

Preparing White Preservice Art Educators to Teach in Urban Classrooms

Judith Briggs
Illinois State University

Abstract

Within a two-year mixed method action research study, two cohorts of White senior preservice Art Educators reflected on anti-racist and anti-classist course materials and attended field experiences within urban schools. A majority of both cohorts identified systemic racism within social systems and language after engaging in course materials. Urban teaching intentions, teaching efficacy and urban teaching attitudes did not show a significant change within the first cohort while the second cohort demonstrated a significant change in teaching efficacy. Both cohorts showed a positive shift in urban teaching intentions. Both cohorts reflected positively on the urban field experience site. The second cohort exhibited greater empathy for urban student concerns and a greater appreciation for urban teachers' efforts. More time spent in schools with urban teacher mentors and students, along with a shift in the urban field experience to later in the semester may have contributed to the positive change in results.

Keywords: preservice art educators, urban education, race, social class, white privilege

Approximately 78% of the students who comprise urban classrooms are of minority groups (U. S. Department of Education, 2009), while a majority of the teaching population is White (National Education Association, 2010). Candidates in teacher preparatory programs also reflect this dynamic (National Education Association, 2010). Teacher training is mainly directed towards the teaching of White, middle-class children (Delpit, 2006). Within a mixed-method action research study, a White university Art Education professor and preservice Art Educators examine the effects of race and class within educational environments and chart their attitudes towards teaching in an urban environment. This study's findings offer suggestions for teacher preparation programs that are prepared to meet the needs of public education's urban demographic.

Conceptual Framework

Teaching is a political act. When done unreflectively, it can maintain power structures that privilege dominant social groups (Wise, 2008). Teacher training programs shape these beliefs and practices, along with the teacher candidate's prior educational experiences. Many of these experiences have not included a discussion of race or class (Delpit, 2006). When unexamined for racial and class biases, White educators view their actions as being normative, expecting all students to behave in a similar manner (Ferguson, 2001).

Discussing race in the preservice classroom can be a difficult task for White educators and for White students. According to Desai (2010), most White teachers claim that they do not see race in the classroom, denying the part that race systemically plays within our society. Whites are taught not to recognize White privilege (McIntosh, 1992). When teachers are unaware of their students' identities and histories, it is difficult to create a climate for learning (Davis, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative for the White preservice educators to critically reflect upon their own attitudes towards race, class, and privilege before entering the classroom, particularly the urban classroom (hooks, 1994).

The responsibility of owning and evaluating one's values and beliefs while encountering the Other creates a climate for potential change, empathy, and respect. It is important that this encounter is on equal terms and that one group does not take a position of racial superiority. Teachers must ask themselves how their cultural perspectives color their views of the world (Hidalgo, 1993). Talking and listening with respect to school children about their experiences (Davis, 2009, Ladson-Billings, 1994), respecting student silence (Delpit, 2006), and engaging with community (Daniel & Drew, 2011) are all as much a part of the educational experience as is relaying information. Listening with the intent of believing is a powerful tool for learning as well as a moral obligation (Noddings, 2003). Anti-racist education examines power relationships and equity issues, and gives voice to people who are frequently silenced (Lee, 2009). University educator researchers are increasingly finding ways to enable preservice educators to critically address race and class in their teaching praxis (Davis, 2009; McIntyre, 1997; Lenski, Crumpler, Stallworth & Crawford, 2005). Students interpret present experiences according to past encounters, scaffolding new knowledge onto previous analyses. The content of prior knowledge affects the way that students extract new information. Faulty prior knowledge interferes with learning; it can be more difficult for students to unlearn inaccurate knowledge than it can be for them to learn new information (Daniel & Drew, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative that preservice educators openly reassess their own assumptions about urban populations. Often, these assumptions are based upon a deficit model of education in which urban students of color represent a sense of "lack," rather than one of resiliency and knowledge (Davis, 2009, Ladson-Billings, 1994, Evans-Winters, 2005). Critical class readings and discussion, reflective journaling, and urban clinical experiences create a climate in which White preservice educators may begin to reverse this idea of urban inadequacy.

Methods

Over the course of two years, the researcher engaged her preservice Art Education students in a mixed method action research study that asked the following research question: "Does anti-racist and anti-classist instruction shift preservice Art Educators' attitudes towards urban education?" Educators use qualitative action research to assess and reflect upon their pedagogy with the primary intention of improving their own practice (Daniel & Drew, 2011). The study encompassed two separate Art 307: Art for Diverse Populations classes consisting of 35 White senior preservice Art Educators in total over two semesters, Spring 2010 and Spring 2011. All students participated in the same class activities, but 29 self-selected to be a part of the study.

Quantitative Measurement

At the beginning of each semester, students completed a university College of Education Urban Education Survey consisting of 56 questions that included four measures: urban teaching intentions (UTI), urban teaching attitudes (UEA), multicultural attitudes (TMAS), and sense of teacher efficacy (TSES). “All measures were scored along a 5-point Likert-type scale. The UTI measured students’ intentions of teaching in an urban school. The UEA measured participants’ endorsement of stereotypical beliefs about urban schools” (College Teacher Education Pipeline™, 2010). The 20-item TMAS survey measured multicultural awareness for K-12 teachers and was slightly adapted for teacher candidates (Ponterotto, Baluch, Greig, & Rivera, 1998). Six items relevant to urban education were added to the 12 item TSES short-form, which had an alpha of .90 (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The TSES measured potential effectiveness of preservice educators within the classroom. Students completed the same survey at the end of the semester and a paired-samples t-test was conducted for each of the four scales to determine changes between administrations (College Teacher Education Pipeline™, 2010).

Qualitative Methods

The researcher collected corresponding written assignments, reflective journals, and clinical reflections to discern and code reoccurring themes (Cresswell, 1994; Maxwell, 1996). Reflective journals were personal vehicles of expression. Students shared their contents with the class at their own discretion. Often, the researcher was the only other participant aware of student attitudes. While the quantitative survey results provided a slight shift in preservice Art Educators’ attitudes towards teaching in an urban environment, qualitative data revealed a more articulate and nuanced positive change in attitude towards race, social class, and White privilege.

The researcher triangulated the data from the two methods to derive meaning from the experience (Creswell 1994). Students’ journals illustrated rich internal dialogues of self-exploration that occurred on several levels of social awareness. This paper examines these dialogues, using student voices, to make recommendations for future anti-racist and anti-classist education within the university classroom.

Participants

Art 307: Art for Diverse Populations met once a week for three hours. The average age of the participants was in the early twenties. All participants were middle class. Participants roughly reflected the university student demographic. Approximately 60% percent of the students were from the Chicago area, while almost 21% were from the county in which the university was located (University Planning and Institutional Research, 2011). Thirteen participants took part in the study in Spring 2010, and 16 participants took part in the study in Spring 2011.

Setting

The study took place in a large Midwestern university within driving distance of Chicago. All study participants elected to take a one-day field experience to visit two Chicago public high school art departments located in a predominately Mexican-American working class Chicago community. The high schools were partners within the university’s College Teacher Education

Pipeline™ initiative. Both schools contained populations that were approximately 81% Hispanic and 19% African American. Ninety-eight percent of the students in one school came from families of low income. Eighty-seven percent of the students in the second school came from low-income homes.

Class Structure

Assignments. Both classes received the same readings and the same assignments. The first half of the 16 week semester consisted of reading and discussing anti-racist literature, the second half of the semester focused on inclusion of students with disabilities, English as Second Language learners, and students of diverse genders. The researcher made no claim to be an expert on racism, but stressed that course activities were meant to open a discussion about race and class in which everyone, including the teacher, was involved; everyone would learn from each other (McIntyre, 1997).

Both cohorts read a chapter from Tim Wise's (2008) *White Like Me* in which Wise articulated the inherent nature of racism and American White assimilationist policies. Students viewed and discussed the Doll Test as shown on MSNBC's *A Conversation About Race* (2008), along with a portion of Wise's (2010) *Pathology of Privilege* lecture which put race and class within a historical perspective. Students read and reflected upon a chapter of Ferguson's (2001) *badboys* that exposed the way in which some teachers pathologized young boys of color and penalized student voices. Students viewed a video of artist Kerry James Marshall talking about his work, and listened to a podcast of Marshall (2006) relating his experience as a person of color who successfully negotiated the White art world. After reading an account of how activist artist and Art Educator, Olivia Gude (n.d.), worked with middle school students to deconstruct racial roles within Disney's *The Lion King* (1995) and evaluate attitudes associated with colors, students found and reflected upon visual examples of color stereotypes and counter stereotypes. After class discussion students viewed the documentary, *Meeting David Wilson*, in which filmmaker, David Wilson (2008), sought out and met David Wilson, a descendant of the family that once owned his. The film made a case for interracial dialogue and called for educators to teach children about the power of their ancestors. An urban field experience, in which students were placed in the position of the Other, provided another level of awareness.

Urban field experience. Both cohorts of preservice Art Educators observed urban public school art classes and went on a scavenger hunt of the community's main shopping street. Groups of four to five university students teamed with high school students to visit local bakeries, shopping malls, and groceries. The 2010 cohort observed for three and one-half hours within the local schools and then toured the National Museum of Mexican Art. The 2011 cohort observed five and one-half hours within the schools, and did not visit the museum. Both cohorts ate in local restaurants, but the 2011 cohort hosted their high school guides for a meal. The 2011 cohort spoke with the urban teachers about their jobs.

The preservice students wrote clinical reflections about their urban field experiences according to a specified rubric that valued insightful comments. Students in the 2010 cohort were not required to link these reflections to class materials. Students in the 2011 cohort were required to link clinical reflections to class materials and to write double the amount for each clinical hour. Weekly journal expectations remained the same for both cohorts.

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative Results

In 2010 the Urban Education Survey found little change in the already positive preservice Art Educators' multicultural attitudes, a slight, but not significant, decrease in attitudes towards urban education, and a slight, but not significant, decrease in attitudes towards teacher self-efficacy. The Survey indicated a slight, but not significant rise in intentions to teach in urban schools. In 2011 intentions to teach in urban environments also rose, only to a slight degree, along with urban teaching attitudes. However, 2011 analyses demonstrated a significant increase in teaching efficacy; at the conclusion of the course students were more confident in their ability to become urban educators.

The College Teacher Education Pipeline (2010, 2011) analysis ranked data on a scale from one to five to mark course effectiveness and student engagement. A ranking of one meant that the course had no significance on student attitudes and intentions, and the students were not engaged. A ranking of three meant the course had moderate influence, and the students were moderately engaged, and a ranking of five meant that the course had a very significant influence, and the students were significantly engaged. Within both cohorts students came into the course moderately engaged with the material and remained that way at the course's end (B. Showalter, personal communication, August 3, 2012).

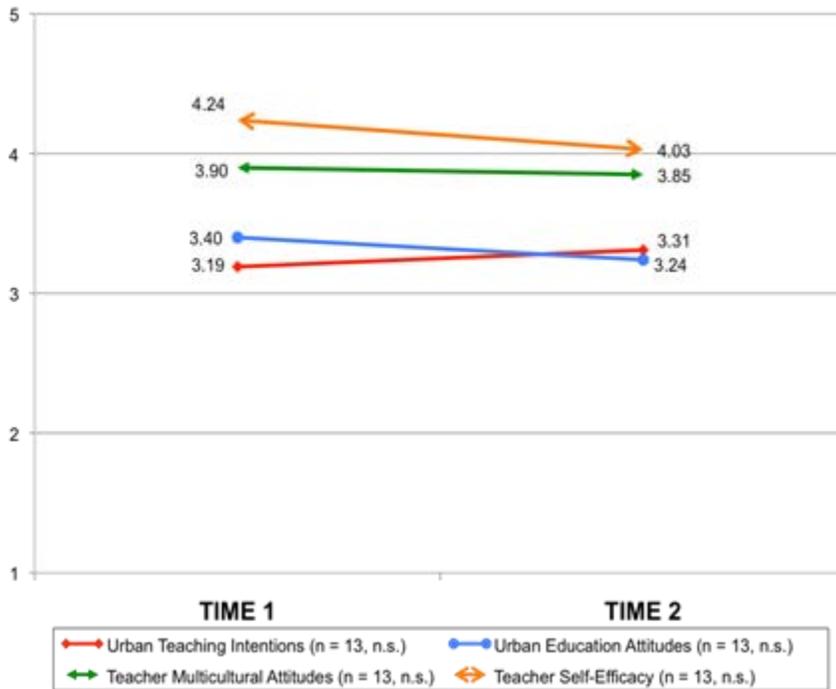
Table 1.

Full data (both pre and post) were available for 13 students from Spring 2010 ART 307

Average Age:	24.54 years (SD = 6.08)
Gender:	11 women (85%); 2 men (15%)
College Year:	13 Seniors (100%)
Race/Ethnicity:	13 White (100%)
High School Setting:	9 attended a suburban high school (69%) 2 attended a rural high school (15%) 1 attended an urban high school (8%)

Figure 1.

Art for Diverse Populations 2010: College of Education Urban Education Survey



College Teacher Education Pipeline™ 2010.

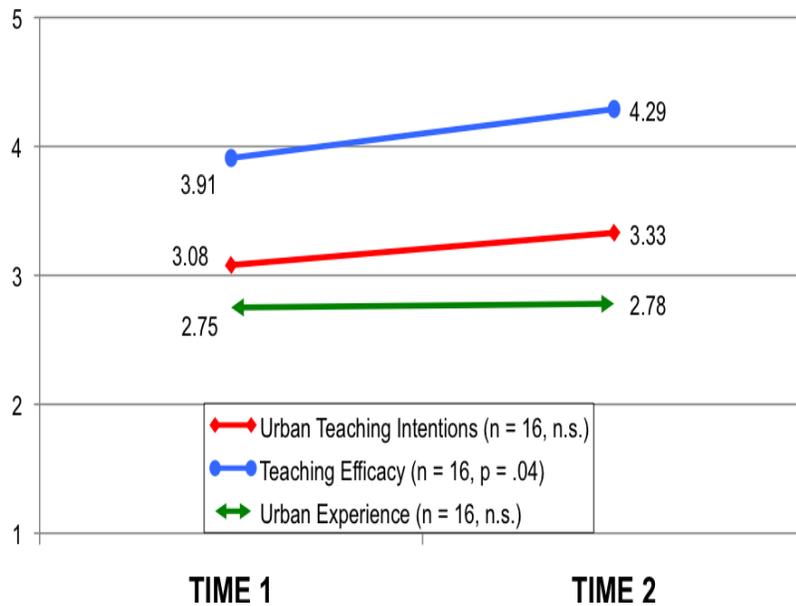
Table 2.

Full data (both pre and post) were available for 16 students from Spring 2011 ART 307

Average Age:	23.44 years (SD = 6.08)
Gender:	5 men (31%); 11 women (69%)
College Year:	14 Seniors (88%); 2 Graduate Students (13%)
Race/Ethnicity:	16 White (100%)
High School Setting:	2 were from urban high schools (13%) 8 were from suburban high schools (50%) 6 were from rural high schools (38%)

Figure 2.

*Art for Diverse Populations 2011: College of Education Urban Education Survey**



College Teacher Education Pipeline™ 2011.

*Due to the lack of nuances within the 2010 Multicultural Attitudes (TMAS) part of the survey, the College Teacher Education Pipeline dropped this portion and revised the Urban Teaching Attitudes (UTI) portion to have students reflect upon their Urban Experiences (B. Showalter, personal communication, August 3, 2012).

Qualitative Results

A majority of students within both cohorts identified systemic racism within social systems and language, which was a reoccurring theme within their writing. A few students expressed resistance through written journals and within class discussion. A few students used their journals to express surprise at their peers' inherently racial attitudes. However, student written reaction to racial and class difference within the post urban field trip clinical reflections was positive and transformative.

After noting 2010 students' generalized, descriptive clinical reflections the researcher revised clinical expectations to require students to critically connect their experiences with course material on race, class, gender, and physical, cognitive, and emotional ability. As a result, students in the 2011 cohort wrote more explicit, insightful comments than did students in the 2010 cohort. The 2011 cohort spent more time with the urban high school students, allowing for more preservice/student interaction and dialogue. The 2010 cohort completed their urban field experience in March, whereas, the 2011 cohort completed their urban field experience in late April after experiencing most components of their course work. Students also had more time to integrate and reflect upon course materials before visiting the schools. Three themes emerged

from the students' clinical reflections: (1) the 2011 cohort demonstrated a greater sense of appreciation of the challenges faced by urban students than did the previous cohort; (2) Students in the same cohort noted the importance and the effectiveness of caring urban teachers; and (3) Students in both cohorts wrote positively about the Little Village environment, indicating a respect for cultural difference.

Positive mentoring by urban teachers and dialogue with urban students helped to dispel the deficit model of urban education among preservice students. After participating in an urban field experience, slightly more students within both cohorts imagined themselves teaching within an urban community. An urban field experience enabled preservice Art Educators to witness effective urban teaching in action, a process that is dialogic, empathetic, respectful, and involved

Preservice students' encounters with urban Art Educators as role models may have influenced their own efficacy for teaching in urban schools. Students asked these Art Educators about their teaching priorities within an urban environment and were impressed with the high school art teachers' caring and respectful culturally relevant pedagogy.

Having the experience of being the Other also shifted students' preconceived notions about race. A preservice student reflected:

The feeling of people looking at me as an outsider ... based on my skin color frustrated me. The experience of spending time with the students taught me that there needs to be a balance of sensitivity [of] being an observer with camaraderie and trying to relate. These issues have always been presented to us via class discussions and textbooks, but to actually experience these issues and try to resolve them was beneficial.

A second preservice student, who had been resistant to reflecting on White privilege in class, put a face on a population to whom he previously could not relate:

Just days after visiting, the news reported that there had been a number of gang related deaths right around where we were. One of those that died was only 16 years old, and the notion that I might have spoken with him just hours before weighed heavily on my mind.

A third student shifted her thinking after a student and teacher dialogue:

It was unbelievable to me how hard some of these students had to work just to support their families at home. This was an insight I had clearly overlooked. Although I believe I am conscious of the needs of others, and hopefully my students in the future, I probably would not have considered these types of circumstances.

Another preservice student demonstrated a politically active consciousness that refuted the deficit model of urban education:

If anything, I don't want to teach these kids and be a part of their community because I can bring to them something that they *lack*, it is because I want to be a part of what they already *have*...I saw class after class of bright, intelligent, and critical thinking students. As we discussed in [class], some of the most important things for a teacher to do are: make the material relatable to their lives, respect them as individuals that can think for

themselves, understand what might be going on in their life before judging, and create an environment that is safe for true dialogue and expression. I observed all of these qualities in [the urban art teacher's] classroom.

Conclusion

In 2010 and 2011 two university Art for Diverse Populations classes White Preservice Art Educators reflected on anti-racist and anti-classist course materials and interacted with students and teachers, and became the Other during urban field experiences. A qualitative review of student writing indicated that a majority of both cohorts could identify systemic racism within social systems and language. A quantitative review of student's multicultural attitudes, urban teaching intentions, teaching efficacy and urban teaching attitudes did not show a significant change within the 2010 cohort. The 2011 cohort demonstrated a significant change in teaching efficacy. Both cohorts showed a slight positive shift in urban teaching intentions. Qualitative data indicated that both student cohorts reflected a positive attitude towards the urban field experience site, students within the 2011 cohort exhibited greater empathy for urban student concerns and a greater appreciation for urban teachers' efforts. More time spent in the school and with teacher mentors, along with a shift in the urban field experience to later in the semester may have contributed to the change in results. After participating in an urban field experience, more students imagined themselves teaching within an urban community. An urban field experience enabled preservice Art Educators to witness effective urban teaching in action, a process that is dialogic, empathetic, respectful, and involved.

Recommendations

First, teacher preparatory programs should enable all students to explore what it means to be of their race and their social class within a society. Ideas of race and culture are often delegated to ethnic minorities. Analyzing the idea of Whiteness and White privilege enables students to deconstruct communication patterns, educational expectations, and social values.

Second, teacher preparatory programs must eradicate the deficit model of urban education. Viewing urban students, neighborhoods, and schools as lacking in the components of success neglects the critical thinking, determination, and sense of connectedness that exists among urban youth and within urban communities.

Third, enabling preservice students to ground their education in experience puts faces to statistics, helps to break stereotypical thinking, provides educator mentoring, and encourages students to become urban educators. Urban field experiences, however, must be prefaced by reflective dialogue in order to avoid a power imbalance that naturally arises amongst privileged people.

Teacher preparatory programs that enable preservice educators to develop a critical consciousness of the roles that race, class, and privilege play within educational and social structures promote the creation of future urban educators. Self-reflection and dialogue are a part of this process. Preservice urban experiences that demonstrate sensitivity and respect for difference and build a sense of connectedness with urban students and the community are effective tools in this process.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Judith Briggs, School of Art, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-5620.

Email: jabrigg@ilstu.edu

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