

Only Connect: Preparing Teachers to Stay Well in Urban Schools
"My school didn't offer any courses to prepare me for this."
Teacher and Administrator Preparation Panel
Education Action Conference
May 8, 2003

Barbara Radner, Ph.D., Director
DePaul University Center for Urban Education

The Challenge

During 20 years of work with incoming and in-service teachers in poverty area Chicago public schools, the Center for Urban Education has developed practical knowledge about what works to prepare teachers to work effectively in these schools. The Center for Urban Education provides professional development for schools with which we work comprehensively for several years. These schools face the usual challenges that confront an urban school in a high poverty area: joblessness, low graduation rate, high crime rate, low achievement, limited hope, great uncertainty. The problems of schools have continued—and become more embedded—as universities have prepared teachers to work in schools that do not exist. Consider these elements in today's teaching situation to see the future.

- Current teacher shortages in critical areas motivate schools to put incoming teachers into classroom positions with particularly challenging students
- Many education courses do not relate to school priorities.
- The critical shortage of effective teachers is in schools that are particularly challenging.
- The population of students with special needs is increasing in the schools but university special education preparation usually consists of one "survey" of the exceptional child.

An Effective Response

In 1990, through funding from AT&T and the US Department of Education, the Center established the Urban Teachers Corps program to meet a critical shortage: well prepared teachers who would stay the course in these schools. That today ten years later 76% of the first cohort and 72% of the second cohort are still working in schools and with schools is evidence that we enabled them to stay the course. That three have become principals with two more on the way to that position also indicates that this pathway was not only to staying in schools effectively but to become central to schools. I should note that two of these principals/principal candidates are in this position because they were able to complete administrative certification through New Leaders for New Schools, which also is participating at this Conference.

We designed a blueprint for teacher preparation to meet standards set by teachers and principals and the competencies required by the state board of education. The program

prepared incoming teachers through year-long residencies in which they worked in “partner” schools in a variety of support roles and completed course work on Saturdays. Class work related directly to school applications—homework was not a paper for a professor but a set of instructional resources and an analysis of why they worked—or did not work. Participants learned how to work with teachers, both positive and negative, administrators, always busy and sometimes short-tempered. The Saturday structure provided a supportive cohort that enabled the incoming teachers to discuss realities and possibilities of a shared school experience. At first they included many presentations and discussions with highly effective teachers—until Corps members asked, “Couldn’t we talk with someone like us, someone who has gone through what we’re going through and isn’t an expert yet.” That year we included presentations by teachers with a range of experience. The next year we included “masters track” teachers in the program, relatively new teachers from the partner schools who were seeking a masters degree in education.

We found with the masters track that some teachers had really limited preparation for the role. Some were struggling. That finding was confirmed when the Center surveyed new teachers in Chicago public schools in 2002, teachers who were fully certified and very worried. The following responses from one of those teachers represent the kinds of critical concerns we need to address if we are to develop and keep effective teachers not only in these schools but all schools. Consider the following response from a first-year teacher, multiply it by 2,000 or 3,000 new teachers, and the scope of the problem expands.

Q: What are the three most important qualifications for a teacher to work in our schools?

A: Classroom management
Able to teach diverse population
A lot of patience

Q: What kinds of orientation support should a school provide to incoming teachers

A: Nothing but the truth.
Things you need to know.

Q: What changes do you recommend in pre-service teacher preparation?

A: Inner city program—my school didn’t offer any courses to prepare me for this.

Q: Why do some new teachers leave?

A: It’s a very stressful job.
Some days you just wonder what’s going on.

The retention rate of incoming teachers in urban schools is an indicator of the level of challenges and the need for more effective preparation and retention. In contrast, the incoming Urban Teacher Corps graduates have a significant retention rate in public schools—77% of the individuals who were prepared in the program still are working in schools after 5 years, and 70% after ten years. These individuals have contributed substantially to school progress through work with students whose achievement has increased, work with teachers whose performance has improved, and their own

advancement to leadership within schools and the system. In fact, three program graduates currently are principals—and we expect more. The percentage does not include 17 individuals who are not reporting at this time. However, at last report the majority of those individuals were teaching. Most importantly, the Urban Teacher Corps graduates are teaching effectively, as indicated by administrator evaluations, their students' progress, and the leadership they have demonstrated in Chicago public schools.

Changing the Source of the Problem: Teacher Preparation

The progress can be expanded with some very simple actions that actually could be “budget neutral.” The basic step is for Schools of Education to take a “zero-based” approach to planning their curriculum. They should re-start with two sets of standards:

- Requirements for effective work in challenging schools set by the experts in those challenges—successful teachers and principals
- State and national standards for what teachers need to accomplish in the schools—right now we will have courses that give an incoming teacher a set of one professor's opinions about how to teach science, and some of those courses still don't integrate the core knowledge that is required of the students the teachers will be educating.

Universities need to analyze and then reorganize the contents of their curriculum to emphasize three areas in which we shortchange education students:

- Mainstream effective methods of special education
- Teach how to assess and then use assessment information you get from it—currently reserved for graduate level studies.
- How to work effectively in a unique organization called a school.

Then the university should organize an inclusive structure for the preparation of teachers that is school-centered not university-centered.

School Time Vs. University Time

A school is a remarkably busy place. A university is a relatively unhurried place. I'm not asking that universities change to the frantic crisis-driven school schedule. I am recommending that more of the education student's time be spent in school than at the university during the third and fourth years of their preparation. Currently, most education students have observation hours (clinical experiences) and then complete student teaching in a relatively short time period with one teacher as a model (and judge). That limits the learning of the incoming teacher, particularly if the university supervision consists of five observations and monthly meetings. Those clinical experiences and student teaching don't give the new teacher the sense of the school year. September is very different from June. And we all know how students (and teachers) perceive the “student teacher”—not really ready to be responsible.

How could this take place? What if Education students had a sequence for their work that placed them in schools half of their time during junior year and all of their time

during their senior year. What about their class sessions? Remember those Saturdays. Consider some on-line course work. If the incoming teacher is a “resident” who becomes knowledgeable about the progression of a school year and becomes a working partner with a number of teachers, they’ll learn much more about the work of teaching. Working with different teachers, they are oriented to teaching as a collaborative activity not an isolated one.

A Connected Curriculum

If course work and application of theory linked directly to the goals and standards that are beginning to drive US education, we would not have the current disconnect that makes new teachers feel fully inadequate. They lack the *know what* (content) and the *know how* (skills) to help students reach the standards set for them by school systems. Traditional university certification requirements are not directly related to meeting the standards for improved education—a rigorous core curriculum. That you are an education major should not mean you are not going to complete the core content work. Universities could—and should—give undergraduates additional education credits for content area courses they “translate” into learning guides for their students as they work in residence at a school. For example instead of taking geography only for the course credit requirements at the university they would take what they learn and adapt it for learning by students they are guiding in their residency at a school. (I hope they do take that geography course—that’s such a hole in our country’s knowledge base.)

One more change: reorganize those methods courses. How many methods are there, and what makes them special for different subjects? You make it clear, you model it; students use it, organize it, communicate it to show they got it. What subject was that? Any subject. What’s missing is more attention to that first step: make it clear, modeling, “thinking out loud” so students see how to get it, get it clear, get it together, and get it across. What if you reorganized education methods courses so that they infuse the methods of special education—it’s about chunking your content, clarifying that content, identifying learning, responding to confusion. Again, what’s the subject? Any subject. This is a radical solution, but it’s a chronic problem. We won’t solve it with Teach for America. We won’t address it with Troops to Teachers. We will fix it if we ask the place that has the authority and responsibility to prepare new teachers changes.

What’s Next?

Changes in Public Policy that address the universities are needed, or we will be considering this same problem 10 years from today. Consider what would happen if No Child Left Behind made the following requirements of universities:

- A one-year “residency” for incoming teachers.
- Demonstrate the following:
 - Retention of 90% of graduates and evaluation of them as competent
 - Evidence of substantial inclusion of principles and demonstrated effective methods of special education infused in Education courses

Evidence that graduates know the content they are to teach, how to teach it effectively, and how to use assessment to improve instruction.

What about Teach for America and Troops to Teachers--and the Urban Teacher Corps? Same answer. Put these incoming teachers in residence in schools and have them complete a course of study that enables them to do their job effectively. Give our most challenged schools the resource they need: individuals who want to be there. Give those individuals the role and support structure that will enable them to learn how to be there effectively.

States and communities that have chosen to invest in the recruitment, support, and retention of well-prepared teachers in all schools have been able to pursue excellent and equity in tandem. These efforts appear to have substantial payoff. With carefully drafted policies that rest upon professional standards, invest in serious preparation, and make access to knowledge a priority for all teachers, it is possible to imagine a day when each student will, in fact, have a competent, caring, and qualified teacher working in a school organized to support his or her success." (*Solving the Dilemmas of Teacher Supply, Demand, and Standards*. New York, NY: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 2000, p. 25.)

What will be the consequences to public education if we do not address these challenges? We will continue to have a shortage of capable teachers in classrooms that serve students in greatest need of effective education. Revisit the first paragraph of this paper and you see the continuing problems. Or visit any urban school that has a dismal academic record. Without substantial changes in the preparation of teachers, limited public education will continue as an unintended and disastrous consequence of focusing on the indicator, low achievement at the school, instead of the cause, the failure to prepare incoming teachers to meet the challenges of their very important job.

Questions about Preparation and Support for Effective Work in Schools: Responses by Year 1 and 2 Teachers Working in Chicago Public Schools in 2002

Retention *Why do some new teachers leave?*

- They don't know how to control classes
- They feel isolated.
- Lack of support
- Lack of "pat on the back"
- Overwhelmed (three cited this reason specifically.)
- They don't have experiences where they feel successful
- Everyone's so busy
- Need support in the school. While it may be a perception, that is how they feel.
- Inability to network with like-minded professionals.
- They perceive there isn't a lot of support.
- Too few options for non-cooperative students
- Not worth it for the money
- Not competitive with business world
- It's hard.
- Unless the teacher has a real heart for it and says who's going to be the most determined—me or the kids?
- It's too much—so many meetings, there's no time to yourself.
- It's as varied as the schools.
- Who you bring in is the key.
- There are glitches no one knows about—it's very frustrating coming in. I would not recommend it to anyone.
- It's a very stressful job.
- It's too hard.
- They can't handle their kids. (three responses)
- The administration—a lot of pressure on them and then the administration puts that pressure on new kids, kids coming in with 1.2 grade level in 5th grade.
- A lot leave because they haven't gotten the preparation they needed prior to graduating in an alternative training or graduate program or whatever kind of program. They didn't get enough training in classroom management and discipline. They haven't acquired that skill well enough.
- They have not had the experiences to prepare them to deal with poverty classrooms that result in a whole host of issues that impact on students daily.
- The politics of school.
- They don't understand the enormity of the task and how they need to pace themselves in this long protracted schedule and they need to hope for the best and have high expectations and also be rational, not too many highs and lows.
- Some days you just wonder what's going on.

Preparation *What should be added to teacher preparation for incoming teachers?*

- **Don't give us the whole ideal classroom setting because it's not there.**
- Walk through a typical day
- Requirements and their realistic completion
- Special education
- Lesson planning specific to Chicago and our schools
- What to think about—the kids' potential, what you need to bring it out
- How to connect with students and families
- The culture of teaching
- Core curriculum.
- Collaborative planning
- As many practical things as they can get
- Classroom management
- Long-range planning
- Before they step in the classroom: practical things—monthly summaries, lesson plans
- Culture of the school
- Rules and regulations
- Policy handbook—become familiar with it—not superficial
- Don't be shocked when the student says “I don't have a pencil”
- How to keep up with the demands of the job
- Standards and structure
- I don't know how to teach the children how to read. I'm lucky I'm set up with another teacher who helps me with everything. If I didn't have him I'd be clueless.
- Inner city program—my school didn't offer any courses to prepare me for this.
- What they taught you in college, that's not what's happening now. You don't have that ideal classroom, the lesson plan you prepared doesn't work and then the next one doesn't.
- Dealing with different kids.
- The paperwork is a major challenge and they don't provide that.
- Getting the student that extra help they need.
- How children learn.
- Creating an environment for learning.
- Classroom management.
- Discipline
- Stress, Balance, and Teacher Professionalism
- It is critical that the curriculum in the college and university addresses all the issues that the teachers must face.
- If you want teachers to teach in a high poverty school, they need a series of experiences to prepare them to do this, not teach in a suburb as student teachers and then go to this high poverty area. Need continuity between undergraduate experience through student teaching.

DePaul Center for Urban Education Urban Teacher Corps Program ~ Retention Data for Individuals Completing Certification

Percentages working in Chicago Public School System (CPS) and Other Schools

	Cohort 1: 21	Cohort 2: 22	Cohort 3: 20	Cohort 4: 20	Cohort 5: 17	Cohort 6: 19	Cohort 7: 18	Cohort 8: 23	Cohort 9: 21	Cohort 10: 4	Total: 185
Year after completion	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5	Cohort 6	Cohort 7	Cohort 8	Cohort 9	Cohort 10	Average
1st year	95.2%	100%	100%	90%	100%	100%	94.4%	87%	90.5%	75%	94.6%
2nd year	85.7%	95.5%	90%	80%	94.1%	94.7%	88.9%	87%	66.7%	100%	87.0%
3rd year	95.2%	95.5%	90%	80%	88.2%	94.7%	94.4%	87%	52.3%		86.2%
4th year	90.5%	90.9%	75%	80%	88.2%	94.7%	66.7%	60.1%			81.0%
5th year	85.7%	90.9%	65%	75%	76.5%	84.2%	55.6%				76.6%
6th year	66.7%	77.3%	65%	65%	70.6%	84.2%					71.4%
7th year	66.7%	77.3%	50%	75%	58.8%						66.0%
8th year	66.7%	81.6%	60%	60%							67.5%
9th year	66.7%	77.3%	55%								66.7%
10th year	66.7%	72.7%									70.0%
11th year	52.4%										52.4%

Percentages working in CPS, Schools Outside CPS, and Organizations Supporting Education

Year after completion	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5	Cohort 6	Cohort 7	Cohort 8	Cohort 9	Cohort 10	Average
1st year	100%	100%	100%	95%	100%	100%	94.4%	100%	90.5%	75%	97.3%
2nd year	100%	100%	90%	95%	100%	100%	88.9%	100%	76.2%	100%	94.6%
3rd year	100%	100%	90%	90%	94.1%	100%	94.4%	91.3%	57.1%		90.6%
4th year	95.2%	95.5%	90%	90%	94.1%	100%	66.7%	65.2%			86.9%
5th year	90.5%	95.5%	80%	85%	76.5%	84.2%	55.6%				81.8%
6th year	81%	86.4%	80%	70%	76.5%	84.2%					79.8%
7th year	85.7%	86.4%	75%	85%	64.7%						80.0%
8th year	85.7%	86.4%	80%	75%							81.9%
9th year	85.7%	77.3%	65%								76.2%
10th year	76.2%	72.7%									74.4%
11th year	57.1%										57.1%

Updated April 2003—does not include individuals unable to contact to confirm placements at this time.

Updated: May 2003