Preservice Preparation for the Urban Context

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Abstract

Urban school districts are in great need of qualified teaching personnel as documented by both personnel retention and school accountability data. Teacher education programs, particularly those sponsored by urban units of higher education, are called upon to invest additional effort to address these personnel needs. This article describes decision points facing teacher education programs with an urban focus. Examples of strategies resulting from each decision point are provided from the perspectives of the authors who are leading efforts to redesign an urban teacher education program at the University of New Orleans.

The need for qualified teachers in urban schools continues to be a problem across the United States. Poverty rates for school-age children have grown significantly in recent years, with approximately 90 percent of the increase concentrated in those counties with the nation's largest cities (Burstein and Sears 1998). The impact of poverty, along with increased levels of reported child abuse, violence, and drug use is especially noted in the nation's largest school districts. Children in these circumstances—who are likely to be most in need of competent, caring teachers—are often in the very settings that find it hardest to attract them.

The number of new teachers available to urban school districts continues to fall short of the reported need. Haberman (1987) reported that the average career of urban educators is three to five years and that within every five-year period one half of the urban teaching force leaves the profession. In order to attract more teachers into the profession, the majority of states have instituted some form of alternate licensure (Wise 1994). The problem of attracting qualified teachers is especially acute in high poverty areas (Darling-Hammond 1994). Although the number of qualified educators overall is problematic, the fact that fewer individuals representing minority groups are entering education is especially disturbing given the demographic characteristics of urban districts (Grace 1992).

In addition to focusing on the number of prospective teachers entering teacher education programs, there is a need to redesign these programs to increase their effectiveness in meeting the needs of urban learners and schools. Tillman (1989) called for the National Association for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to examine the needs of urban school districts and to develop standards for teacher preparation based on those needs. Other urban teacher educators have identified effective strategies related to various areas of teacher education, including: field experiences (Mason 1997), instructional skills (Brainin and Sema 1997), and underlying principles for urban education (Gilbert 1997). Attempts to reform teacher

education to ensure that the needs of diverse populations are met have resulted most prominently in the call for performance-based programs that require teacher candidates to demonstrate their teaching proficiency. Table 1 provides a concise overview of the differences among traditional, competency based, and performance based approaches to teacher education. This comparison is provided to assist the reader in understanding the context for our current program revision efforts.

Table 1
Comparison of Different Models of Teacher Preparation

Program Feature	Traditional	Competency Based	Performance Based
Program of Study	Organized according to courses	Courses aligned with demonstration of specific competencies	Comprehensive program of study supports ongoing application of skills to bring about educational outcomes
Course Design	Individual faculty responsible for design of targeted course(s)	Courses aligned with specific competency clusters	Key role and concept themes are addressed at multiple points in program of study within sequenced blocks
Faculty Role	Courses typically taught by single faculty aligned with specific department	Faculty aligned with specific competency clusters	Faculty organized into teams to support course blocks
Student Support	Traditional advising	Students receive support to address specific competencies from multiple sources aligned with competency clusters	Students receive ongoing consistent support throughout program of study to address targeted performance standards
Field Experience	Field experiences designed by individual faculty as dictated by individual courses—major experiences contained within culminating student teaching experience	Field experiences aligned with each competency cluster	Field experiences aligned with competency cluster in addition to field experiences that support student in applying multiple roles and themes concurrently
Induction	Responsibility of employing school district	University may assume responsibility to retrain teacher on specific areas of need	Partnership created with employing district to support teacher during induction period
Evaluation	Course grades	Individualized review of competency demonstration	Team review of candidate's demonstration of targeted individual and program outcomes

We are currently engaged in the redesign of an urban teacher education program with a focus on initial licensure via both a traditional undergraduate program and an alternate certification option. This article reports key decision points related to the development of an effective, performance-based teacher education program for urban settings.

Decision Point One: What framework will be used to develop the program of study?
Once a teacher education program reaches the decision to adopt a performance-based model of preparation, it is necessary to identify a framework to drive the design of the program of study. Ideally, a framework should be equally useful to university faculty responsible for the program of study, K–12 partners who are engaged in effective urban education, and the participants who are enrolled in teacher education programs. In addition to meeting the needs of multiple stakeholders, a framework should also support alignment with multiple standards, including licensure requirements (e.g., state department of education criteria for certification), accreditation standards (e.g., NCATE), professional development standards (e.g., standards adopted by a local urban school district), federal accountability standards (e.g., the No Child Left Behind Act), and teacher examination standards (e.g., Praxis).

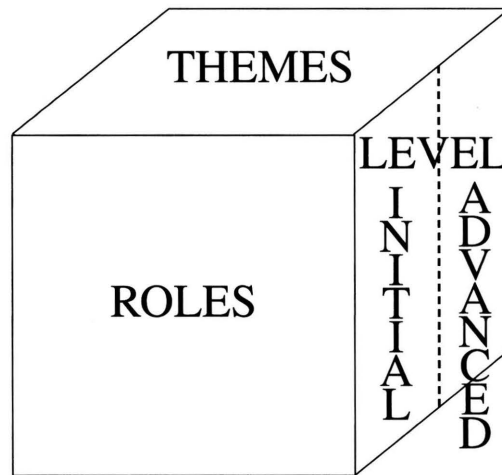Figure 1
UNO Program of Study Framework

Figure 1 presents a teacher education program of study framework recently adopted by the University of New Orleans. The framework includes three critical dimensions: one relates to critical roles performed by effective educators, a second relates to key themes addressed by the program of study, and a third relates to two program levels, initial licensure and advanced study. Our framework is relatively streamlined to facilitate ease of use, yet complex enough to support program participants as they address a wide variety of professional competencies. Following is a brief description of each dimension of the framework.

Professional Roles. A framework should encompass each critical task associated with effective teaching. Table 2 presents the six roles included in the University of New Orleans framework. Five of the six roles reflect the components of teaching upon which first year teachers will be evaluated in Louisiana. The sixth role, "use of inquiry to improve practice," was determined by our faculty to be an equally important factor in teachers' effectiveness. These roles are addressed within the program of study via both coursework and field experiences. Additionally, the participant evaluation component of the program assists teachers in documenting their professional growth in terms of each targeted role.

Table 2
Professional Roles

Professional Roles of Teachers	Examples of Critical Tasks for Participant Evaluation
Design and Deliver Instruction	Develop lesson plans to accommodate needs of diverse learners Align instruction with curriculum standards and benchmarks
Advocate for Services and Supports	Recognize the need for advocacy efforts Link student and family to community resources
Manage Time, Tasks, and Environments	Organize classroom resources and logistics to maximize learning Utilize available resources to compensate for materials that may be unavailable in urban schools
Support Group Practice Through Collaboration	Partner with other professionals to develop, implement, and evaluate instructional programs
Improve School and System Practice	Participate in school improvement efforts
Use Inquiry to Improve Practice	Identify additional sources of information to plan and evaluate instruction

Critical Themes. A framework must be comprehensive in terms of its ability to address the multiple issues associated with effective urban education. While the number of identified issues can be extensive, our program framework clustered critical issues into 11 categories, each of which impacts teaching and learning across levels of certification (e.g., PK–3, or 7–12) and disciplines (e.g., science or English education). Additional categories can be added, or existing ones modified over time.

Table 3
Program of Study Themes

Health and Safety	Learning Theory
Literacy	Parent/Family/Community
Assessment	Technology
Context of Schooling	Legal & Ethical Issues
Behavior Support	Communication
	Diversity

Program Level. The framework should also support both initial licensure and advanced professional development. Although multiple levels could be established for each program of study depending on the pathway selected for licensure (e.g., undergraduate study, alternate certification, or advanced study, e.g., Masters degree, professional development), our framework includes two levels to facilitate ease of use.

Decision Point Two: How should an urban teacher education program organize content? A performance-based model of teacher education calls for a shift from assigning content and pedagogical issues into a single course to threading these issues within a series of courses and related experiences. For example, assessment content and strategies may be introduced in a course on assessment and instructional strategies. Later, specific assessment strategies may be practiced by candidates as they are enrolled in pedagogy coursework (e.g., math education). Thus, assessment content and skills are taught across an array of courses, rather than in a single course at a specific point in the teacher preparation program of study.

Another important decision point related to program content calls for adopting a professional development model of teacher education, rather than exposing candidates to a finite knowledge base. This approach embraces an inquiry-based framework for teacher education. Thus, candidates are concurrently supported as they master a set of teaching skills, while adopting their own inquiry-based framework to continue their professional development beyond the university experience. This approach to teacher education makes it critical that program creators consider carefully the design of content and field experiences in order to promote the adoption of professional development skills.

Effective teacher education programs must include content that is especially relevant for urban schools and learners. Specific knowledge and skills related to issues such as dialects, family supports, community resources, and cultural differences are especially important for effective urban educators. While it may be easier to create a single course of "urban education issues," programs should consider the earlier point related to threading content and strategies across a program of study. Repeated opportunities

to consider urban contexts and situations will more likely result in increased effectiveness of teacher candidates in addressing the needs of urban learners.

Decision Point Three: How should an urban teacher education program organize field experiences?   The national drive to increase teacher education accountability by shifting to a performance-based model focuses considerable attention on the design and support of appropriate field experiences. The issue of field experiences is even more complicated for urban teacher education programs due to a larger number of "nontraditional" students who are employed while pursuing their undergraduate degrees, as well as a large number of alternate certification candidates who are employed as teachers while pursuing licensure. It is critical to adopt a framework to guide the design and support of field experiences. Table 3 outlines a framework that can be used to organize field activities for a teacher education program. Note that the framework also supports teacher candidates in reflecting on the roles assumed and issues addressed while engaged in fieldwork. The framework provides a common mechanism to enhance communication among enrolled students, partner faculty in districts, and university faculty. The framework can also be used following program completion to support continued professional development and school improvement efforts. Supporting enrolled participants in the use of the framework during their program of study concurrently teaches them the skills to address professional development and program improvement needs beyond their induction years. Therefore, the steps included in Table 4 support an inquiry-based method of professional development and program improvement.

A second need regarding field experiences relates to defining the primary purpose of a given field activity. Field experiences should become more complex as the candidate moves through the program of study. For example, early experiences might focus on observation and issue identification. Later field experiences can "spiral" through individual instruction, small group instruction, management of instruction for whole classrooms, and participation in school improvement efforts.

Additional attention is needed to identify appropriate settings to sponsor field activities. Familiarity with the culture of urban schools appears to play a key factor in successful retention of new teachers in urban settings. Thus, Ilmer, Snyder, Erbaugh, and Kurz (1997) call for longitudinal field experience in a single urban setting in order to assist program participants in understanding successful patterns of negotiating family and community supports while considering cultural factors. Urban teacher education programs must identify urban schools that can sponsor an array of field experiences aligned with the program of study framework. It is also critical to select campuses that demonstrate a range of promising practices, yet serve as realistic examples of the high need settings most in need of new teachers.

Table 4
Recommended Field Experience Format

Description of field experience	A short overall description of the field activity
Rationale	A description of the purpose of the activity in terms of professional development
Guidelines for Field Activity	Steps to assist the participant in designing and implementing the activity
Timeline	Approximate length of time needed to complete the activity
Outcomes Expected	A statement of what should result from completing the activity in terms of participant professional development
Artifacts	Suggested artifacts resulting from the activity appropriate for inclusion in professional portfolio
Resources	Attachment of a journal article, videotape or tool to assist understanding how to complete the activity
Evaluation	Rubric to assist external and self evaluation of the quality of the participant's work in completing the field activity

Decision Point Four: What faculty roles and responsibilities are needed to support an effective urban teacher education program? Teacher education programs dedicated to urban school success must carefully consider faculty selection and duties. Teacher education programs must conduct an assets map to determine their expertise in urban education and increase the number of qualified faculty by: *(a)* hiring new personnel with experience in P–12 urban settings, and *(b)* identifying partner faculty from urban districts to collaboratively plan, offer, and evaluate teacher education coursework and field experiences.

A second shift that needs to occur within teacher education programs is for faculty to move toward a model of collaboration and teaming, analogous to the faculty teaming found in restructured P-12 schools. That is, university faculty should model the same collaborative strategies that program participants will need to demonstrate once hired in urban settings. Administrative supports are needed for this shift to occur. At a minimum, teacher education programs should establish both an expectation and a vehicle to support university and P–12 collaboration. One method of accomplishing this outcome is to create a greater role for P–12 faculty beyond the traditional adjunct role. These roles may include collaborator in program design, co-instructor, field experience supervisor, small group facilitator for teachers engaged in field activities, and program evaluator. A second administrative support needed is the creation of

consistent time blocks to support faculty group work. One hurdle to this effort is the inherent mismatch of schedules between university faculty (who typically teach classes late afternoons and early evenings), and P-12 faculty (who are not free to work collaboratively until then). Support to leap this hurdle must come from both university and school system administrators.

Redesign of existing teacher education programs also calls for a significant investment of faculty time. Administrative support is also needed to establish governance structures for teacher education programs that are efficient and assist faculty in incorporating innovative features into existing licensure programs. Traditional models of teacher education allocate the majority of faculty efforts to individually managed tasks such as independent course instruction and student advising. Effective urban teacher education programs must support faculty in at least two forms of group work: *(a)* management of a particular certification program of study (e.g., 1–6 licensure), and *(b)* design, implementation, and evaluation of a particular program component (e.g., portfolio development and evaluation).

Decision Point Five: How should the performance of program participants be evaluated? Recent changes in accreditation standards and state accountability programs are increasing the use of individual portfolios as a key component of participant evaluation in teacher education programs. A review of the professional literature indicates that few strategies for effectively using portfolios in urban teacher education programs are reported. In general, the portfolio approach calls for a shift from course-specific evaluation designed by a single faculty member to longitudinal evaluation across an entire program of study.

Another important consideration for individual participant evaluation is the need to shift from evaluation solely from a university perspective to evaluation from multiple perspectives. Our redesign efforts include three targeted perspectives in addition to those of the program participant and university faculty member: a successful urban educator, an effective school administrator, and a parent of a student enrolled in an urban school. Note that these three categories of stakeholders represent the very constituencies with whom urban educators must work effectively. Any model for utilizing all perspectives must ensure that everyone is familiar with the framework guiding the program of study, that rubrics are in place to support consistent evaluation of participant teaching, and that participants are guided to create meaningful portfolios using authentic artifacts that clearly support demonstration of targeted performances.

A performance-based model also requires a shift in terms of the role of the program participant in the evaluation process. It is critical that participants move from being recipients of evaluation activities to being active participants. An effective teacher must be able to assess his or her own ability to engage in the targeted roles and utilize multiple strategies as dictated by student need or school and community context. Again, use of a singular framework to organize the program of study, field

experiences, and participant evaluation will enhance teachers' ability to self-assess professional development.

Decision Point Six: What program evaluation features should an urban teacher education program adopt? Effective urban teacher education can only be realized through ongoing program evaluation. Although each teacher education program must attend to accreditation standards (e.g., NCATE), few standards are aligned with the specific needs of urban schools and learners. Teacher education programs must ensure that a program evaluation model is adopted that specifically determines the effectiveness of the program for urban settings. At a minimum, traditional measures such as the number of program graduates hired and retained in urban schools should be collected and used as benchmarks for increasing the number of qualified teachers in urban settings. Mantle-Bromley, Gould, McWhorter, and Whatley (2000) call for urban teacher education programs to move beyond simply examining the number of program completers.

Another critical feature of effective program evaluation is the use of performance data to inform the redesign of the program of study. It is critical that urban institutes of higher education invest greater resources into the identification of features and strategies most aligned with success in urban school settings. One example of such an effort would be the use of program data to study the factors that best predict success as an urban educator so that program recruitment efforts can be improved. Indeed, Haberman (2000) suggests that selection of urban educators is likely more important than training. Another evaluation effort might focus on using reports from effective urban educators to identify instructional strategies most critical to include in teacher education programs. Individual portfolio data can be analyzed to identify those field activities that elicit professional development integrating the greatest number of roles and themes. This line of study could assist in identifying efficient designs for teacher education experiences

Perhaps the most important program evaluation feature that a teacher education program can adopt relates to improved performance of P–12 learners themselves. This model holds the teacher education program accountable for demonstrating the positive impact of its participants on students in urban settings. Endorsement of this model of program evaluation depends on using a backward mapping technique to determine the effectiveness of program components. Thus, field experiences are evaluated in terms of their positive impact on student learning. Course content is validated when program participants have the tools necessary to successfully complete field experiences. This model of program evaluation creates higher stakes and calls for a teacher education program to invest significant efforts in a smaller number of school sites to ensure that the program is constantly redesigned until targeted performances for urban learners are demonstrated.

Beyond the Initial Decisions

Our efforts thus far have led us through the beginning stages of redesigning our teacher preparation program in ways that we hope will make it more responsive to the needs of the urban school districts that look to us as a major source of highly qualified new teachers. The work has not always been easy or without setbacks as everyone adjusts to new roles and expectations. Despite some struggles, however, the experience has been largely positive. Many faculty members have come to recognize and value the strength derived from working across departmental boundaries to develop a cohesive program of study that blends in critical content as defined from the perspectives of special education, curriculum and instruction, educational leadership, and counseling and foundations faculty members. There is a new level of ownership of teacher preparation beyond the individual course or department level, and for the first time many faculty members identify a comfortable role for themselves in the program.

Of course, the work is not nearly finished. While the framework has led us thus far to the outlines of a workable new program, all of its components must be fleshed out as the new courses begin to be offered. Further, we must now expand our redesign efforts from initial teacher preparation to include reformulation of advanced programs of study. The same framework will be used to ensure continuity in programs from initial through advanced certifications and ongoing professional development. We envision a seamless process of teacher development that is responsive to the evolving needs of the urban constituencies we serve.

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