EDITED BY
CHERYL J. CRAIG
LOUISE F. DERETCHIN

IMAGINING A RENAISSANCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION
CHAPTER 2

Preparing Urban Educators for the Twenty-First Century

WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS

Deborah L. Voltz
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Lourecia Collins
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Janice Patterson
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Michele Jean Sims
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Deborah L. Voltz, Ed.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Leadership, Special Education, and Foundations at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Prior to teaching at the university level, Dr. Voltz taught students with learning disabilities, grades K–8, in the Birmingham City Schools. She has written and published numerous articles and book chapters related to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse populations in inclusive settings.

Lourecia Collins, Ed.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Leadership, Special Education, and Foundations at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She is a veteran educator of thirty years who has taught in Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, and Alaska. As a principal, she was recognized for her outstanding leadership role with the Anchorage School District. Dr. Collins has researched, published, and presented extensively on proactive approaches to school violence and bullying.

Janice Patterson, Ph.D., teaches in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She has taught at all levels from four year olds to graduate level students in urban, rural, and suburban settings. Her research focuses on resilience, teacher leaders,
educational policy and school-university partnerships. She has published widely in her field and has conducted workshops and presentations throughout the United States and in Canada, Israel, Ecuador, Spain, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands.

Michele Jean Sims, Ed.D., teaches in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She was an elementary classroom teacher and a Chapter I/Title I teacher in the New York City Public Schools, a Title I Reading teacher at the middle/junior high school level in the Philadelphia School District, and a member of the Philadelphia Writing Project. Her publications focus on collaboration and inclusion.

ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a review of the research related to preparing teachers for urban settings. Specific competencies requisite to the successful preparation of urban teachers are presented, along with the research base supporting these competencies. The authors argue that teacher preparation program features that support the development of these competencies would contribute to a renaissance in teacher education.

Nowhere is the need for renaissance greater than in urban schools. Many unique factors exist that differentiate urban schools from suburban or rural school settings. The unique context of urban schools complicates the educational lives of many children in America's inner cities.

Obidah and Howard (2005) posit that the majority of economically disadvantaged students and families of color live in densely populated hubs. Approximately 64% of students in major cities are culturally and linguistically diverse. Of those students, 56% participate in the free lunch program (Jacob, 2007). For public schools, poverty is identified by the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunches. The financial deprivation experienced in urban centers is an integral factor embedded in urban school education.

The social, economic, and political realities of inner city living and schooling have been noted as an American crisis (Kozol, 2005; Monroe, 2005). The economic and financial neglect means that there are few banks located in urban centers. The lack of banking services needed to promote economic development has promulgated decay and decline in the infrastructure of life for urban dwellers. Often, the most successful businesses are liquor stores, funeral homes, and
loan companies. Litter strewn streets from infrequent trash pick-ups, poor sewer systems, and deteriorating housing describe the environment of many urban areas. The decline in property values has led to a decrease in property taxes that has negatively impacted the development of urban schools (Jacob, 2007).

How have the results of economic deficits impacted urban education? Schools in urban areas have become racially and economically segregated. Other negative realities for urban schools include: dilapidated, overcrowded school buildings, significant teacher turnover, and community and school violence (Murnane & Steele, 2007). In addition, urban school students face (1) student achievement challenges; (2) inadequate school readiness skills; (3) low parental involvement; (4) limited access to learning resources; (5) high mobility rates; (6) linguistic challenges; and (7) inadequate student health care (Rothstein, 2004).

Why Is There a Need for a Renaissance in Teacher Education Programs?

A significant difference exists between teachers and students in urban schools where race, gender, socioeconomic status, and native language are concerned. Differences in sociocultural identities between teachers and students may affect teacher retention and student success in urban schools. Howard (2007) argues that continuing with business as usual in how teachers are prepared may lead to failure for urban students. Currently, urban districts lose nearly one half of their newly hired teachers within the first five years of classroom teaching (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003).

Ninety percent of U.S. teachers are white, middle-class women who do not reside in urban centers. In striking contrast, 37% of the students are children of color who exist in poverty (Children’s Defense Fund, 2001; Young, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Hence, cultural incongruence may impact the instructional programs of many urban schools.

Many educators grapple with providing instruction to linguistically diverse students. Teachers are expected to instruct students who are linguistically diverse even though they speak only one language. Sachs (2004) noted that the sociocultural identities of teachers and students, and factors that differentiate urban from suburban and rural settings characterize a unique urban context for examining teacher success.

Teacher preparation programs have noted the challenges and need for preparing educators for urban schools (Jacob, 2007). In New York, more than 2,000 certified teachers turned down job offers in one year, choosing not to
teach rather than be assigned to a low performing school (Grace, 2001). In a study that reviewed placement choices of teachers, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2002) found that teachers routinely moved away from districts with low levels of academic achievement and high concentrations of minority children identified as living in poverty. The reluctance to accept teaching positions in underperforming, urban schools points to a failure of teacher preparation programs to prepare and inspire adequate numbers of teachers to teach in urban school systems.

As the faces of America's children change, so do their educational needs. A renaissance is needed in teacher preparation programs to inspire and ignite pre-service and in-service teachers. The purpose of this literature review is to address salient research regarding this movement.

**Competencies for Success**

The competencies presented have been synthesized from research in the field and represent the value-added pieces that programs preparing urban teachers must address. As illustrated by Figure 2.1, these competencies have been organized in four strands: sociocultural competence; affirming attitude; collaborative skills; and pedagogy for diversity.

**SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE**

Strand One, Sociocultural Competence, focuses on helping candidates to better understand the students and families with whom they will work and the communities in which they will teach. Based on his research, Sternberg (2006) argued “children from non-mainstream cultures often bring to school the kinds of knowledge and skills that are relevant to their lives and upbringing” (p. 30). Educators who are aware of this prior knowledge, and can tap into it in their instructional approach, can more readily promote the academic success of diverse students.

![Figure 2.1 Competencies for Success](image)
The need for cultural understanding also was reflected in a focus group study involving 19 teachers from some of Chicago’s hardest to staff schools (Fleming, Chou, Random, Nishimura, & Burke, 2004). When asked about the challenges faced by teachers and the knowledge base required for urban teaching, these teachers reported a need for deep understanding of cultural knowledge. According to Fleming et al, participating teachers, “often acknowledged challenges in working with children whose backgrounds were very different from their own . . . teachers suggested the need for course work that breaks down topics related to race and ethnicity into much more specific discussions and experiences to help students better understand the nuances of particular cultures and school communities” (p. 106–107). These nuances included such factors as the impact of poverty on the teaching and learning process, as well as the complexities associated with teaching children who have adult responsibilities.

Based on these and similar research findings related to sociocultural competence, the following competencies for teacher candidates have been developed:

- Understands the influences of culture on learning and behavior, as well as how culture influences teaching
- Is knowledgeable about the local community in which he or she teaches, and is aware of the educational assets of that community (e.g., parks, speakers on specific topics, neighborhood leaders, social service agencies)
- Understands that education broadly defined includes the intellectual, social-emotional, physical, and ethical development of students; and occurs both inside and outside of schools (e.g., neighborhoods, families, and peer groups)
- Recognizes that the context of schooling is complex and reflects the historical, political, social, and economic influences of the community and that teachers must consider these issues in their teaching
- Uses his or her knowledge and experience to advance issues of social justice (e.g., protecting human rights, ensuring effective education for all children) in the broader community and in school-community relationships

**AFFIRMING ATTITUDE**

Strand Two, Affirming Attitude, focuses on developing in candidates the attitudes necessary to foster high student achievement. It focuses on developing what Corbett, Wilson, and Williams (2005, p. 8) described as a “no choice but success” attitude that has been associated with successful urban teachers. Teacher resilience is an important focus of this strand, as is helping teachers to recognize the many strengths that their urban students bring. It is important for teachers to develop a predisposition toward affirming and working from those strengths.
Likewise, this strand acknowledges the importance of developing students' self-efficacy in the learning process.

A number of research studies support the need for urban teachers to maintain an affirming attitude. For example, a case study of four exemplary urban teachers of African American students revealed that a critical element of their success was their belief in their students' ability to achieve (Howard, 2001a). Participating teachers—nominated by parents, principals, community members, and peers—were interviewed and observed in their classrooms over a four-month period. Findings indicated that:

Although having a connection to and awareness of the cultural context that students bring from home was important, what seemed to be equally important in the development of these teachers' teaching practices was a belief that their students were capable of being academically successful. Whereas teacher expectations have been associated with student academic performance, students' expectations of their own academic success is often a greater predictor of academic achievement ... The teachers in this study believed that it was important to convince their students that they possessed the potential to make a difference in their academic development. (Howard, 2001a, p. 198)

The level of trust that teachers have in their students also has been shown to be an important aspect of developing affirming attitudes. In a study involving 452 urban teachers and 2,536 students in 47 schools, Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, and Hoy (2001) found that "trust was a significant positive predictor of differences among schools in student achievement" (p. 3). In the study, participating teachers were surveyed and asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with statements such as: "Students in this school are reliable," "Teachers in this school trust their students," and "Teachers here believe students are competent learners." The academic achievement of their students was measured by the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to model teacher trust as a feature varying within and among schools. Results indicated that while the SES level of the school was shown to be related to the level of teacher trust, once school means were adjusted for SES, trust was a significant predictor of differences between schools with respect to achievement. According to the authors, "Trust seems to foster a context that supports student achievement, even in the face of poverty" (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, and Hoy, 2001, p. 14).

According to Song (2006, p. 496), "Urban teacher education programs need to restructure their curriculum to include experiences designed to strengthen those teacher belief systems that are essential to shaping the way
teachers define and understand physical and social realities of today's urban teaching." To this end, the following competencies have been developed:

- Exhibits a strong belief in the capacity of all students to achieve at high levels and communicates this belief to students
- Demonstrates and engages in systematic and continuous inquiry that promotes ongoing teacher reflection, especially in regard to teacher attitudes and beliefs
- Exhibits resilience and a belief that one can achieve what one sets out to do in regard to educational challenges, and promotes similar resilience and belief in his or her students
- Exhibits and encourages respect for students' home community, language, and culture
- Demonstrates a strong commitment to fairness by teaching and reinforcing conflict resolution skills
- Is a reflective, responsive teacher-leader who effectively addresses the inequities of policies, practices, and achievement related to race, class, gender, linguistic differences, and physical or mental exceptionalities

COLLABORATIVE SKILLS

Strand Three, Collaborative Skills, focuses on strategies for building effective relationships with the variety of persons with whom urban teachers must work in order to be effective, including those within schools (e.g., administrators, counselors, other teachers) as well as those external to schools (e.g., parents, social service agencies). Since these collaborative skills must be applied within the organizational complexities that characterize most urban school districts, urban educators must have skills in negotiating bureaucratic structures.

A number of studies have illuminated the importance of collaborative skills in promoting the academic success of urban students. Brown (2002) conducted an ethnographic study of an inclusive urban elementary classroom identified as being exemplary by teachers, administrators, parents, and former students. Based on data collected from observations, interviews, and focus groups, several defining elements of classroom practice were noted. Among these elements, teacher/student/parent interaction was shown to be critical.

Although collaborative skills are important to the success of urban teachers, the practice of collaboration in urban school settings can be complex. Clark and Holmes (2006) studied 12 first-year urban middle and high school teachers. An in-depth interview model was used. Findings indicated that these teachers identified the bureaucratic structure of urban schools and districts as a deterrent
to developing collaborative relationships with fellow teachers and administrators. Large school size was noted as a contributing factor, which these new teachers felt led to a lack of staff collegiality and a sense of isolation.

Based on these findings and other research related to collaborative skills, the following competencies for teacher candidates have been developed:

- Demonstrates the ability to plan and problem-solve with parents and other education and social service professionals in order to promote student success
- Engages in collaborative efforts/activities with other teachers that promote mutual respect and high student achievement
- Demonstrates the skills needed to communicate effectively with diverse students, their parents, and the community
- Demonstrates ability to work effectively with diverse families and assure that families feel welcome in the school environment
- Demonstrates knowledge of effective ways to send and receive information to students, parents, and other professionals in order to foster inquiry, collaboration, and engagement in learning environments
- Demonstrates mutual respect, boundary setting, and creative problem-solving skills in collaborative relationships with students, parents, the community, and other professionals
- Recognizes the importance of being a student advocate and change agent, and works effectively with others within and outside of school environments
- Demonstrates understanding of how large school districts function, and understands how change can be accomplished within these complex systems
- Promotes personal and professional resilience in self and colleagues

PEDAGOGY FOR DIVERSITY

Strand Four, Pedagogy for Diversity, focuses on strategies for accelerating achievement for diverse groups of students. Because of the intensity of the academic challenges present in many urban settings, teachers need particularly strong content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and awareness of the instructional nuances that facilitate the learning of diverse populations.

In a study involving 251 sixth grade students, Sternberg (2006) found that those who were taught math by infusing culturally relevant content into instruction performed better on math assessments than did those who were taught through a conventional textbook approach. This finding suggests a need for educators to understand the culture from which their students come in order to maximize their learning.

Turner (2005) conducted an in-depth case study of a highly effective urban
teacher of African American elementary students. The purpose of the study was to identify effective practices in orchestrating the literacy success of culturally diverse learners. Twenty classroom observations of approximately two hours each were conducted, along with five teacher interviews of approximately 45 minutes. One of the prominent findings of this study was the facility with which the teacher used practices associated with multicultural education, such as bringing the children’s culture into the literacy content, embracing students’ learning styles, and promoting interaction among diverse students. Likewise, in a similar study, Brooks (2006) also found that African American students’ reading comprehension improved with the use of cultural knowledge congruent with their own experiences. These findings underscore the need for teachers to develop skills in pedagogy that embraces student diversity.

Other studies have focused on classroom contextual variables that support pedagogy for diversity. For example, Howard (2001b) interviewed students of four highly effective urban elementary school teachers and found that three central themes emerged with respect to student perceptions of culturally relevant teaching: "(1) teachers who displayed caring bonds and attitudes toward them; (2) teachers who established community and family-type classroom environments; and (3) teachers who made learning an entertaining and fun process" (Howard, 2001b, p. 131). The author described caring teachers as "warm demanders" (p. 139) who were often stern in their expressions of high expectations for students, but who also provided support and nurturing. A family-type classroom environment was described as one that mirrored some of the communication patterns and interactional styles of the home while promoting a sense of community among students. Making learning fun was described largely as a task of connecting to students’ interests and appropriately integrating affect into instruction in order to engage students. Other studies have shown similar trends with respect to student perceptions of culturally responsive instructional and classroom management strategies (Darling, 2005; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004).

Based on this and other research related to pedagogy for diversity, the following competencies for teacher candidates have been developed:

- Plans and implements a variety of developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive instructional strategies
- Demonstrates competence in the use of accommodation strategies and alternative assessments for special needs and ELL students
- Uses classroom management strategies and group motivational techniques that respect cultural differences and establish a classroom climate that promotes positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation
• Demonstrates competence in the use of community resources to meet the needs of diverse students
• Demonstrates competence in alternative assessment strategies that are culturally sensitive
• Demonstrates competence in incorporating students' experiences, cultures, and community resources into instruction
• Demonstrates competence in his or her teaching field, including the ability to present multiple perspectives in the discussion of subject matter

The four strands discussed above, sociocultural competence, affirming attitude, collaborative skills, and pedagogy for diversity, reflect what the research suggests with respect to competencies needed for urban teaching. These strands give guidance to issues related to what needs to be included in urban teacher education programs in terms of content. The discussion below will highlight research related to how teacher education programs can best go about delivering this content.

Teacher Preparation Program Features

It is impossible to teach people how to teach powerfully by asking them to imagine what they have never seen or to suggest they "do the opposite" of what they have observed in the classroom. (Darling-Hammond, 2006a, p. 308)

As expressed by Darling-Hammond, teacher education institutions must make significant changes in order to prepare teachers well for urban schools. As teacher educators, we continue to struggle to develop a context for teaching and social justice that will carry urban teachers from preservice through the early years of teaching into ongoing professional development that spans a career. A number of promising practices have emerged from this struggle.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH URBAN SCHOOLS

Evidence has suggested that teacher education institutions partnering with urban school districts is an effective strategy for the preparation of urban teachers (Sleeter, 2001). Often, these partnerships have culminated in the establishment of professional development schools. Darling-Hammond and colleagues at Stanford University examined seven exemplary teacher education programs
and identified common features across the programs. These programs were selected because they were noted for producing graduates who are extraordinarily well-prepared for their first classrooms. The common features included:

- A common, clear vision of good teaching that permeates all coursework and clinical experiences, creating a coherent set of learning experiences;
- Well-defined standards of professional practice and performance that are used to guide and evaluate coursework and clinical work;
- A strong core curriculum taught in the context of practice and grounded in knowledge of child and adolescent development and learning, an understanding of social and cultural contexts, curriculum, assessment, and subject matter pedagogy;
- Extended clinical experiences—at least 30 weeks of supervised practicum and student teaching opportunities in each program that are carefully chosen to support the ideas presented in simultaneous, closely interwoven coursework;
- Extensive use of case methods, teacher research, performance assessment, and portfolio evaluation that apply learning to real problems of practice;
- Explicit strategies to help students to confront their own deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about learning and students and to learn about the experiences of people different from themselves; and
- Strong relationships, common knowledge, and shared beliefs among school and university-based faculty jointly engaged in transforming teaching, schooling, and teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2006b, p. 306).

A teacher education program that attempts to integrate these features above and contribute to goals of social justice while remaining largely a collection of unrelated courses without a common conception of teaching and learning will be a feeble change agent for teacher education. Teacher education institutions must provide integrated opportunities for modeling and participation in high-quality practice that will only come through working with highly accomplished urban teachers and by close collaboration with schools, further developing the quality of urban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Patterson, 2000). Features of high performing teacher education programs can integrate more tightly with the four strands of sociocultural competence, affirming attitude, collaborative skills and pedagogy for diversity in a well-developed school-university partnership or a Professional Development School (PDS).

Partnersing with urban districts in the preparation of teachers not only provides opportunities for richer field experiences, but also provides unique opportunities to include urban practitioners as instructional partners in the delivery of coursework. This was a critical element of a successful PDS-embedded urban
teacher education program at Indiana University Northwest (Schoon & Sandoval, 2000).

SEPARATE COURSE VS. INFUSION

Much of the content in the four competency strands discussed above revolves around issues of diversity. Many teacher education programs have struggled with how best to address such content. Often it is housed in separate courses (e.g., Multicultural Education, Teaching Diverse Populations, etc.). Among the stated advantages of such an organization is the idea that there is greater assurance that the topic will be covered in some depth—disadvantages include the idea that the information will be isolated to a particular term and not revisited throughout the program of study (Voltz, 2003). A number of studies have been conducted that examined the impact of a single course on student attitudes. For example, Weisman and Garza (2002) used questionnaires to survey 158 prospective teachers before and after taking a required multicultural education course. Results indicated that while gains were made with respect to overall orientation to diversity, students largely remained unable to see the role that schools and society can play in the educational challenges that some students of color face. Other studies also have shown positive, but limited, impact of single-course approaches in the delivery of content related to diverse populations (Sleeter, 2001).

Because of the limited impact of single-course approaches, many teacher education institutions have begun to explore the use of infusion models that distribute competencies related to urban teaching across multiple courses in the program. For example, Indiana University Northwest attempted this approach in their Urban Teacher Education Program (Schoon & Sandoval, 2000). However, the infusion approach was abandoned after a two-year period because “faculty believed that an urban teacher preparation program did need more emphasis on multicultural education” (p. 431). This case study suggested a lack of depth in the coverage of material related to diversity issues under the infusion approach.

Because of the shortcomings associated with both separate course and infusion models, emerging consensus suggests that these approaches be used in combination in order to reduce the liabilities associated with each. Jennings (2002) conducted case studies that examined programs that used both infusion and separate courses. These researchers concluded “multicultural teacher education needs to include but extend beyond particular courses to more expanded venues that provide opportunities for collaboration and critical reflection” (p. 456). These expanded venues included not only infusion throughout other course-
work but also related field opportunities in urban settings that allowed for critical inquiry.

Where Do We Go from Here?

As teacher educators, we can no longer afford to ignore the need for well-prepared, successful urban teachers. We must develop bold and innovative strategies to improve what we do in regard to educating teachers and ourselves about teaching effectively in urban schools. First, we must continue serious scholarly inquiry that asks important questions about the competencies needed for successful urban teaching, the types of learning communities necessary to support and nurture those committed to urban schools, and the affiliated questions of social justice. As Ladson-Billings (1999, p. 114) commented, “Despite the changing demographics that make our public schools more culturally and linguistically diverse and the growing body of knowledge on issues of diversity and difference, multicultural teacher education continues to suffer from a thin, poorly developed, fragmented literature that provides an inaccurate picture of the kind of preparation teachers receive to teach in culturally diverse classrooms.”

Second, we must analyze efforts to reform teacher education to determine what works. We can only do this by tracking our graduates and their experiences in urban schools. Generally, we shrink from connecting what we do in teacher education with student learning in schools. Yet, without progress in this arena, we will continue to wallow in the unknown and develop program modifications without adequate evidence. Investigation of the multiple factors that influence student and teacher performance holds promise for advancing knowledge and the effectiveness of our programs. To ignore the complete images between teacher actions and student achievement may also open the door for others to pursue that information. Berry (2005) argued that “teaching will not be a profession and teacher education will not earn its rightful status in the university until practitioners link teacher learning to student learning. Teacher educators must take the lead in this regard” (p. 277).

Third, we must consider whether or not modifying existing teacher education programs is sufficient to meet the needs of urban schools. Although specialized programs that prepare students for teaching in urban schools have not always been effective, it is clear that students need extended field experiences in high-quality urban settings that are coherent and integrated with the affiliated teacher education program. More research is needed on these specialized programs. Policymakers need to be informed of the initiatives—including their cost and the costs of replacing teachers. It may also be necessary for these policymakers to take the lead in eliminating duplicate programs within states so that
resources can be re-allocated to those that focus successfully on low-performing schools.

Finally, we must use the knowledge gained to create a platform to get others involved in forging quality teacher education that addresses needs of our least served students. If that can be accomplished, we move closer to realizing the goals of social justice and educational equity; for nowhere is the need for renaissance greater than in urban schools.

References


