

Feature Article

Focusing on Reflective Practice: Reconsidering Field Experiences for Urban Teacher Preparation

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The traditional structure of field experiences poses a dilemma for urban teacher preparation. Research shows that teachers of low-income, urban students often have negative beliefs about, and attitudes towards, their students. Yet, large numbers of cooperating teachers are routinely utilized as mentors in urban classrooms. This practice potentially puts teacher candidates in a position of drawing from and emulating such deficit discourses, as well as denying them opportunity to observe and develop essential critical reflection skills. Using a model of reflective teaching developed by Liston and Zeichner (1991), this study examines and reports on the impact an alternative model of fieldwork can have on teacher candidates' development as critical reflectors. Following this alternative fieldwork model, pre-service teachers reported being more confident in teaching in urban settings as well as having more opportunities to develop critical reflection skills.

Reflective practice is an essential tool for the professional development of veteran, novice, and future teachers (Moore-Russo & Wilsey, 2014; Nagle, 2009; Schön, 1983). It has been characterized as a purposeful, deliberate act of inquiry into one's own thoughts and actions (Davis, 2006; Loughran, 1996). Dewey (1933) initiated discussions about the importance of reflective classroom practice by asking teachers to carefully consider their beliefs not only about teaching and learning, but also about the students they teach. Teachers' reflective activity has been linked to student achievement and motivation (Çimer & Paliç, 2012), and reflective teachers have been shown to cope more capably with classroom management and the demands of curriculum and accountability (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). Finally, reflective teachers have higher expectations of their students (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2001), and are less likely to blame students for poor test scores (Cross, 2003; Delpit, 2006; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Schön (1983) insisted that truly reflective practitioners examine those social contexts that exist outside of the classroom and that, in turn, affect teaching and learning in the classroom. In their model of reflective teaching, Liston and Zeichner (1991) refer to four progressive stages of reflection that culminate in a critical examination of teaching as it impacts social justice. The first level of

reflection is *factual reflection*, which focuses on routines and procedures of classroom teaching. The second level is *procedural reflection*, which focuses on an evaluation of teaching outcomes. The third level is *justificatory reflection*, which focuses on teachers' rationales for teaching. And, at the fourth level, teachers have achieved *critical reflection*. They see the bigger picture of their students and the social contexts that impact their daily classroom practices and decisions.

Critical reflection as a construct is particularly important to urban teacher preparation because of what the literature documents about urban teachers' attitudes and beliefs about their students. That is, teachers in low-income, urban communities have been shown to have low expectations of their students (Dance, 2002; Delpit, 2006; Groulx, 2001) and believe them to have excessive behavioral challenges (Delpit, 2006; Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008; Schmidt, 2007). Urban teachers have also been shown to believe that their students are less motivated to succeed with school (Frankenberg, 2012; Groulx, 2001), have disproportionately disinterested or uninvolved parents (Gilbert, 1997; Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, & Gordon, 2006), and require more teacher-directed learning environments (Jamar & Pitts, 2005; McKinney, Chappell, Berry, & Hickman, 2009) than their more affluent peers.

To change these attitudes and beliefs, teachers need to learn from, rather than judge, their experiences in the classroom, and consciously think about their practice and their students (Coombs, 2003; Moore-Russo & Wilsey, 2014; van Halen-Faber, 1997). Yet, the literature on reflective teaching suggests that urban teachers do not routinely engage in the sort of reflective practice that would mitigate the aforementioned beliefs (Anderson & Stillman, 2010; Kagan, 1992). Thus, they get locked into patterns of negative perceptions about their students' motivations, interests, and potential (Walker, 2007).

From these literatures on urban teachers' beliefs and attitudes, as well as how they are impacted by reflective practice, there emerges a dilemma we face in urban teacher preparation, which I aim to explore in this paper. The typical structure of teacher preparation programs involves placing teacher candidates, from their matriculation through their capstone term, in urban classrooms with cooperating teachers who often reflect the literature (Gareis & Grant, 2014), and who may not only harbor but also reveal their negative attitudes towards, and low expectations of, their students (Hampton et al., 2008). Many of these cooperating teachers fail to model productive reflection (Moore-Russo & Wilsey, 2014), limiting the efficacy of this traditional methodology.

However, field experiences in teacher education are undeniably essential (e.g., Andrews, 1950; Clarke, Triggs & Nielsen, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Gareis & Grant, 2014; Levine, 2002; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Institutions count on their cooperating teachers to be conduits for reflective practice and to provide learning environments that support it. However, despite their importance, field experiences have been found to be haphazard (Darling-Hammond, 2000) and the least intentional component of teacher preparation (Levine, 2002). Teacher candidates report that their cooperating teachers are modeling few practices that support the development of learner-centered classrooms (Anderson & Stillman, 2010). By and large, cooperating teachers uncritically deliver mandated, test-oriented curriculum to their students and expect candidates to do the same (Anderson & Stillman, 2010). Cooperating teachers also seem to model few

strategies for using formative assessment to individualize instruction (Anderson & Stillman, 2010), leaving student-teachers with relatively shallow understandings of students as learners and the depth of involvement necessary to provide equitable learning opportunities to all (Brock, Moore, & Parks, 2007). Without the sort of mentorship that supports equitable and reflective teaching, I argue that student teachers are denied the opportunity to develop in situ and post-instructional reflection strategies that develop important habits of mind.

Mirroring the teacher candidates in the literature, my own students were not having regular opportunities in their fieldwork to learn about inquiry-based, equitable teaching and learning, despite their emphasis in our teacher preparation program. To address this conflict, I first studied the characteristics of effective mentor teachers, which included understanding pedagogical content knowledge, recognizing the characteristics of adult learners, promoting stages of teacher development, and practicing classroom observation techniques and coaching strategies (Andrews, 1950; Boatright, Phelps, & Schmitz, 1986; Clarke et al., 2014; Gareis & Grant, 2014). Feeling confident that my professional experiences and graduate degrees qualified me for the role, I decided to remove the cooperating teacher from the equation of my elementary mathematics methods courses whenever possible. I began recommending that teacher candidates enrolled in my courses teach Kindergarten through 6th grade children from our city's poorest neighborhoods at a local afterschool mathematics program where I would be the supervising teacher. In so doing, I sought to investigate:

1. How does pre-service teachers' self-reported readiness to teach in urban settings compare after field experiences with a traditional cooperating teacher in a regular classroom versus after field experiences without a traditional cooperating teacher in the afterschool mathematics program?
2. Where do pre-service teachers place themselves in Liston and Zeichner's (1991) model of reflective teaching after field experiences in urban settings with traditional cooperating teachers versus after field experiences in the afterschool mathematics program without one?

The Afterschool Mathematics Program and Field Experience Requirements

The graduate mathematics methods courses at my institution require 15 hours of field experiences in an elementary mathematics teaching and learning environment. The community center where students enrolled in my classes are encouraged to do their fieldwork serves families from over 40 of the city's poorest neighborhoods. At least 80% of the children who attend the center must come from families in which the annual household income is below the poverty line despite the parent's (parents') or guardian's (guardians') full-time employment or student status. The center has an established school-age program to which children are bussed from local public schools. The afterschool mathematics program takes place weekly and is free to both the center and its families. Materials for the program come from internal grants awarded through my institution, and pre-service teachers are responsible for all of the teaching.

The pragmatics of the program are such that each week, pre-service teachers develop a 15-20 minute lesson that they will teach to rotating groups of children. The children are divided into three classrooms: K-1; 2-3; and 4-6. Pre-service teachers are responsible for selecting a relevant Common Core State Standard for Mathematics (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), around which they build their lessons. The lessons are expected to be hands-on, engaging, and student-driven. Teacher candidates are strongly encouraged to avoid worksheets and other generic resources. The content of each week’s lesson plan was clearly defined in the course syllabus and was intended to keep pre-service teachers connected to their past, present, and future experiences with the children as well as the theoretical perspectives they read about for class. The content requirements of the lesson plan are found in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Content Requirements for Weekly Lesson Plans

Section	Content
How did the week’s assigned readings influence your lesson plan?	Describe and discuss how the assigned reading contributed to your thinking around appropriate content and pedagogy for your lesson.
How did last week’s teaching experience influence your lesson plan?	Describe and discuss your experiences last week with your groups of students and how those experiences influenced your content and pedagogy for your lesson.
Who are the students you are teaching?	Describe the students you will be teaching in as much detail as possible.
CCSSM Standard and your interpretation of what the standard means.	Include the CCSSM you are using
Write your understanding of the standard and if applicable, the particular part of the standard you will be focusing on and why.	
What are your professional goals for this lesson?	Identify and describe one aspect of your teaching you want to focus on improving through teaching the lesson. For example, you may want to work on speaking more slowly, maintaining eye contact with students, improving “wait time,” or learning students’ names and their home schools. Include a short plan for attaining this goal. Professional goals are meant to extend beyond a single lesson.
What are your social goals for students?	Identify and describe a social goal you would like to see students work on. These may include sharing materials, encouraging others, and not shouting out answers. These goals are intended to extend beyond a single lesson.
What is an appropriate literature connection for your lesson?	Provide the title of an appropriate piece of children’s literature that connects with the lesson.

Section	Content
What materials do you need?	List the materials necessary for the lesson.
What are the details of how you will introduce the lesson to children? What will you say? How will you animate your ideas and get children involved? How much time do you expect to spend on the introduction and the instructions for children's follow up work. What will students do and in what sort of groupings? Include any activity sheets. How will you conclude the lesson? What will you do while students are working independently or in groups?	Annotate the details of your planned lessons.

Each week, I observe teacher candidates with their students, and take notes that will inform individual and group feedback as well as contribute to my planning for upcoming class sessions. After the children have gone, we also have a large group discussion. During this meeting, pre-service teachers share their experiences with peers and exchange ideas and suggestions as they begin the reflection process and preparation for the next week's lesson. I also try to incorporate my observations into these whole group discussions and relate what I saw to our course readings.

The Study

Participants

To be eligible for the study, pre-service teachers had to be enrolled in my graduate mathematics methods course, and be completing their field experiences for it at the afterschool mathematics program. Eligible participants must also have completed or be completing another field experience for a different methods course in an urban classroom with a certified teacher. Of the 21 students who met the criteria, 18 participated. There were 15 female and 3 male participants. Nine participants were Caucasian women, four were Hispanic women, two were African American women, two were Caucasian men, and one was a Hispanic man.

Research Design and Data Collection

The research design was qualitative and involved case study methodology (Eisenhardt, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' views about teaching in urban settings and the impact of the presence or absence of a cooperating teacher on those views. All interviews began with the same set of questions designed to get a sense of participants' social, economic, and educational background. Participants were also asked why they went into teaching, and why they chose to attend our education program, which has an urban focus. In addition, interviews asked participants what they expected to find in a structured learning environment teaching low-income, inner city children, and why they thought they held such preconceptions. At the end of each interview, participants were asked where they would place themselves on Liston and Zeichner's (1991) scale of critical reflection after their experiences in a traditional classroom setting with a cooperating teacher, as well as after their experience in the afterschool program.

At the end of the academic year, I conducted an individual 60-90 minute interview with each pre-service teacher. I audio-taped each interview, making notes, and crafting in situ questions and topics to discuss as the conversations evolved. To ensure validity and reliability, I maintained an audit trail, and had two graduate assistants review the data for discrepancies and potential researcher bias (Peshkin, 2001). To limit the effect of personal subjectivities during the research process, I noted my personal reactions during the interviews, and reflected on the research process from technical, analytical, and personal perspectives.

Data Analysis

Audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim by the research assistant, and I randomly selected six to transcribe to confirm reliability of the data. To understand the detail and nature of each individual's story, I first did within-case analyses of the transcripts. Categories befitting participants' responses and contributions to interview dialogue were developed and the data were coded and recorded accordingly. For example, preconceptions about teaching in urban classrooms most influenced by popular culture were differentiated from those most influenced by upbringing and personal experiences. Thus, the former was coded "POP" and the latter "EXP" in the category "Preconceptions." In addition, flow charts of individual interviews were mapped out to capture the nuances and variations organic to each participant's experience. Field notes taken during each interview and used to propel it were used to supplement this analysis. There was overlap in students' experiences as well as clear distinctions. To comprehensively communicate the results of all interviews, I decided to do a cross-case search for patterns and similarities in the data (Eisenhardt, 2002), and subsequently chose three participants' stories that best represented the patterns that emerged.

Results

Case #1: Morgan

Morgan was a twenty-something Caucasian female, who grew up in an upper-middle class suburb of a large urban center in the mid-western United States. Morgan attended local public schools from Kindergarten through 12th grade. Both of her parents were college-educated with jobs outside of the home. Morgan's undergraduate degree was in a business-related field, and she had been employed in that profession for approximately four years until she found it to be unfulfilling and without opportunity to give back to society. Morgan decided to leave her job to pursue a teaching career because she had fond memories of working with youth in community settings and as a summer camp counselor. Our institution's timetable was appealing because it was compatible with maintaining a day job while attending night classes. She was unaware of our focus on urban education and social justice before applying.

Morgan described her initial reactions to working in schools with low-income populations as "hesitant," "nervous," and "anxious." She had little personal experience with low-income, urban children despite having spent time in soup kitchens and working with clothing drives. Going into her first urban teaching experience, Morgan expected "the kids to have more behavioral issues and be

really disrespectful. [She] thought their attitudes towards math would be negative and that they wouldn't be motivated to learn." Morgan had these preconceptions because of what she had been exposed to in the media and in popular movies like *Dangerous Minds* (1995). Academically, she expected "poor kids to be lower based on media reports of city schools not meeting scores and being short on resources."

Morgan's first field experience was at a school on a seven-year probation plan because it had earned less than 50% of the district's available "points" on its performance scale. The school's population included 95.8% low-income families. Additionally, 81.6% of the school's population was Hispanic, 13% was Black, 4.2% Caucasian, and 1.2% Asian. Morgan's cooperating teacher (CT) was very focused on test preparation, and the whole classroom was papered with resources. The CT was very vocal about her opinions of her students and clearly "put all her energies into those students who were achieving." Morgan witnessed her CT talk about her students' "problems" to other teachers in front of them, and would also talk about them negatively in the teachers' lounge. The impression Morgan got was that her CT had given up on some students and seemed to encourage Morgan to do the same by having her prepare scripted, textbook-based lessons without accommodations or adaptations for struggling students. Her CT's feedback only related to how she felt Morgan had done in reaching those children on the radar to succeed.

The environment made Morgan "feel sorry" for the children. She felt overwhelmed by the amount of work it would take to work in a "school like that." She shared that she had compiled a list of things she would do differently with the students such as taking down all of the test preparation resources and using more hands-on problems. But, at the same time, she felt discouraged because she did not feel it would be possible to apply what she was learning in her coursework to such a classroom because the institutional constraints of mandated test preparation would be a "deal-breaking deterrent."

Morgan's second field placement was at the afterschool mathematics program. She admitted that she was intimidated by having to develop lessons that germinated from a standard rather than from a textbook. She was also skeptical about the children succeeding and being respectful when she "wasn't their teacher and they had no reason to listen to her." She went on to explain that as she got to know the children in her groups, she developed a theory that "kids pick up on what others *don't* expect from them."

Morgan said that the most important difference she noticed between the two field placements was that she "thought more positive things about the [afterschool] kids than the [public school] kids." She was not proud of this, and she wished she could go back and "learn more about the first group of students and not just about their negative behaviors and depressing futures." The experience in the afterschool program changed some of her expectations for teaching. For example, she acknowledged that the main behavioral issues she encountered at the afterschool program were children being talkative or off-task, but she quickly followed up by saying "all kids are like that." She came to appreciate that knowing more about her students motivated her to develop "skill-appropriate" lessons that would both push them and reward them with success. After her first placement, Morgan was pretty sure that teaching in the inner city was not for her, and that the media and popular culture accurately depicted the problems of urban education. However, after spending time in the afterschool program, even the institutional constraints

seemed surmountable and she felt confident that if she decided to pursue teaching at an urban school that she would be prepared to do so.

Morgan gave herself a 2 on Liston and Zeichner's (1991) scale after her inner city placement with a CT. That is, she felt stuck at the *procedural reflection* stage, which focuses on an evaluation of teaching outcomes. She said:

We had to always be thinking about how a student's response to a question would score on a test. It had very little to do with what they understood about the math they were working on and everything to do with whether or not they could fit what they knew into a particular format.

After the afterschool teaching experience, Morgan rated herself a level 4. She believed that she understood the importance of *critical reflection*, and made it her responsibility to see the bigger picture of her students and the social contexts that impact their daily classroom lives. She said:

After each session I would have to figure out what had gone right and what had gone wrong. Then, I'd have to figure out why those things had gone right or wrong and decide what to change and keep for next week. I talked to my classmates, looked back on the articles we read for the week, and sometimes even read ahead for ideas. It got to the point that I was more excited about the things that went wrong so I could try and fix them. I don't know if I ever got it right, but I certainly got good at thinking about it!

Case #2: Ela

Ela, a Mexican-American woman in her late 20s, was brought up in an urban neighborhood. She attended a private Catholic school from Kindergarten through 8th grade before moving to a public, selective enrollment high school. She went to a large state college and graduated with a B.A. in Communications. After working in advertising for five years, Ela felt dissatisfied with her career path, and went looking for an education program. She decided on our program because of its Vincentian philosophy, and because her friends had positive experiences here as undergraduate students. She also wanted a program with an urban focus because she wanted to end up teaching "somewhere that would need [her] more than a suburban school." Ela had few expectations of the children she would meet in the inner city schools. She said, "all kids misbehave and we all know this." She also assumed all of the students would be at or near grade level in math, and that "textbooks would help guide and pace teaching." Her expectations stemmed from her own school experiences and limited exposure to "non-city" schools.

Ela's first field placement was at a public school in which 45% of families were low-income. Ela described her CT as strict, saying, "my CT did all the teaching in the beginning, and only let me teach a little toward the end. She was worried about handing over her class in case there were behavior issues." When the CT did let Ela teach, she told her how and what to teach, and interrupted regularly to direct students. Ela received very little feedback.

Ela said that her CT "had her favorites" and told Ela "what would happen with particular students in particular situations." Her CT had low expectations of her students when it came to academic work; she trusted them with very little

responsibility and gave them very little autonomy for anything having to do with the classroom. However, she did have high behavioral expectations of her students, and Ela believed that the students respected that and wanted to please their teacher by rising to her expectations. Although Ela's CT gave her very little opportunity to plan or teach, she did give Ela students' writing to grade. This was Ela's only opportunity to get to know the students. In their writing, Ela saw no evidence that justified her CT's negativity. Ela completed this field experience feeling as though she had gained no experience or insight into how to teach low-income students.

Ela's second field experience was at a city school whose student population had only 16.5% low-income families. She was not aware of the low poverty rate at this school and was surprised to find that this city school was not diverse or representative of the greater city's variable demographics. Parents were regularly involved and present at the school, which was again surprising to Ela. Her CT explained that the school used to be far more diverse but it became a "project" for some local politicians.

Ela claimed there was nothing remarkable about her CT's teaching style or the students' behavior or participation in class. She said her CT mostly taught from the textbook but "worked with groups of kids who needed more help." When Ela was responsible for teaching, her CT gave her lessons from the textbook to prepare, but also suggested she be ready to go over the material with small groups of students who needed extra support. Ela's CT gave feedback that was mostly limited to positive and motivating comments about Ela's magnetic personality and how the children enjoy having her in the room. The CT did make some suggestions for improvement like extending wait time and trying to involve more students in whole group discussions. However, the CT did not follow up with whether or not Ela improved in these areas.

Ela's third field experience was at the afterschool program. She was unprepared for the low academic level of the students. She commented on a 4th grade girl who could not add and mentioned that none of the children could multiply. Ela soon realized that the majority of the students in the program were well below grade level and lacked basic skills. She was puzzled by the fact that these students were working from the same 4th grade text the students at her second placement were using. She was glad to have been at the program because she realized she "would have been totally blindsided if [she] were to teach these kids in their home schools because [her] first two field placements didn't prepare [her] at all."

After completing her time at the afterschool program, Ela went back and looked up the demographic information for her other two schools and saw the huge difference in percentage of low-income families. Consequently, she wished she could go back to her first placement "with new eyes" and apply some of what she learned in the afterschool program to support the children there. Ela also talked about how she was initially uneasy about the group reflection and discussion time at the afterschool program. Her experience with her first CT heightened her concern for teachers talking about students with colleagues. However, Ela realized how useful it was to hear what others were doing and about teachers' concerns for their students' struggles. She saw that such conversations can be open and productive when approached with a problem-solving orientation rather than a carping one, and she realized that if she were to teach in an urban school, she could build a network of support among her colleagues and former classmates similar to

the one we had each week after teaching in the afterschool program. She said that such a support system made the prospect of teaching in urban schools “exciting” and “preferable to teaching in a silo elsewhere.”

On Liston and Zeichner’s (1991) scale of reflective practice, Ela placed herself at a 1, *factual reflection*, for the first field experience. She did not believe she had opportunity to go beyond seeing and understanding the routines and procedures of the classroom. Ela did not feel she had any responsibilities that required her to know the students, only the rules they needed to follow when they were together. For her second placement, Ela placed herself at a level 3, *justificatory reflection*. She believed she had several open and sincere conversations with teachers in her second school that helped her better understand their rationales for wanting to teach in certain communities. Following her experience at the afterschool program, Ela talked about the need for level 4, *critical reflection*. She finished the program determined to start every lesson considering students and how they matter. She finished her thoughts by saying “I learned something about urban education from urban education.”

Case #3: Syd

Syd was a thirty-year old Caucasian male who grew up in a middle-class, suburban community situated between two large urban centers in the Midwest. His mother was a homemaker, and his father was a small business owner. He and his siblings went to public schools from Kindergarten through 12th grade. He then attended a local university and earned a B.A. in psychology. Syd had been working in his family’s restaurant since graduation, but decided to return to college and become a teacher because he had “always been happiest working with kids.” He had been a tutor in high school and coached soccer and tee-ball for the local park district. He chose our program because of its location and its reputation. He was neither drawn to nor repelled by our college’s urban focus.

Syd’s primary source for what he expected from urban classrooms came from his early education coursework. He described his instructors’ focus on “what urban kids are dealing with, but not how to manage it.” His teachers emphasized “understanding kids from low-income neighborhoods and why they do what they do.” He did not hear anything positive about the urban school experience, which led to heightened anxiety and concern that the students would be “out of control” and he would not be able to relate to them or their circumstances.

Syd’s first field experience was at the afterschool program. He wasn’t sure what to expect because in his classes they had been discussing formal school settings and the program did not fit that model. But, he was certain “there would be the same kind of kids.” In his first week he planned a math game involving single-digit addition for kindergarten children. He expected that the children would not take him seriously, and would not respect him or his authority. However, he was surprised to find that the children were really excited to play his game and that they did not reflect the behavior and attitudes he had come prepared to face. In fact, it was difficult to reconcile his initial experience with his coursework and remained convinced that “it might be more jarring to see them in their home schools.” After a couple of weeks, however, it was hard for Syd to remember their home circumstances. He got to know the children and each week felt better able

to prepare lessons for them. He relaxed his negative expectations and came to see them as “kids, just kids.”

Syd’s second placement was at the same school where Morgan did her first placement but with a different CT. Syd described his CT as “dry.” “She did not react one way or the other to her students and rarely gave them any sort of feedback unless it was about their behavior.” She never spoke negatively about them and even had positive things to say about them from time to time. The children, Syd felt, seemed to respond in kind by showing little affect toward their schoolwork or their teacher. They were, however, compliant and respectful of the rules his CT had established. Syd thought that the students were getting tired of rotating student teachers. He was there four full days over four weeks, and other student teachers were there on the days he was not. This revolving door of student teachers made it seem impossible to him to build relationships, and he felt that the children did not seem motivated to invest in getting to know him.

Syd’s CT taught almost exclusively from the textbook and asked Syd to do the same. Syd perceived her to be “on a mission to get through her curriculum with as few disruptions as possible.” She never interfered with Syd’s lessons, but also did not provide much feedback or support. This meant that he had little to think about and reflect on for improvement. Each lesson he taught “was an entity unto itself.”

The most significant difference for Syd between his first and second field experiences was the opportunity to reflect on his teaching and how it impacted students. Syd commented that he would like to go back to the afterschool program now that he had more experience. He found new appreciation in the structure of the program and the responsibility to reflect. It pushed him to think deeply about the children he was teaching, and he realized in hindsight that such forced reflection kept his mind on students’ learning and off of the behaviors he initially feared. Syd commented on how helpful it was in the group sessions to listen to what his peers were doing and how they were thinking about their teaching. Although there was opportunity in his other courses to discuss with classmates what they were experiencing, everybody’s field placements were so different with so many different expectations that he often could not regularly relate to their stories.

On Liston and Zeichner’s (1991) scale of reflective teaching, Syd put himself at a 2, *procedural reflection*, immediately after completing his experience at the afterschool program. He admitted that while immersed in it, he was always a little concerned about the children’s “true behaviors” coming out and that he would lose control. After his second placement, however, he was motivated to reflect retrospectively on what he had learned at the afterschool program and believed that he ended up as a “critical reflector,” who was “concerned with and motivated by students’ lives and how they live them.” With respect to his second field experience, Syd did not believe that he was pushed to go beyond *factual reflection* (level 1). The “dryness” of his CT and the lack of affect from the children contributed to a sterile environment that seemed to be all about adhering to routines and procedures.

Syd expressed surprise about his final thoughts as they came out of his mouth. He was surprised that he had been in two field placements with children who came from extreme poverty yet did not “act like it” – or what he had constructed “it” to be based on his early education courses. He was surprised that he had been with a CT who, while not overtly negative with or about her students, still did not enable their achievement to any great extent. He was also surprised by how much

reflection and community mattered for his professional growth and development. While Syd said that he was not sure that at any point in the course he felt any more or less prepared to teach in urban settings than in non-urban ones, his attitude had shifted toward urban education significantly from the beginning of the course to the end. He felt that he formed his conclusions about what to expect in urban schools pretty early in his education program, and he had been premising his expectations for teaching in the inner-city on those. He said that his revised expectations were “a relief” and “carried positive energy” into his forthcoming career choices.

Discussion and Recommendations

Most of the teacher candidates in this study worked with cooperating teachers who failed to model not only the practice of critically reflective, adaptive teaching, but also the need for it. In the data analyzed and reported here, two notable impediments to pre-service teachers’ critical reflection surfaced. The most common impediment to critical reflection centered on discrepant opportunities for teacher candidates to plan, teach, and reflect in the field. Many methods instructors have little to no control over, or knowledge of, what their teacher candidates are able to observe and accomplish in the field (Proctor, Rentz, & Jackson, 2001). Furthermore, individual cooperating teachers approach their mentoring roles with great variance. Some turn over their classrooms almost immediately, while others are reluctant to let student teachers plan and carry out lessons until the very end of the cycle. As a result, most study participants commented on the futility of many of their class discussions about field experiences.

Inconsistent opportunities to teach also meant inconsistent opportunities for constructive feedback, which is essential to developing reflective and skillful teachers (Çimer & Paliç, 2012). Even when student teachers were offered feedback, the quality and quantity of that feedback varied as dramatically as the opportunities to teach. Moreover, without access to regular and recurrent teaching opportunities, student teachers could not develop relationships with, and get to know, their students. This was problematic because knowing them, their circumstances, their strengths, their needs, and their communities, is at the core of successful and rewarding teaching in urban areas (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nagle, 2009).

The Afterschool Mathematics Program as a Complement to Change

At the afterschool mathematics program, all students had similar responsibilities: to plan, teach, and reflect. They also had equal opportunities to get feedback and mentorship. During the quarter, everyone planned and taught a lesson each week for groups of increasingly familiar students. Everyone participated in post-teaching discussions about their successes and struggles, and everyone listened to and offered feedback and ideas to one another. Everyone was responsible for submitting the same package of written work, which I reviewed and returned with individual feedback and suggestions. This uniformity came across in the interviews as “appreciated, helpful, equitable, supportive, and encouraging.” It also gave me, as the instructor, a more comprehensive view of my students and allowed me to engage in more effective and relevant planning for our class sessions.

Implications and Conclusions

Faculty who teach courses with field hours may consider finding ways of including placements that balance opportunities for teacher candidates to (a) gain substantial and recurring experiences planning, teaching, and reflecting; (b) get regular, productive, critical feedback that inspires reflection and growth; and (c) come to know the nuances, needs, and strengths of the students they are and will be teaching. At this time, traditional classroom settings may not be the most amenable environments, and thus faculty and college staff may need to forge relationships with, or innovate their own, alternative learning sites (Walker, 2007).

Utilizing the afterschool mathematics program and its structure provided teacher candidates a place to confront and consider their preconceptions about teaching in urban schools without the potentially biased filter of a cooperating teacher. The alternative setting was fundamental in developing participants' self-perceived readiness to teach in urban schools, and also allowed them to plan for, teach, and reflect on a representative population of children, while still being supported by a community of peers and experts. The program also made apparent for pre-service teachers the value of habitual critical reflection, particularly in contrast with the factual, procedural, and justificatory reflection that characterized their traditional field placements.

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