

The New Changing Faces of Urban Teachers and Their Emerging Teaching Belief

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Alternative certification programs are changing the face of the teaching profession. Not only have these programs attracted individuals from different disciplines and educational backgrounds, they have also changed the ethnic and gender makeup of the classroom teaching population. This suggests an increase in point-of-view diversity in the teaching workforce which in turn suggests potential opportunities to effect planned variation in the educational experiences of students in urban schools. The current study examines the perceptions of teachers who come from these non-traditional programs. The study also addresses cultural issues related to teacher perceptions of effective classroom learning environments. The results in the present study suggest that a majority of the teachers surveyed perceived that a classroom that supports cooperative or group activities is an effective classroom environment. Finally, there were significant differences in teacher perceptions of effective teacher practices across teacher ethnicities. These differences, if viewed as resources, may manifest themselves in the form of pathways toward enriching the educational experiences of students in urban schools.

Introduction

In an effort to address teacher shortages many states have established and implemented alternate routes to teaching programs to attract individuals from other disciplines into the

teaching profession. Alternate routes to teaching programs or alternative certification programs (ACP) as they are commonly called, offer individuals with no teaching backgrounds opportunities to become certified teachers by meeting state requirements through nontraditional means. These programs have successfully attracted college graduates who ordinarily would not have become teachers. In a recent national survey of alternative certification program graduates, about 50 percent indicated that they would not have become teachers if there had not been an alternative certification program (National Center for Educational Information, 2005). Furthermore, 20 percent of those surveyed said they would not have gone back to college to obtain a teaching certificate.

Review of Literature

Alternative certification programs are changing the face of the teaching profession. Not only have these programs attracted individuals from different disciplines and educational backgrounds, they have also changed the ethnic and gender makeup of the classroom teaching population. Traditionally, the teaching profession has been dominated by females of European descent (National Center of Education Information, 2005). However, in recent years ACP program have attracted more males and minorities into the teaching profession. This is especially true in ACP programs that support urban schools where there has been a 20 percent increase in minority enrollment (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2006). Hispanics represent the fastest growing ethnic group among urban school teachers, nevertheless the number of African Americans and East Asians enrolling in ACP programs have also increased drastically. This suggests an increase in point-of-view diversity in the teaching workforce which in turn suggests potential opportunities to effect planned variation in the educational experiences of students in urban schools thus

enriching the educational experiences of students in urban schools.

While ACP programs have had a major impact on reducing teacher shortages in urban schools, research studies continue to raise issues with these programs (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004; Earley, Goldberg, & Huie, 2005; National Center for Alternative Certification, 2006). A major issue traditionally cited is that pre-service teachers enrolled in ACP programs are allowed to teach in classrooms before completing their certification. Moreover, the argument goes on, many of the ACP teachers lack sufficient training in pedagogy theory and classroom management skills (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2006; Earley et al., 2005). ACP teachers must rely on perceptions about learning in the role of practicing educators. The effect is that these teachers generally become frustrated and over fifty percent will leave the teaching profession in their first five years (National Center for Educational Information, 2005).

Recently research has begun to examine the critical role that teacher perceptions of how classroom instruction and student learning contribute to or influence student outcomes. Researchers have found relationships between teacher perceptions and instructional practice (Gordon, 2003). It, specifically, was found that teacher perceptions are directly manifested in practice in classrooms. For example, a teacher who perceives that the classroom environment should be a competitive setting is more likely to believe that students need to be aggressive in his/her classroom to be successful. It is also known that teacher perceptions about learning must coincide with student perceptions in order to maximize learning. What is not known are the perceptions of teachers who come from a non-traditional program? This is primarily because research on teacher perceptions has primarily focused on teachers who come from traditional teacher education programs (Earley et al., 2005). The extent to which cultural

issues inform the perceptions of the ACP teacher is also not known. Are, for example, certain teacher perceptions unique to different ethnic groups? To answer these questions the present study will examine perceptions of first year teachers who are currently enrolled in ACP programs. Furthermore, the current study will compare these perceptions across five different ethnic groups to see if there are cultural issues that are associated with teacher perceptions of learning and effective teaching.

Method

The data used in the present study were collected over a four year time span from teachers enrolled in an Alternative Certification Program. The teachers were all enrolled in an ACP program sponsored by a large urban school district located in the Southwest. The sample was limited to new teachers; in this case only those teachers who were in their first semester in the classroom. Furthermore, only secondary teachers were included in this sample. The total sample for the present study included 624 new secondary teachers. Finally, all of the sample teachers were enrolled in courses in order to complete state certification requirements. The ethnic make-up of the sample was 258 European-Americans, 158 African Americans, 81 Hispanic, 94 East Asian (Vietnam, Taiwan and Filipinos decent) and 48 South Asian (India decent).

The instrument used in the present study is a modified version of the Akins (1998) “Emerging Teaching Scale” survey. The instrument measures teacher perceptions about student learning and effective teaching practices. The survey consists of statements related to student learning and effective teaching practices. Individuals were asked to indicate if they agreed or did not agree with each statement by answering yes or no. One statement for example asked the teacher to indicate yes or no to the statement “Learning takes place most effective under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another.” The percent of teachers who

agreed or did not agree with the statements included in the survey were compared across five different ethnic groups. To examine if significant differences existed in percentages, a chi-square test was performed. The statistical advantage of using a chi-square test is that it is distribution free.

Results

Table 1, Teachers' Perceptions of Student Learning and Effective Teaching Practices, reports the overall percentages of teachers who agreed with each of the items used to measure perceptions of how students learn. The highest percent of agreement on how students learn was "Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another." The overall percentage of teachers who agreed with this statement was about ninety four percent. About ninety three percent of all teachers in the sample agreed with the two statements, "Students can learn more by sharing their ideas rather than by keeping their ideas to themselves" and "Ideas of other students are useful for helping another student understand the content of lessons." Fifty four percent of the teachers agreed with the statement "To do well in my class, students must be assertive." About 38 percent of the teachers in the sample agreed with the two statements, "Most of what students learn is learned from other Students" and "Most of what students learn is learned from their teacher." Twenty-six percent of the teachers agreed with the statement "Most of what students learn they learn on their own." Less than 20 percent of the teachers agreed with the remaining three statements, "Students learn more by working on their own rather working with others" "Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are working independently of one another" and "Most of what students learn is learned from books." The percentages were 18.2%, 14.3% and 13.4% respectively.

Table 2, Teachers Perceptions of Student Learning and Effective Teaching Practices, reports the percent

differences on the measures of student learning perceptions across ethnic groups. The results indicate that several significant differences existed. There was a significant difference ($p < .001$) in the percentages of teachers agreeing with the statement, “Most of what students learn, they learn on their own” across the five ethnic groups. The chi-square value associated with these differences was 53.2. Fifty percent of Hispanic teachers and South Asian native teachers agreed with this statement. Thirty two percent of the African-American teachers agreed with this statement compared to about thirteen percent of the European-Americans and East Asian decent teachers. Statement two, “Students learn more by working on their own rather working with others” also indicated there was a significant difference ($p < .001$) on how teachers perceived this statement. The chi-square value associated with these differences was 54.2. East Asian teachers had the highest degree of agreement in this statement with about 46 percent of the teachers. A little over 20 percent (21.4%) of the European-Americans teachers agreed with this statement. Less than 10 percent of the Hispanic (8.3%) and African-American (4.8%) teachers agreed with this statement. The statement, “Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are working independently of one another” produced significant differences ($p < .001$) in agreement across the five ethnic groups. The chi-square value associated with these differences was 65.5. Fifty percent of South Asian decent agreed with this statement compared to about 27 of the East Asian teachers. Fifteen percent of the African-American and about seven percent of the European-Americans teachers agreed with this statement. Finally, none of the Hispanic teachers agreed with this statement. There was a significant difference ($p < .001$) on teacher perceptions of the statement, “Students can learn more by sharing their ideas rather than by keeping their ideas to themselves” across the five ethnic groups. The chi-square value associated with these differences was 30.6. One-hundred percent of the South Asian teachers agreed with this

statement. More than ninety percent of the European-Americans (97.4), Hispanic (92.3%) and East Asian (91.7%) agreed with this statement. Slightly over eighty percent (82.6%) of African-American teachers agreed with this statement. There was a significant difference ($p < .001$) in agreement levels on the statement, “Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are in competition with one another.” About one-third of the Hispanic (36.4%) and African-American (33.3%) teachers agreed with the statement. Twenty-five percent of the East Asian teachers compared to 19.4% of the European-Americans teachers. None of the East Asian teachers agreed with the statement.

The largest reported chi-square value indicating significant differences ($p < .001$) exist among the five ethnic groups was on the statement, “To do well in my class, students must be assertive.” One hundred percent of the South Asian teachers agreed with this statement compared to only one-third of the European-Americans teachers. About eighty two percent of the East Asian and seventy three African-American teachers agreed with this statement. Forty percent of the Hispanic teachers agreed with this statement. There was a significant difference on the percentages of agreement on the statement “Most of what students learn is learned from other students.” About 64 percent of the Hispanic compared to 23 percent of the European-Americans teacher agreed to this statement. Fifty two percent African American, 43 percent of the South Asian and 27 percent East Asian teachers agreed with this statement.

Perceptions of the final two statements, “Most of what students learn is learned from their teacher” and “Most of what students learn is learned from books” indicated significant differences ($p < .001$) exist. On the first statement sixty percent of South Asian teachers compared to eighteen percent of East Asian teachers agreed with this statement.

Forty five percent of the African American teachers, followed by thirty seven percent European-Americans teachers, and a little over thirty six (36.4%) of the Hispanic teachers agreed with this statement. On the second statement, “Most of what students learn is learned from books” twenty five percent of the East Asian teachers agreed with this statement. Twenty percent of the South Asian teachers followed by nineteen percent of the African-American teachers and a little above nine percent (9.4%) of the European-Americans teachers agreed with this statement. Finally, none of the Hispanic teachers agreed with this statement.

The statement, “Learning takes place most effective under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another” indicated differences ($p < .01$) exist in the percent of teachers that agreed with statement across ethnicity groups. European-Americans, Hispanic and East Asian teachers reported above ninety percent levels of agreement with this statement. Their reported percentages were 97.4%, 91.7% and 92.9% respectively. Eighty seven percent of the African-American teachers and 85.7% of the teachers of South Asian decent agreed with this statement.

Discussion

Teacher shortages in urban school will continue to be a major problem until teacher preparation programs are able to better train teachers for the environment they serve. Urban educators are faced with many unique situations to be successful in their school environment. These professionals must understand the institutional factors that exist in high-need and typically under funded schools and school districts that can undermine students’ access to excellent and equitable education opportunities (Banks, 2006). For instance, climates of high expectation are routine in schools that serve children from middle income and European-American backgrounds (Brophy & Good, 2000; Wilen, 2004). The opposite is true in schools that serve lower income urban learners from ethnic

groups of color (Wilén, 2004). These schools are typically characterized by climates of low expectation (Edmonds, 1979; Wilén, 2004). Research has shown a high positive correlation between teacher expectation and student performance (Brophy & Good, 2000; Wilén, 2004). The first important finding in the present study relates to the descriptive results that summarize teacher perceptions about student learning. The results in the present study suggest that majority of the teachers surveyed perceived that a classroom that supports cooperative or group activities is an effective classroom environment. This is of particular interest because research has shown that cooperative education enhances classroom instructions by providing practical work experience that is relevant to students' career goals (Kerka, 1998). Furthermore, cooperative learning also capitalizes on the heterogeneous student bodies of most urban schools (Brophy & Good, 2000). Finally, the teachers in our sample did not perceive environments that emphasize competition nature. This is also of particular interest because research recommends that to help urban students achieve, the teacher must help them believe they can become good students (Wilén, 2004). Moreover urban students do better in a more nurturing environment that do not create in classroom rivalries (Stone, 2002).

Another important finding from this study was that teacher perceptions of effective teacher practices significantly differed across teacher ethnicities. African American, South and East Asian teacher perception of an effective learning environment was that students need to be assertive in their classroom to be successful. European-American and Hispanic teachers on the other hand in large disagreed with this statement. Hispanic and South Asian teachers were more likely to agree with the statement what students learn they learned on their own compared to European-American, African-American and East Asian teachers. A larger percent of African-American and Hispanic teachers agreed with the

statement what students learn is learned from other students compared to their European-American, East and South Asian counterparts. More South Asian teachers agreed with statement that what students learn they learn from their teacher. Likewise, more from other South Asian teachers agreed with statement that effective learning take place when students are working independent of one another.

Although the findings in the present study suggest that several significant differences exist among ACP teachers across ethnic groups, further correlational and experimental research is needed to verify these results. Other research issues that remain to be investigated in this area include examining: (a) teacher perceived ideal classroom learning environment that should exist in secondary classroom, (b) whether these perceptions are and should be consistent across all content areas, (c) how these perceptions relate to students of different cultures and, (d) extents to which gender factors may be associated with ACP teacher perceptions. Future studies should also attempt to examine ACP teacher perceptions and associate them with student achievement, especially in urban settings where many more students are at risk of dropping out and not furthering their education. These and similar issues should be examined so that practitioners and researchers may continue to understand the impact of teacher perceptions in order to improve ACP teacher preparation programs.

While the findings in the present study suggest research issues that remain to be investigated, they also suggest policy and practice that may result in meaningful learning experiences for students in urban schools. Our findings suggest that personnel placed strategically and appropriately would result in improved outcomes of schooling for urban learners. Teachers, for example, who do not believe in and do not practice cooperative learning or competition,

should not be assigned to teach urban learners who would benefit from these methodologies.

Three items found in Table 2, below, among others, suggest policy. Note the disparity between the responses of Black versus white teachers with respect to the following three items:

- Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are in competition with one another.
- To do well in my class students must be assertive.
- Most of what students learn is learned from other students

Clearly urban students who are competitive, assertive and who learn from one another who are assigned to teachers who lack agreement with these three statements are in less supportive learning environments than would be the case if they are assigned to teachers who agree with these statements. Thus our results suggest policy that mitigates against mismatch between teacher and student proclivities and behavior such as those suggested by the examples pointed to here.

A third implication is related to the instructional program. If it is important for teachers to be responsive to the nature and needs of urban students, it follows that those teachers must align the pace, structure and content of instruction with the background, training and experience brought to the school by urban students. This necessarily means that teacher perceptions of student learning and effective teaching practices of some urban teachers may be in need of modification would they be prepared by training and experience to provide meaningful learning experiences for students in urban schools.

Summary

Alternative certification programs are changing the face of the teaching profession. Not only have these programs attracted individuals from different disciplines and educational backgrounds, they have also changed the ethnic and gender makeup of the classroom teaching population. This suggests an increase in point-of-view diversity in the teaching workforce which in turn suggests potential opportunities to effect planned variation in the educational experiences of students in urban schools. The current study examines the perceptions of teachers who come from these non-traditional programs. The study also addresses cultural issues related to teacher perceptions of effective classroom learning environments. The results in the present study suggest that a majority of the teachers surveyed perceived that a classroom that supports cooperative or group activities is an effective classroom environment. Additionally, there were significant differences in teacher perceptions of effective teacher practices across teacher ethnicities. These differences, if viewed as resources, may manifest themselves in the form of pathways toward enriching the educational experiences of students in urban schools.

Table 1
Teachers Perceptions of Student Learning and Effective Teaching Practices

Most of what students learn, they learn on their own.	Yes No	26.3% 73.7%
Students learn more by working on their own rather than working with others.	Yes No	18.2% 81.8%
Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are working independently of one another.	Yes No	18.3% 81.7%
Ideas of other students are useful for helping students understand the content of lessons.	Yes No	92.5% 7.5%
Students can learn more by sharing their ideas rather than by keeping their ideas to themselves.	Yes No	92.6% 7.4%
Learning takes place most effective under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another.	Yes No	93.5% 6.5%
Learning takes place most effectively under conditions conditions in which students are in competition with one another.	Yes No	22.5% 77.5%
To do well in my class, students must be assertive	Yes No	54.8% 45.2%
Most of what students learn is learned from other students	Yes No	38.8% 61.2%
Most of what students learn is learned from their teacher	Yes No	38.2% 61.8%
Most of what students learn is learned from books	Yes No	13.4% 86.6%

Table 2
Teachers Perceptions of Student Learning and Effective Teaching Practices

		American/European	American/African-	Hispanic	East Asian	South Asian	Chi-Sq
		N=243	N=158	N=81	N=94	N=48	
Most of what students learn, they learn on their own.	Yes	13.2%	32.0%	50.0%	13.3 %	50.0%	53.2***
	No	83.8%	68.0%	50.0%	86.7 %	50.0%	
Students learn more by working on their own than rather than working with others.	Yes	21.4%	4.8%	8.3.0%	45.5%	20.0%	54.2***
	No	78.6%	95.2%	91.7%	54.5%	80.0%	
Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are working independently of one another.	Yes	7.1%	15.0%	00.0%	27.3%	50.0%	65.5***
	No	92.9%	85.0%	100.0%	72.7%	50.0%	
Ideas of other students are useful for helping other students understanding the content lessons.	Yes	94.3%	92.0%	92.3%	92.9%	100.0%	3.1
	No	5.7%	8.0%	7.7%	7.1%	00.0%	
Students can learn more by sharing their ideas rather by keeping their ideas to themselves	Yes	97.4%	82.6%	92.3%	91.7%	100.0%	30.6***
	No	2.6%	17.4%	7.7%	8.3%	00.0%	
Learning takes	Yes	97.4%	87.0%	91.7%	92.9%	85.7%	17.5**

place most effective under conditions in which students are working cooperatively with one another.	No	2.6%	13.0%	8.3%	7.1%	14.3%	
Learning takes place most effectively under conditions in which students are in competition with one another.	Yes No	19.4% 80.6%	33.3% 66.7%	36.4% 63.6%	00.0% 100.0%	25.0% 75.0%	34.9***
To do well in my class, students must be assertive	Yes No	33.3% 66.7%	72.7% 27.3%	40.0% 60.0%	81.8% 18.2%	100.0% 00.0%	106.8***
Most of what students learn is learned from other students.	Yes No	22.6% 77.4%	52.0% 48.0%	63.6% 36.4%	27.3% 72.7%	42.9% 57.1%	52.7***
Most of what students learn is learned from their teacher.	Yes No	37.0% 63.0%	45.5% 54.5%	36.4% 63.6%	18.2% 81.8%	60.0% 40.0%	20.4***
Most of what students learn is learned from books.	Yes No	9.4% 90.6%	19.0% 81.0%	00.0% 100.0%	25.0% 100.0%	20.0% 80.0%	26.7***

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