

## Research Article

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# Teacher Candidate Perceptions of Urban Field Experiences

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### Abstract

This paper examines the impact of diverse clinical field experiences on rural teacher candidates' perceptions of their ability to effectively teach urban, diverse students. The literature framework supporting the study builds on Nieto's description of socially-just pedagogy and responsive approaches to diversity while meeting national education program standards despite declining resources. Researchers gauged candidates' perceptions of the impact of working with students from race, language and class backgrounds different from their own. Findings revealed four significant impacts: increasing capacity to use culturally-relevant practice, boosting ability to differentiate for urban learners' diverse needs, understanding the importance of strong relationships, and raising candidate self-efficacy and desire to teach in diverse schools.

### Introduction

Upon entering an urban school setting, a teacher derisively stated, "Oh, you've brought your students here to look at the poor kids." While taken aback by the statement, most brief teacher candidate experiences in urban settings are just that; nothing more than a cruise through the halls to peer into classrooms full of faces looking very different than the candidates' themselves.

Educator Preparation Programs (EPP) must shift candidates' mindsets from "saving the world" (Nieto, 2006, p. 1) to focus on understanding and

supporting school cultures focused on meeting students' needs through social justice. Teacher candidates at a rural, public Midwestern University in the United States, 110 miles from an urban area, have limited experiences with learners from racially and economically diverse backgrounds. There are scant proximate opportunities to attend, observe, or teach in ethnically, culturally diverse schools with concentrated poverty. District leaders desire to hire new teachers who are comfortable, competent, and effectively prepared to teach students from marginalized, under-represented

minority populations reflective of concentrated poverty and diversity. This study investigates the impact of diverse field experiences on the comfort level and awareness of bias of teacher candidates, and the use of culturally responsive instructional practices (See Appendix A).

Collaboration between urban school districts and EPP is necessary to provide the opportunity for candidates to be prepared to thrive in urban classrooms. Recognizing this imperative, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, 2016) notes, "Diversity must be a pervasive characteristic of any quality program." Teacher candidates must become skilled at what Nieto referred to as, "becoming a learner of their students' realities" (Nieto, 2006, p. 184). Strong EPP support candidates' experiences in urban settings by encouraging the use of students' life experiences to tailor lessons making connections between the students' contexts and the content. This research article chronicles teacher candidate perceptions of attending a rurally-based preparation program to participate in instruction and observation at diverse, urban schools. The researchers provide analysis of the meaning of diverse clinical experiences using mixed methods to determine the impact of diverse experiences on candidate perceptions.

In reviewing the hiring location data at a small Midwestern EPP, the majority of graduates were hired in rural or suburban locations. The absence of rich, well-designed, authentic clinical practices in urban schools was evident to the researchers, who sought to investigate the impact of the location of clinical practices and their relationship to the location of job placement for preparation program graduates at the institution studied. In order to diversify the skill set of teacher candidates, and to transform candidates' perceptions about where candidates thought they could or would eventually teach, the EPP made a concerted effort to solicit an

urban school partner. Co-developed extraordinary clinical practices and student teaching placements were viewed by the EPP as a win-win; the district would experience quality instruction and the university would expand the minds and comfort zones of candidates by engaging them in thoughtfully-crafted, truly diverse clinical experiences. The result was a collaboratively-developed series of experiences providing rurally-based teacher candidates with teaching experiences in urban schools.

The effectiveness of the clinical experiences on teacher candidate perceptions of working with culturally-diverse learners needed to be investigated to determine efficacy of the transition from being a student teacher to becoming a full-time classroom teacher. These results were also needed to inform and transform university instruction within the EPP. The data are used to influence leadership decisions to fund transportation to diverse sites during an era of significant decline in state appropriations and decreased revenue. After a review of literature examining standards, accountability, cultural values, racial diversity impact on teaching and learning, positive school cultures, biases of teacher candidates, and impact of EPP, the researchers' methodology and methods are presented. Results are presented related to teacher candidates' perceptions followed by a discussion of how the EPP is impacted by the study.

### **Standards and Accountability in Educator Preparation Programs**

The public education system and its leaders are highly scrutinized (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2012). Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), parents and policymakers have been inundated with reports suggesting that U.S. schools are failing (Senge et al., 2012). Legislative changes have

continued to increase educator standards and accountability to meet the needs of all students (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997). EPP must meet increasing standards while also meeting the needs of K-12 schools and diverse student populations. Quality clinical practice affords candidates the chance to teach learners in great need.

Federal laws including Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990) define accountability as how well schools meet students' diverse needs. Educational reforms have increased in recent years (Goldstein, Warde, & Rody, 2013). Reform focuses on closing economic and other gaps while meeting needs of all children (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2015; Vannest, Temple-Harvey, & Mason, 2009). Yet students from racially marginalized, under-represented minority groups lag behind (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2014).

As EPP become more aware of the needs of K-12 students, candidates must be prepared to meet those needs. State and federal standards require EPP to provide candidates with authentic experiences which create a positive impact on learning for students. Clinical experiences are essential in the local context. Missouri Standards for the Preparation of Educators (State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013), and specifically Standard 3, require that "field and clinical experiences, offered in collaboration with PK-12 schools, support the development of educators" (p. 4). To meet standards while preparing candidates effectively, candidates must have scaffolded opportunities to practice (Izmirli & Yurdakul, 2014) in early, middle, and late-program experiences. Those experiences must be in diverse K-12 settings while placing social justice front and center (Nieto, 2000). A strong sense of social justice can contribute to teacher candidates implementing culturally relevant pedagogy.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices**

Nieto, Rivera, Quinones, and Irizarry (2012) discuss three essential steps to improve schools by implementing a responsive approach to racial and ethnic diversity. EPP demonstrate cultural values by 1) building candidates' understanding of how racial diversity impacts teaching and learning, 2) using culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies, and 3) building positive school culture emphasizing capacity-building beliefs that all students can learn (Nieto et al., 2012). Acknowledgement of an existing widespread problem-of-practice in training culturally responsive teachers resulted in an educational renaissance centered around purposeful collaboration among faculty.

Ayers (2004) describes teachers who look past 'deficits' within students, and, instead, view their "assets and capacities, strengths and abilities" in order to "stand with, not above, our students" (p. 35). Ayers (2004) calls this process being students of our students. Teacher candidates will best learn about students of different races, ethnicities, and cultures by "learning about the social, cultural, and political circumstances of real students in real schools" (Nieto & Bode, 2012, p. 30). When candidates have experiences in "real" schools, they can make decisions about changing what is being done in classrooms and influencing the educational system at large (Emdin, 2016). They learn tough lessons about schools and students including how schools must focus on learning that occurs within classroom walls because there is less opportunity to impact students' lives outside of school (Emdin, 2016; Nieto & Bode, 2012), and how "race and ethnicity have a strong link to poverty" (Nieto & Bode, 2012, p. 29). These lessons are critical because, while the numbers of students from diverse racial, linguistic, and socio-economic status continue to rise, changing the faces of American classrooms, U.S. teachers are

predominantly white (Nieto & Bode, 2012) and middle class.

Nieto and Bode (2012) define social justice as a philosophical belief along with personal actions centered around how individuals are treated with “fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity” (p. 12). Cruise-by experiences are not clinical; they do not change candidate mindsets. EPP must build upon the cultural experiences and language talents described by Nieto and Bode (2012) while emphasizing choices teachers make. Collaborative field experiences between universities and K-12 schools within urban settings provide important lessons.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is essential for the success of students in diverse schools and candidates must be prepared to teach using CRT (Gay, 2002; Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Field work and reflective practice are vital to facilitating conversations which change candidates' perspectives on teaching in diverse schools. CRT uses the community in which the students live as the basis for learning. CRT requires impactful relationships with students and families (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Nieto, 2003). Students in learning environments where their own community is understood and valued as a learning opportunity are more engaged in learning (Burns, Keyes, & Kusimo, 2005; Nieto 2012). Instruction is not based on a deficit model but builds on existing relationships and validates extant knowledge.

### **Biases of Teacher Candidates**

Teacher candidates with very little experience with diverse students need support to effectively recognize their own biases. Johnson (2006) described the “the luxury of obliviousness (p. 22)”, like blind spots which create mindbugs (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). EPP must help candidates identify mindbugs so they do not creep into how students and families are perceived which can

impair effective communication occurring (Nieto, 2006). Teacher candidates learning their own biases and questioning beliefs they hold is important in teaching students of color (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Lower expectations and bias, particularly toward poor and minority students, can lead to expanding achievement gaps (Noguera, Pierce, & Ahramrd, 2016).

### **Sociopolitical Context of Education**

Leaders at a rural University prepare candidates for increasingly diverse classrooms (Gay, 2000; Kritzer & Ziebarth-Bovill, 2012; Yeo, 1999), but struggle to find resources to support travel to diverse schools, though important to candidate development to reach all learners. While the literature suggests that teachers impact students in classrooms (Nieto, 2006), race and/or ethnicity may also impact how some students respond to learning opportunities. Teacher success in urban schools was not related to licensure examination score or GPA according to Buddin and Zamorro (2009). Experience teaching in urban schools was the most significant determinant of success.

## **Methodology and Methods**

### **Participants**

Research participants in this study were teacher candidates enrolled in a beginning practicum-observation seminar, a methods class for special education, and an elementary/middle school literacy methods course during the spring 2017 academic term. Candidates comprised a purposeful sample, many of whom were preparing for student teaching the subsequent semester. Prior to the field experiences, 64 candidates participated in the pre-survey. Following the field experiences at diverse schools, 35 candidates participated in the post-surveys. Of the participants, 83% were female and 96% percent were White, three students were African-American, and one was Pacific Islander/Asian; representative

of the racial and gender demographic of the EPP. Over half the candidates came into the study with two or more experiences in diverse settings, almost 30% had one experience, and 12% had no prior diverse school experiences.

Candidates participated in two course-dependent experiences at either elementary or high school level settings. Field experiences were designed to introduce candidates to environments with different racial, linguistic, and class makeup from their schools of origin or prior field experiences. Clinical experiences were designed to provide a more diverse experience from candidates' previous field experiences. Coursework provided pedagogy, theory, and structured interaction with diverse students. Clinical experiences were organized to effectively teach students from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds, many with limited English skills, and high poverty status. Through methods and practicum coursework, candidates had access to appropriate planning techniques, contextual supports, and engagement in support of culturally-responsive teaching practices.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This was mixed-methods inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze data from pre- and post- surveys of teacher candidate perceptions. Data triangulation occurred using document analysis, focus groups and survey data until saturation occurred (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data were analyzed through candidate reflections post-experience, and from focus groups conducted three to six weeks after. All survey questions were identical. Additional questions were asked during focus group sessions with the participants:

- Discuss what kinds of changes occurred for you as a result of the experience.

- What would assist you in being better prepared for lesson planning for diverse groups of students?
- How can we better prepare teacher candidates for working with students who have limited English language skills?
- Diversity includes culture, religion, gender, socio-economic status, and others. What would assist you in being prepared for working with students in all areas of diversity?

Participants indicated they had been changed as a result of the collaboration experiences in diverse school settings. In addition, the teacher candidates responded on reflection sheets to the following prompts: "What did you learn about teaching and learning in a diverse school setting today?" and "What did you learn about your response to students from diverse populations?"

The researchers used Chi Square to detect significant differences in expected outcomes compared to actually-observed results. Surveys used a four-point Likert scale. Responses were organized and transformed in Excel based on "agreement" or "disagreement". Responses of strongly agree/agree coded as "1". Responses of disagree/strongly disagree coded as "0". Researchers identified that the most important outcome would be if a teacher candidate changed item response from disagreement to agreement (or vice versa) after the clinical experience.

### **Surveys**

The pre- and post- surveys gauged how field experiences impacted candidates' perceptions of teaching diverse students in diverse schools (Appendix B). The researchers attempted to identify changes in pre- and post- perceptions from candidates after observations and interactions with diverse learners. The survey consisted of 16 items. Items were developed by

synthesizing tacit knowledge from one researcher who previously served as a district administrator with several similar surveys from the literature and articles on candidates' perceptions (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Hairston, 2011; Marxen, & Rudney, 1999; Northwest Missouri State University, 2007).

Table 1

*Data Sources*

Data Source	Description
Pre-Experience Survey	The pre-experience survey consisted of 16 questions using a scale for responses. The survey included three open-ended questions requiring narrative responses.
Post-Experience Survey	The post-experience survey asked identical questions as the pre-experience survey.
Post Experience Reflections	Post-experience reflections required narrative responses by the candidates.
E-mail survey	An email survey was used with six first and second year teachers working in the district where the field experiences occurred.
Post Experience Focus Groups	Four focus groups were conducted over the course of a week on different days/times.

Narrative responses from pre- and post- surveys were analyzed using axial coding. Open-ended questions were coded for themes and sub-themes. Reflection sheets completed after field experiences were analyzed thematically. Focus groups convened four times to probe candidates' perceptions. Additionally, six novice teachers hired by the district responded to an email survey to discover the impact of clinical experiences on decisions to accept offered teaching positions in the district.

Researchers worked independently while open coding. Researchers notated important phrases and discovered emergent themes. Included terms served as foundational data to develop cover terms in data categories (Spradley, 1980). Each researcher's themes/notations were compared for consistency and ranked by prominence.

## Results

Researchers discovered three significant candidate perception changes when analyzing pre- and post-results. The results indicated significant differences in candidates' agreement in self-perception changes in efficacy and beliefs about diversity. Specifically, data analysis revealed candidates were: 1) more likely to use curricular materials and instructional practices fostering diversity, 2) more aware of (K-12) students' experiences and cultural backgrounds, and 3) noted diverse schools were 'very different' than those they attended.

## CHI SQUARE ANALYSIS

Table 2

*Chi Square showing a significant difference from expected outcome.*

Response	Pearson Chi-square	Degrees of freedom	P-value
Pre- and Post * Schools in a diverse setting are very different than the one I attended.	4.466	1	.035*
Pre- and Post * I am aware of the students' experiences and cultural backgrounds at the school where the field experience will occur.	4.457	1	.035*
Pre- and Post * I can use curricular materials and instructional practices that foster diversity.	4.743a	1	.029*

Note. \* indicates statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

From a practical perspective, this experience mattered. It expanded candidates' experience in diverse settings and changed their perceptions of students, schools, and their own efficacy to effectively instruct and reach students from diverse backgrounds. Findings indicate candidates were more likely to use student experiences and backgrounds when planning for instruction after having a diverse clinical experience. This indicated

candidates understood the need to know the students and build classroom community. Candidates revealed diverse schools are indeed different than schools attended by candidates when they were PK-12 students. Despite differences, and perhaps because of them, candidates believed they could effectively plan for and reach diverse learners' needs. In this finding, there is overlap with qualitative results. Specifically, forming strong, positive cross-cultural relationships are essential for success in teaching diverse learners. The quantitative results indicate after a diverse clinical experience, candidates were more likely to differentiate instruction to benefit diverse learners.

Three themes extracted from qualitative data in teacher candidates' reflections and post-survey responses included: 1) relationships built between teachers and students impact teaching and learning; 2) differentiation is vital in diverse settings, and, 3) diversity, when acknowledged, enriches school culture. In addition, the reflections provided insight into ways the EPP can improve candidates' experiences to be prepared for reaching diverse learners.

Table 3  
*Teacher Candidates' Perceptions by Theme*

Theme	Subtheme
Relationships	Need to respect all students and where they come from Building relationships assists teachers in meeting all learner needs Specifically, addressing learning styles Relationships (or lack of them) impact other classroom factors
Differentiation	Scaffolding Accommodating and modifying Using a variety of strategies Adapting Making instructional changes
Diversity	Backgrounds Cultural differences

**What about relationship-building is important?**

*I learned, more than anything, relationships matter.*

A routinely-surfacing theme from candidates' responses to open-ended questions was that developing relationships with students was paramount. Candidates recognized teachers in diverse settings strived to know their students, families, and communities. Students wanted to attend school and often it became a safe place. School met educational needs while serving as a haven where students were fed and discussed their lives with teachers and counselors. Candidates recognized that relationships required truly knowing the PK-12 students: "... (being) informed on their lives and experiences so they [school setting and teachers] are able to provide the necessary assistance."

Candidates acknowledged that respect must be earned, and it is difficult for students to learn when respect for teachers is missing. Candidates demonstrated understanding that respect includes sensitivity to students' out-of-school experiences. When candidates acknowledge such experiences, they become keys to learning how to interact with students, helping to build respect in the classroom. "It's...all about the relationships you build with your students. The students won't learn if they don't respect who they are learning from."

An important part of the teacher's job was building relationships: "...it is the teacher's responsibility to create the relationships" in order to help students learn. Candidates indicated that teachers must adapt to students' needs, preferences, and interests to build a community. This idea was reflected in statements including, "There are always changes going on for the good of the students," which demonstrates candidates' recognition of the work the teachers and administrators do to provide students

opportunities. “These kids just want to be loved and cared for and that’s what this school is doing for them.” Candidates acknowledged that students came from challenging economic situations; moreover, candidates learned economics are less important than human rights as a candidate noted: some [students] “...may not be heard at home,” and noted many students have challenges that could impact learning.

Building relationships was a critical factor occurring within the walls of school. Relationship-building impacts engagement, management, learning expectations, participation, and student motivation. Effective practices targeting classroom management, for example, were perceived as compromised if a teacher was unable to build a successful relationship. Candidates recognized risk-taking behaviors (like participation) are unlikely when teachers don’t know students; effective teachers “...make students feel comfortable enough to make mistakes and take risks” in order to learn. A candidate noted, “Students thrive on relationships;” while another observed fewer “disciplinary issues when they feel loved, respected, and important.”

Finally, candidates recognized relationships take time to build and lamented the diverse clinical experiences, although impactful, were too brief. Upon reflection, one candidate considered student learning needs unmet since the candidate was unable to relate “to them like we should.” Another candidate summarized: “I need to learn more about diverse populations in order to better connect with these students.”

### **What did you learn about teaching and learning in a diverse school setting today?**

*I learned that students learn things differently, so you need to differentiate the instruction to meet all the students’ needs.*

Candidate responses produced differentiation as a theme. Although various terminology was utilized to describe differentiation for students, this theme saturated responses. One candidate reflected, “I learned that the way you approach one student is going to be different from the other. I also learned that you have no idea of the student’s ability until you ask and seek answers.” This finding influences EPP leaders to support additional, deeper clinical experiences.

Statements about meeting students’ needs were broad, ranging from, “I learned that you have to be ready to fix your lesson plan on the spot, in order to accommodate to your students that you have” to more generalized statements about needing additional pedagogy to meet students’ needs. Candidates’ responses addressed changes including lesson accommodation, modification, or adaptation to reach all learners. Candidates described individualized instruction: “You need to meet their needs; it is your responsibility” and “You will need to change instruction.” A recurring comment was, “It’s about meeting students’ needs.”

Open-ended responses to post-survey results shed light on candidates’ reflections. Many addressed diversity broadly, promoting differentiation as needed: “I learned that not all students are the same and they all learn in different ways,” and “I learned that every student will react differently.” Recognition of diverse learner needs surfaced: “I learned that there are more diverse learners, so you have to make sure you are meeting the needs of each student.” The theme of differentiation was revealed often, and in surveys, focus groups, and reflections.

### **How do teacher candidate biases affect student learning?**

*Today I learned that although I may have personal biases, it is easy to set these aside in the*



*classroom and help these students learn.*

It can be challenging to identify our personal biases and then even more challenging to set them aside. Unconscious biases creep into our everyday interactions. This candidate recognizes the biases they have but perhaps has not yet fully developed an understanding of the complexities of the biases. Field experiences provide discovery of candidates' internal biases which can impair relationships. Despite good intentions, mindbugs/implicit biases affect work with diverse students (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). Candidates demonstrated reflection on their biases: "I want to help all students regardless of race or religion grow and learn new things, and I hope to serve as a role model to them." A candidate wrote about checking bias at the door: "I won't say I didn't have any misconceptions or stereotypes, but it was easier to question. When I saw a girl who was pregnant, I made assumptions, but I was able to watch myself." The candidates had good intentions to serve the needs of the students; however, asset-based view of the community and its students may not be fully developed.

### **How does diversity benefit students, classrooms, and schools?**

*I now want to work with students from diverse populations.*

Candidates indicated increasing desire to promote diversity, as it enriches school culture. A candidate noted, "Diverse background can affect a child's learning, but with the right teachers, structure, procedures, etc. it [sic] doesn't make a difference." Another stated, "it's up to us to reach all students. I have learned that listening to diverse students, I can learn from them. Great things are possible..." A candidate provided synthesis: "Teaching in a diverse school setting is one of the most challenging things you may ever do in your life, but it is also the most rewarding."

Diverse clinical experiences were designed to provide candidates with rich experiences. Many originate from rural areas with limited diversity, and for those the urban clinical learning provided a transformational experience. Some candidates were originally apprehensive about diverse experiences: "I was nervous but realized there was nothing to be nervous about. They are just like us, just in a different school setting".

Another candidate echoed:

*I had no experiences teaching in an urban setting, so I was a little apprehensive. What I realized though, is that kids are kids no matter where they live or their background. They need love, a listening ear, and education.*

A rural candidate recognized, "... it is exciting to see students that are different (than I am) but still have that same passion for learning". This transformational experience holds implications for EPP leaders and faculty.

### **Discussion**

#### **How did the study inform EPP programming and funding issues related to standards and accreditation?**

*I needed a better plan for how diverse (on different learning levels) my group was.*

EPP strive to meet or exceed the ever-expanding demands of the teaching profession to reach all (Ayers, 2004). For the university research site in this study, data gleaned during the study provided impetus for change: 1) ongoing curricular redesign, 2) expanded resources in support of urban clinical experiences, 3) opportunities to hear candidates' voices on diverse settings (Ayers, 2004). A curriculum redesign underway for three years included an advisory council with current candidates and recent EPP graduates. Council voices echoed those of candidates studied. A candidate stated, "I don't have background

knowledge needed to teach in diverse backgrounds.” The program needed more (early and ongoing) experiences in diverse, urban settings and this knowledge heavily influenced the content of redesigned courses. Because of this study, the EPP will implement more frequent, brief experiences and ongoing embedded field experiences. Candidates will begin these experiences as freshmen, and the experiences will exceed EPP accreditation requirements (CAEP, 2016).

For leaders of a rurally-located, traditional EPP, this study suggests that resources to support clinical experiences are impactfully, wisely spent. Data from this study support expansion of diverse experiences because they expand candidates' thinking while improving self-efficacy to reach all learners.

What is the impact on university partnerships?

One candidate commented:

I fell in love with [school] and that completely lead [sic] to my decision to teach not only in this kind of setting and community, but more specifically this school. I have always felt like my hands and heart were needed most where students have to show grit to succeed.

The study focused on one unique urban partnership. True partnerships leave both parties on solid footing. Trust exists, and from that there is possibility to develop more complex, extended experiences within district, including an extended summer school practicum. The district now expressly seeks university candidates for teaching roles, often a year before graduating.

In this study, emailed follow-up interviews were conducted with recent graduates now teaching in the district. Their responses demonstrated a powerful impact of diverse clinical experiences for rural candidates in urban schools. This experience is excellent to prepare candidates for student

teaching and helps determine where candidates could/should student teach. Without exception, when novice teachers were asked what EPP experiences contributed to deciding to teach in-district, each wrote that the urban field experiences were the deciding factor: “These settings aren't for everyone, but it just made me realize how much I wanted to help students in high-poverty areas and how much I loved working with students from all different backgrounds.”

As a result of the rich partnership developed, other districts in highly-diverse areas now seek out partnerships with the rurally-located university; a significant transformation in EPP culture.

Discussions are underway to replicate the diverse clinical experiences for freshmen and sophomores. Our curriculum redesign requires partnership expansions and augmented placements in diverse settings, with rigorous opportunities for candidates to teach and observe.

### **How are diversity and collaboration addressed in the future?**

*Everyone is different and it's all about being prepared and flexible.*

Candidate responses about developing strong relationships inform our work. We must increase candidates' knowledge (and efficacy) to work with diverse students and improve our collective impact on relationship-building, even in brief experiences. EPP faculty are engaged in reflective, sometimes challenging, discussions about early experiences and the need for deeper, more meaningful engagement with diverse students and partners. We must ensure faculty prepare candidates to teach anywhere. We must support diversity, equity, and inclusion and build experiences to deepen it for candidates, and ourselves. All EPP faculty agree that the diverse clinical experiences reflected in this study are critical to preparing candidates well-versed in understanding nuances

of diversity and how to effectively collaborate to meet student needs in diverse schools.

### Conclusions

Combining the qualitative and quantitative results of this study, diverse clinical experiences change candidates' beliefs, mirroring findings from Nieto (2006), and Blankstein & Noguera (2016). Diverse experiences for candidates positively impacted instructional practices, differentiation, and self-efficacy. This study suggests that a rurally-based EPP can collaboratively improve teacher candidate preparation to reach diverse learners, promoting a socially-just challenge to candidates' preconceptions about their ability to differentiate instruction, collaborate, and reach learners. Through a partnership with an urban-located district with significant ethnic, racial, and economic diversity, a rural EPP developed a reflective practice to support candidates' ability to reach marginalized, underrepresented students while shifting mindsets (through evidence and practice) to know they make a difference for all learners.

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## Appendix A

### *Research Question*

Is there a difference in teacher candidates' perceptions of comfort level, awareness of their own biases, and the use of culturally responsive instructional practices following field experience(s) in a building of racial diversity and high levels of poverty?

## Appendix B

### *Pre-Experience Survey*

1. What is your gender?
2. How would you describe your racial heritage?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. Please indicate how many field experiences that you have had that could be considered racially diverse and high poverty.

Please rate your agreement with the following statements (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

- I have experience in a racially diverse K-12 school setting.
- I am comfortable teaching students in a racially diverse setting.
- I feel comfortable teaching students who have no English-speaking skills.
- I consider the diversity of the students when wording questions and responses.
- I can use curricular materials and instructional practices that foster diversity.
- I can use curricular materials and instructional practices that make each student feel valued.
- Students in the classroom are good sources for information on which to base lessons.
- I can plan lessons to capitalize on students' cultures and experiences.
- I am aware of the students' experiences and cultural backgrounds at the school where the field experience will occur.
- I am aware of my own bias regarding differences in culture.
- I expect students in a racially diverse environment to be disruptive during instruction.
- I expect to feel unsafe when teaching in a racially diverse setting.
- The community in which the field

experience occurred will look very different than the community from which I graduated.

- Students in a diverse setting are different than students in settings with less diversity.
- Schools in a diverse setting are very different than the one I attended.
- I believe it's important for each student to have a fresh start each day.
- I would like to teach in a building with racially diverse students.

### *Post-Experience Survey*

1. What is your gender?
2. How would you describe your racial heritage?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. Please indicate how many field experiences that you have had that could be considered racially diverse and high poverty.

Please rate your agreement with the following statements (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

- I have experience in a racially diverse K-12 school setting.
- I am comfortable teaching students in a racially diverse setting.
- I feel comfortable teaching students who have no English-speaking skills.
- I consider the diversity of the students when wording questions and responses.
- I can use curricular materials and instructional practices that foster diversity.
- I can use curricular materials and instructional practices that make each student feel valued.
- Students in the classroom are good sources for information on which to base lessons.
- I can plan lessons to capitalize on students' cultures and experiences.
- I am aware of the students' experiences and cultural backgrounds at the school where the field experience will occur.
- I am aware of my own bias regarding differences in culture.
- I expect students in a racially diverse environment to be disruptive during instruction.
- I expect to feel unsafe when teaching in a racially diverse setting.
- The community in which the field experience occurred will look very different than the community from which I

graduated.

- Students in a diverse setting are different than students in settings with less diversity.
- Schools in a diverse setting are very different than the one I attended.
- I believe it's important for each student to have a fresh start each day.
- I would like to teach in a building with racially diverse students.

A large, stylized, red cursive letter 'R' is centered on the page. The letter is written in a classic, flowing script with a decorative dot on the upper left curve and a long, sweeping tail that curves back towards the base of the letter.