a number of years	B. I think the progressive experience over several years is an excellent idea.

Least Beneficial Urban Experiences

Teacher educators and practicing teachers were also asked to indicate which types of field experiences they felt were *least* beneficial to the development of teacher candidates. The themes that emerged mirror those found in the positive experiences and are presented below based on their correspondence as site-based issues, teacher education program issues, or experience quality issues.

The themes generated from teacher educator responses that related to site-based issues contributing to poor quality field experiences are presented in Table 6.

Practicing teachers also indicated a site-based characteristic as detrimental to the quality of the field experience; see Table 7.

Issues that stem from the teacher preparation program were also identified as and disadvantageous. Teacher educators responses are presented in Table 8 and practicing teacher suggestions are presented in Table 9.

Characteristics of the experience itself also interfered with the quality of high-need, urban field experiences. Responses by teacher educators that reflect characteristics of the placement are presented in Table 10 while practicing teacher responses are presented in Table 11.

TABLE 6.
Site-Based Characteristics of Less Beneficial Field Experiences Teacher Educator Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Lack involvement of parents of urban students	A. There is a lack of parental participation.
B. Lack positive inclusive special education practices	B. These schools are even more damaging than those where inclusion is not even under consideration because the message is likely to be "inclusion doesn't work in the real world".
C. Placements are made with teachers who do not model best teaching practices	C. The least beneficial experiences are those with teachers that are not very competent or dedicated.
D. Placements are made with teachers who are not effective mentors	D. There is a lack of constructive criticism by the cooperating teacher.

TABLE 7.
Site-Based Characteristics of Less Beneficial Field Experiences Practicing Teacher Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Experiences are hosted by novice or un-qualified staff	A. Working with non-tenured staff would not really be beneficial.

TABLE 8.
Teacher Education Program Characteristics of Less Beneficial Field Experiences Teacher Educator Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Experiences are short-term or limited in scope	A. When students go for a 3 hour visit for a practicum, it doesn't really give a chance for them to develop an understanding of what they are doing and why they are in the classroom.

TABLE 9.
Teacher Education Program Characteristics of Less Beneficial Field Experiences Practicing Teacher Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Experiences are too brief	A. The short-term placements are least appropriate since they do not give the candidate a true picture nor do they allow them the time to actually put their ideas together.
B. Experiences are highly directed by college/university requirements that are not consistent with the school context	B. XXX University requires student teachers to teach an interdisciplinary unit, which they feel should run about 4 weeks. The only problem with the unit is our approach to gradually having student teachers assume teaching duties, sometimes creates a situation which is not conducive to an interdisciplinary 4 week unit.
C. Experiences are inconsistent with the school schedule	C. We are on a rotating ABCD schedule, so it is sometimes difficult to match up with the candidate's free time.

TABLE 10.
Field Experience Characteristics of Less Beneficial Placements Teacher Educator Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Experiences are passive or not aligned to the intended learning competencies expected of teacher candidates	A. Primarily observation and interview experiences have not been very productive.

TABLE 11.
Field Experience Characteristics of Less Beneficial Placements Practicing Teacher Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Experiences lack depth in the level of candidate involvement in the classroom	A. Experiences stressing strictly observation are not favored. The teachers are anxious to have good quality candidates who are prepared to assist with some basic tasks.
B. Experiences lack emphasis on developing relationships between teacher candidates and students	B. It's very hard to "try" lesson plans without developing a relationship with the students.

Urban Placement Challenges

Teacher educators and practicing teachers were next asked to identify any challenges they have confronted in their attempts to establish quality field experiences in high-need urban schools. Emergent themes related to site-based difficulties suggested by teacher educators are presented in Table 12.

TABLE 12.
Site-Based Challenges to Establishing Quality Field Experiences Teachers Educator Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Identifying a good quantity and variety of placements in a centralized location	A. Providing students with a variety of experiences with varied teaching styles.
B. Identifying schools with effective inclusive practices	B. There are a lack of inclusive settings.
C. Identifying enough certified/qualified teachers	C. Finding sufficient qualified teachers to place candidates with at the appropriate grade level.
D. Finding cooperative teachers with effective mentoring practices	D. Cooperating teacher's rigidity in offering curriculum and refusal to allow student teachers their ability to create and revise instruction.
E. Surmounting the systematic and bureaucratic issues of many urban schools	E. [School district] has tried to run all of their placements through one coordinator that makes it difficult.
F. Overcoming the time of cooperating teachers needing to address other relevant issues	F. Teachers feel they have an important agenda to attend to. Working with prospective teachers is often cast as "an extra"
G. Avoiding district use of teacher candidates to compensate for less effective classroom teachers	G. Periodically, school districts try to use our students to compensate for teachers who are not very effective.
H. Addressing issues of school resistance	H. School partners have a fear of another outsider evaluating them.
I. Compensating cooperative teachers	I. Making it worthwhile to the cooperating teachers...compensating them.
J. Overcoming support issues associated with establishing quality field experiences	J. Our challenge is being able to provide the level of supervision that I think is necessary for supporting all constituencies.

TABLE 13.
Site-Based Challenges to Establishing Quality Field Experiences Practicing Teacher Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Inexperienced staff	A. Many of our science teachers are relatively new at the job and don't have enough experience to help future teachers.
B. Scheduling problems	B. Usually candidate arrive during or just prior to classes with no time to prepare.
C. Continual changes in the standards for teachers and students	C. Communicating curriculum changes to new staff and student teachers.

Practicing teachers also acknowledged site-based issues that posed challenges to establishing quality field experiences in their schools. Table 13 provides this information.

Teacher education programs also were identified as having some responsibility for the challenges in establishing quality experiences. The emergent themes generated from the feedback of teacher educators is presented in Table 14 while themes generated from practicing teacher feedback is presented in Table 15.

TABLE 14.
Teacher Preparation Program Challenges to Establishing Quality Field Experiences Teacher Educator Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Overcoming teacher candidate cultural competency issues.	A. If one has not had previous "presence" in high need schools, then it may be more difficult to enter the culture.
B. Addressing the safety concerns of teacher candidates	B. Some students expressed concern about neighborhoods in which schools are located.
C. Overcoming the support issues associated with establishing quality field experiences	C. In terms of workload the university does not recognize coordination of fieldwork as a separate entity but as part of a 3-credit load.
D. Decreasing teacher candidate resistance to urban placements through teacher preparation	D. Many of our students live in [suburban area districts] that are higher paying with more ideal working conditions. They are interested in working in [suburban district] and resist going to [urban district].

TABLE 15.
Teacher Preparation Program Challenges to Establishing Quality Field Experiences
Practicing Teacher Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Scheduling problems	A. We are very near the college so we have many students here at times. It is hard to give time to each college student that would like to come here.
B. Limitations with the experience evaluation documents	B. Student teaching evaluations are poorly constructed and very limiting.
C. Teacher candidate preparation, competency, and professionalism	C. We have encountered some problems with student teachers being ill-prepared in subject matter.
D. College supervisor expectations, consistency, and workload	D. The field supervisors from the universities are very cooperative, but I feel their individual approach to the job and how they perceive it is inconsistent.
E. Time constraints associated with the length of the experience and capacity for feedback	E. Usually candidates arrive during or just prior to classes with no time to prepare.

Urban Placement Successes

Lastly, teacher educators and practicing teachers were asked to identify strategies that they have found successful as they attempted to establish quality field experiences. The responses provided to this inquiry indicated that each group took on responsibility for facilitating quality experience development. The recommendations for successful practices offered by teacher educators are presented in Table 16.

The strategies identified as successful by practicing teachers are presented in Table 17.

DISCUSSION

This study provides an overview of the current field experience practices in high-need, urban schools. Demographic responses from teacher educators and practicing teachers indicate that most teacher preparation programs subscribe to a developmental field experience model. That is, candidates are guided through a series of mentoring experiences in which they gradually assume more of the teaching responsibilities in the classroom. The earliest field placements involve less invasive practices (e.g. observation and tutoring). Pre-student teaching placements are relatively more demanding requiring

TABLE 16.
Successful Strategies For Developing Quality Field Experiences Teacher Educator Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Eliciting school administrative support	A. Develop "supportive context" with key administrative players.
B. Offering benefits to the host schools	B. Hold initial meetings with key personnel within a district to identify specific teacher needs with regard to meeting pupil needs.
C. Providing training for cooperating teachers	C. Offer in-services and workshops that meet the teachers and school children's needs.
D. Including cooperating teachers in program and course development	D. I bring a draft of my syllabus and seek teacher input on assignments, topics and practicum expectations.
E. Establishing a quality relationship and commitment to urban schools	E. Develop trust, collaboration, mutual goals, starting with small activities and dialogue.
F. Recognizing the efforts of the cooperating urban school	F. I buy doughnuts for the faculty lounge with a thank you from the college.
G. Allocating higher education faculty resources to the relationship	G. We are fortunate to have one adjunct faculty person who is a retired school counselor from [urban district]. She screens candidates and placements and finds a right fit for each experience.
H. Focusing on communication between cooperating schools and the college or university	H. There needs to be clear communication between and among all parties.
I. Enhancing the quality of the supervision model	I. Meet one-on-one with every student after teaching supervised lessons.
J. Providing clear guidelines or expectations for the teacher candidates	J. Both the cooperating teacher and candidate need to be provided with detailed inlines and expectations.
K. Grouping teacher candidates together for the experience	K. Placing several students in one building creates a support system for candidates and a community.

candidates to take on additional duties. Finally, the student teaching experience enables the candidate to assume the full role of the teacher.

This developmental model, in theory, provides a scaffold by which candidates build the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions

TABLE 17.
Successful Strategies For Developing Quality Field Experiences Practicing Teacher Suggestions

Theme	Representative Survey Response
A. Presenting the teacher candidate with strong teaching models.	A. We look for quality teachers who will provide candidates with a worthwhile experience.
B. Team teaching between the host teacher and candidate	B. Co-teaching side by side with student teacher.
C. Effective time planning on the part of the host teacher	C. When we have a student tutor we end up sharing the person's time so that he/she is not wasting time coming when we have a prep period.
D. Developing strong and open communication between the teacher and the candidate around professional issues and practices	D. Frequent and lengthy collaborative conferences and daily reflection have been successful strategies.
E. Working closely with the teacher in developing the curriculum for candidates	E. We develop the curriculum with local colleges.
F. Allocating responsibility to the candidate and upholding expectations	F. Providing the candidate with a consistent set of standards regarding attendance and performance.
G. Providing a support system for the candidate	G. Work closely with the candidate and school to provide the guidance and knowledge necessary to help them be successful.
H. Slowly integrating the candidate into the classroom	H. I have allowed for a slower transition process. My student teachers must work one on one with the students before they earn my trust to take over the class.
I. Immersing the teacher candidate in a variety of teaching experience	I. We offer a variety of grade levels and we make sure that our student teachers have the opportunity to observe other areas of interest.
J. Frequent and consistent evaluation of the candidate.	J. Since the cooperating teacher stays with the student teacher in the classroom, daily evaluation of each lesson is helpful.

requisite of novice teachers. The model does not, however, consider the context (urban versus suburban or rural, high versus low need) of the placement in conjunction with the developmental level of the experience.

Notably, at the time of data collection, teacher preparation programs in New York State were required to provide candidates with a minimum of 100 hours of field experience prior to student teaching. In practice, therefore, all of the pre-service teachers referenced in the survey responses would have had to complete early field experiences. The quantitative results of this study indicate a dramatic increase in the percentage of student teaching experiences in high-need, urban sites as compared to earlier field placements. It is likely that the needs, demands, and challenges indigenous to many urban placements increase the complexity of the student teaching experience. Ultimately the teacher candidate may become overwhelmed by the sudden escalation in difficulty level and environmental demand. If the gradual development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching in the urban setting is the goal of the teacher preparation program, then perhaps the dissonance and lack of efficacy noted in earlier studies is a consequence of an abrupt contextual change in late field experiences (See Figure 1).

The results of this inquiry also indicate that current models for field experiences in high-need urban schools are very traditional in nature. Only one teacher educator described a non-traditional program in which teacher candidates were immersed in an urban school and lived in the community for an extended period of time. If teacher educators are going to truly have an impact on the achievement gap in urban schools, perhaps we need to begin to "think outside of the box" and change the experiences we design to prepare teachers to work in these sites.

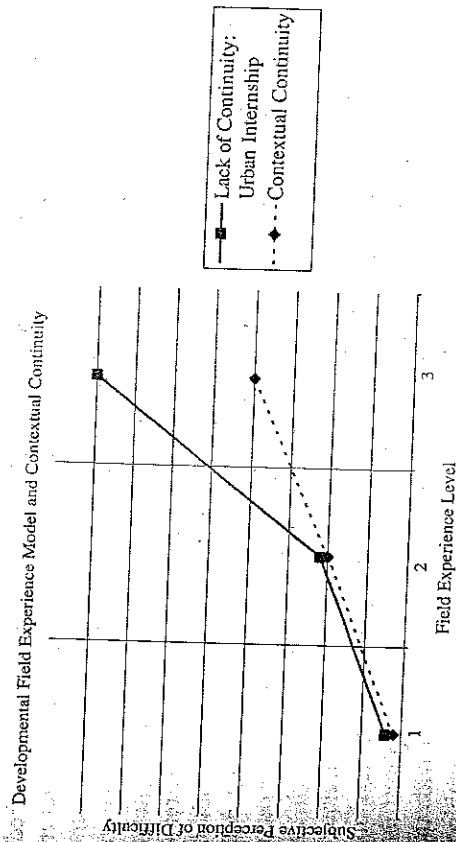


FIG. 1. Development field experience model and contextual continuity.

The summary of the views of teacher educators and practicing teachers on placement qualities and strategies that may be effective in the preparation of urban teachers identified in this study may provide insight into the development of novel experiences. In their evaluation of the essential elements of effective field placements, teacher educators felt that sites needed to have strong administrative support and teachers who demonstrated quality practices. Teacher educators especially called for sites that incorporated positive inclusion models. Cooperating teachers agreed that field experiences needed to be developmental in nature and that experiences that were primarily observational in nature were least beneficial. Some cooperating teachers however, felt that the "ivory tower" sometimes limited the potential of field placements. They cited conflicting schedules between higher education and schools, and teacher preparation course requirements that were unrealistic in light of classroom demands.

Teacher educators tended to focus on teachers and schools as the greatest challenge to the establishment of high-quality experiences, while teachers redirected this toward teacher candidates and teacher educators. Teacher educators listed a lack of certified teachers who modeled research-based best practice among their biggest concerns. Cooperating teachers, on the other hand, described teacher candidates who lacked professional dispositions, skill in lesson planning and assessment, knowledge of student diversity, and content knowledge as their major issues.

It was heartening to see that teacher educators and cooperating teachers identified a number of cooperative strategies that they deemed successful in establishing quality field experiences. Dedicating themselves to opening lines of communication and developing strong, mutually beneficial relationships were key points identified by both groups. Cooperating teachers petitioned for a standard set of expectations for teacher candidates while teacher educators called for partnerships with mutual goals, objectives, and governance structures. In apparent unity, these groups acknowledge that to establish field experiences of the highest quality in our needy urban centers, we must start small, perhaps on a site-by-site basis, creating personal relationships in which we communicate openly and honestly with one another.

As teacher educators work to develop urban field experiences that will better prepare teacher candidates for high-need schools a few important issues emerge as a result of this study. First, contextual continuity is an important factor to consider as teacher educators design field placement models. If the goal is to prepare candidates for urban settings, developmental experiences at these sites may need to be provided throughout the program of study. Early experiences in suburban sites may not provide the scaffolding necessary for an effective transition to student teaching within a high-need, urban site.

Second, field experiences need to be established as a sub-component of more encompassing relationships between schools and higher education institutions. These relationships need to have jointly devised goals and objectives that are mutually beneficial to both partners. Shared governance structures must be established and site-based liaisons must facilitate the work of the higher education institution at the school.

Third, field experiences must include mutually beneficial interactions for teacher candidates. Future teachers need to be intimately involved in their practice in order to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions that might provoke an interest in urban service, and teachers hosting these candidates must balance their role of supporting candidates' professional development with the primary goal of meeting the needs of their students. Early field experiences therefore must include things like tutoring and service-learning that promote candidate and student development.

Once these professional relationships have been established some other concerns may become more easily addressed. Perhaps the processes used to place teacher candidates in quality experiences might be revised to eliminate some of the typical bureaucratic issues in high-need urban districts, and placements can be selected on a site basis to address individualized needs. Teachers involved in these partnerships may assume a more central role in the curriculum and preparation of teacher candidates ensuring that content knowledge, knowledge of student diversity, lesson planning and evaluation, and professionalism are adequately integrated and assessed in the teacher education program. These teachers would therefore feel more confident in the individuals completing field placements at their sites. Partnership relationships might also contribute to the professional efficacy of cooperating teachers so that they feel more knowledgeable and prepared to host teacher candidates and teacher educators may feel more comfortable about the quantity and quality of cooperating teachers at these sites.

This qualitative study was designed to generate themes for future exploration into the preparation of teachers for urban practice. As such, it has a number of limitations that must be acknowledged. The information collected reflects the views of voluntary respondents within New York State and may not, therefore, be generalizable to high-need, urban settings in other geographic locations. The focus of the study on urban and high-need settings without the benefit of comparison suburban, rural and low-need situations also restricts the assertions that can be made.

The trends identified in this qualitative investigation need to be further validated in future studies using research designs that compensate for the limitations of inductive thematic analysis. As well, the practices and perspectives of educational professionals in other geographical areas should be explored. Finally, future research might examine the impact of contextual

Assistencialism and the Politics of High-Stakes Testing

Luis Urrieta, Jr.

In this article I argue that the current high-stakes testing accountability model is an assistencialist model, derived from deficit thinking paradigms. Such models, like the No Child Left Behind Act, sanction low performance with serious consequences for students and educators. Drawing from Freire, I propose an anti-assistencialist accountability model based on local community culture and needs that would include critical, problem-posing education, dialogue as a means toward raising social consciousness, and appropriate assessments according to local community needs. I further argue that such an accountability model can be implemented through cultural immersion programs that include three levels of immersion, (1) classroom culture, (2) local community culture, and (3) trans/cultural, or transnational exposure.

KEY WORDS: assistencialism; anti-assistencialism; high-stakes testing; accountability; conscientization; cultural relevance.

Sometimes people come into your life and you know right away that they were meant to be there...to serve some sort of purpose, teach you a lesson or help figure out who you are or who you want to become. You never know who these people may be but when your eyes first meet, you know that very moment that they will affect your life in some profound way.

LIFE!

INTRODUCTION

I recently came across a flyer that read, Hear Our Cries: Community Speak Out on Education and was instantly transported back to my years as an eighth grade teacher. The flyer read, "Did you know that your 3rd, 5th, or 8th Grader could be HELD BACK by not passing the End of

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continuity and experience difficulty on teacher candidate development over time. For example, the perceptions of teacher candidates completing urban field experiences throughout their program might be compared with candidates who complete experiences in a variety of locations.

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