

Final Paper: Building Confidence in Novice White Teachers
Angelica Martin, Daniel Thurman, Denisse Hinojosa, Eric Vanston,
Patrick McCarthy, Terrence Murphy
Michigan State University
EAD 801

Introduction

With each passing year, decade, and generation, the United States is becoming an increasingly diverse society. The growth of the nation's ethnic minority population, particularly in the public school system, is leading to profound demographic changes, signaling also the need to embrace an updated view of education in a multicultural context. Already, as of 2001, students of color constituted the majority of public school students in twenty-three out of the nation's twenty-five largest cities (Landsman, 2001). Furthermore, Garcia and Gonzalez of the *Teachers College Record* forecast that by 2026, the percentage of ethnic minority students in America's public schools will reach 70% (Parker, 2003).

In contrast to this demographic trend among students, according to the Southern Education Foundation, only 13% of teachers were from minority groups (2001) with this percentage forecasted to remain steady or possibly even decline in coming years (Landsman, 2001). While minority teacher recruitment and training programs, such as the Pathways to Teaching Careers Program (Southern Education Foundation, 2001), have been developed, the reality is that for the foreseeable future, white teachers will comprise a significant proportion of the general teacher population in schools where racially and ethnically diverse students comprise a majority of the student body. Given this backdrop, it is imperative, therefore, to adequately equip white teachers with the qualifications to effectively teach in urban school environments. For many white teachers, this environment represents a significant, sometimes dramatic, change from their personal, cultural and educational experience.

As a starting point, it is necessary for novice white teachers to acknowledge the existence of oppression created by white privilege, for one does not exist without the other. As Wise so aptly states, “to think otherwise is to deny reality, having down without up, underprivileged without “over privileged” (2008, p. 7). The goal, of this training, then, is to recognize and seek to dismantle existing structures that promote and maintain systems of privilege and oppression, replacing them with ones that foster equity and justice for everyone (Gorski, 2008).

Besides dismantling systemic structures of privilege and oppression and replacing them with ones that promote equity and social justice for all, the goals of multicultural education, according to Gordon, should also include:

1. For all teachers and students to respect each culture represented in the school community and the larger society.
2. To improve communication and interpersonal relationships between members of different cultures.
3. To improve achievement of students from marginalized cultures by eliminating cultural bias from the curriculum so as to provide students with equal opportunity to learn, while empowering them to achieve (2004, pp. 239-240).

Due to the fact that the number of minority students is increasing while the number of minority teachers remains stagnant, it is becoming more and more important to have professional development sessions for white teachers to learn how to effectively educate their minority students.

Curriculum

Empowerment through professional development is the underlying principle of

our workshop and provides the starting point for all of the recommendations that follow. While there is enormous attention placed on the development of the novice teacher and the individual development that must first be realized, there must also be a formal place for this change to shift from teacher to student. Infusing the curriculum with equality, fairness, inclusiveness and diversity also provide novice white teachers in urban schools with an empowerment-centered toolkit they can successfully take into their classrooms. According to Gordon (2004), curriculum development is one of the five dimensions of all successful professional development and school improvement models. We propose a development program that includes placing novice white teachers alongside veteran leader teachers to assist in the continuous process of designing and implementing a multicultural, inclusive and holistic curriculum. Each team will be assigned to different tasks including planning, data analysis, assessment, communication, and curriculum design. In addition, novice teachers will be trained in the use and design of curriculum maps. Based on the development of Heidi Hayes Jacobs (1997), these maps are helpful in producing an overview of a teacher's curriculum, where gaps and problem areas can be easily identified. By training novice teachers in this process early in their careers, they are more likely to develop a sense of what student-centered, holistic, multicultural, and inclusive curriculum looks like while also learning how to provide accurate self-assessment of their ability to effectively incorporate justice and equity into their curriculums.

Caine and Caine (1997) argued the purpose of education should be less about the transfer of knowledge and more about the development of individuals and their ability to adapt to the diversity of the global world. Given this perspective, and the recent

and colossal shift of globalization, a primary responsibility of our teachers today is to help prepare students for the immense diversity they will inevitably face in their personal and professional lives. This goal could be a tremendous obstacle for teachers who face the same dilemma. A novice white teacher in an urban school district will likely undergo a similar struggle when they are introduced to racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequality. How do these teachers address such issues if they have not themselves confronted these problems in the past? How can they be sure not to perpetuate the same ignorance, prejudice, and insensitivity that create such injustice to begin with? Above all else, how do we expect them to help their students rise from this perspective to an enlightened state of individual and integrated personhood? Direct involvement in curriculum development encourages teachers to define their own beliefs about education, its fundamental purposes and consider the changes they could make in the classroom to help improve the lives of their students. Providing an immediate avenue for new teachers to collaborate alongside more seasoned educators also allows for the sharing of knowledge, the creation of new information and ideas, as well as opportunities for critical problem solving that incorporates a much larger perspective from its various team members (Gordon, 2004).

Teacher involvement in the development and integration of an empowerment-based curriculum creates a welcoming and accepting environment that challenges harmful, yet existent realities that students likely face in their own lives. By incorporating a multicultural curriculum that teaches respect for all cultures, it is possible to create a sense of empowerment that is equal among everyone in the classroom, school, and community. Inclusive curriculums can also provide new teachers with an important

understanding of how to adapt to all developmental levels in the same classroom at the same time. This allows “educators to place a greater value on diversity” and integration amongst its students while providing teachers with a sophisticated set of skills allowing them to offer a highly personalized education to all of their students (Gordon, 2004, p. 240). Lastly, the development of a holistic curriculum offers educators an opportunity to act as role models as they embody truly empowering characteristics including a high level of intrapersonal, social, moral, physical and artistic intelligence.

Providing novice teachers the opportunity to take part in the direct development of inclusive and integrated curriculum allows them to begin developing their own understanding of these complicated and harmful issues. It also helps them to design proper techniques, which they can then take into their classrooms as they seek ways to transfer this knowledge to their students. It is naive to assume that all educators have a holistic and justice-oriented viewpoint upon entering the classroom. Therefore, we must be ready to prepare all novice teachers on the principles of equality, fairness, inclusivity and diversity, by allowing them the proper training and preparation. This is not only crucial for our teachers, but also for the students as educators seek to pass on this evolved state of intrapersonal intelligence. Only then can we claim to have prepared our students for the diversified and collaborative world that awaits them.

Individual Teacher Development

As novice teachers are expected to produce similar results of teachers who have been working in the school for many years, they need assistance in different areas so that they can fulfill their new duties. New teachers need to develop classroom management skills, motivation techniques, plan and organize materials, all while dealing

with other professional responsibilities. On the school level, beginner teachers need to become familiar with the school system, obtain instructional material, and communicate with other teachers, administrators, and supervisors as well as with parents. Additionally, novice teachers need to adjust to their new teaching environment and new roles as teachers in the institution *and* receive emotional support to make adaptation easier (Gordon, 2004). With all of these responsibilities, we feel it is imperative to implement a *Beginning Teacher Assistance* (BTA) program as a formal component of the school's professional development program. The goal of the BTA program is to help familiarize beginning teachers with the responsibilities that represent being a white educator in a racially diverse school, helping marginalized students succeed. We will give a detailed plan for the BTA program, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the people involved. It will also list the ongoing assessments of the different activities and resources needed for its implementation (Gordon, 2004).

As a part of the BTA program, a *needs assessment* is going to be used in order to identify the novice teachers' needs. The first part of the needs assessment will help identify the teacher's learning style. Then the BTA program can be adapted to individual personal needs, promote self-understanding, and at the same time, an understanding of colleagues. We have chosen to use the *Learning Style Survey* designed by Cohen, Oxford, and Chi (Gordon, Appendix B, 2001). The second form of the BTA will be in focus groups between mentors and beginning teachers. The BTA program seeks to pay special attention in helping white beginner teachers gain a greater understanding of their students' cultures, backgrounds and varying needs, which can lead to greater educational outcomes. We aim to do this through reflection with a mentor

teacher.

Teacher Leadership and Mentoring

The importance of having lead teachers and mentors in urban schools is undeniable. Novice white teachers hired into what may be an unfamiliar environment will need daily counsel and advice from an experienced colleague who is also a leader. These teachers can offer their expertise and create a connection to other staff in the building. This helps prevent feelings of isolation that new, urban teachers often face. In this model, both novice and experienced teachers gain something that also helps ensure a community of collaboration within the school. Teacher leaders should have several years of experience in urban education and in that specific school to ensure they understand the cultural norms, the student population and challenges those urban students at their grade level often face. Experience is vital because all of this will be new to the beginner teacher.

With such a large transition, the BTA program will try to help beginner teachers feel comfortable. Mentoring a new teacher consists of three phases with the first beginning with developing a strong, trusting relationship as the new team gets acquainted with each other. Mentor teachers should share their experiences freely, but it is crucial they do not pass judgment on any specific students. Sometimes, an experienced teacher can pass along his or her negative opinions to the novice teacher in such a way that the novice teacher begins to also feel the same way as the experienced teacher, a potential downside to a very valuable program. The second phase involves the pair deciding on the mentoring content, which comes from the needs assessment. When the content is chosen, there are numerous activities that can empower the beginning teacher. There can be one

on one conversations where the new teacher can express concerns and the mentee can give insight in to what will be a new culture for the white teacher. Learning about the students' culture is imperative to creating positive educational outcomes. Without a mutual understanding, it is difficult to have trust. A lack of trust leads to the negative outcomes that are so prevalent in urban school districts. In phase three, the mentee begins to apply skills and strategies learned under the mentor's observation. The ultimate goal of this process is give the new white teacher an outlet for their difficulties and frustrations that they may encounter in an urban school. It also gives them an experienced leader from which they can learn how to handle a wide array of situations, and gain a better understanding of the community and surrounding culture. Furthermore, the new teacher should be ready to take a mentee of their own after the completion of their own mentoring program. This only enhances the new teacher's development once they are given leadership roles of their own.

Coaching and co-teaching

“Peer coaching involves teachers observing each other's instruction, collecting and analyzing data, and problem solving for the purpose of improving teaching and learning” (Gordon, 2004, p. 52). With the goal of this professional development to be to help make novice white teachers feel more confident in their urban environments over the long term, it makes sense to help acclimate them to the cultural climate of the school. Two great ways to get them comfortable is through the use of coaching and co-teaching. Each of these practices helps the novice teacher to gain perspective on their practices and teaching philosophies and help perfect their practices, in turn helping them to feel more at ease in their new surroundings.

First and foremost, in regards to peer coaching it is important to remember that it is not for evaluation or judgment and that it is to be used for observations and the betterment of teaching practice (Gordon, 2004, p.53). Two very important varieties of coaching for teachers new to the urban environment are Team Coaching and Cognitive Coaching. Team Coaching is a combination of peer coaching and co-teaching and is important for helping novice teachers because it pairs them up with an experienced coach and then has them plan, teach, and evaluate lessons together. In this way the new teacher has a solid model of what effective teaching in this environment looks like, while giving them the chance to “test the waters” without having to do so completely on their own. Cognitive Coaching, whose end goal is to help teachers to be better observers of themselves and their practice, is also important because it helps a teacher to reach a point in which they can “self-monitor, self-analyze, and self-evaluate” (Gordon, 2004, p.54). During this process there are three stages: planning conference where the teacher and coach discuss what is expected from the lesson; lesson observation during which the coach watches the lesson, making notes for the teacher; reflecting conference where the teacher analyzes how the lesson went, especially focusing on student achievement/teacher behavior relationships (Gordon, 2004, p.54). Through this practice the novice teacher can begin to have a specific understanding of how their actions are affecting their teaching and their relationships with the students, in turn empowering them to reflect and change their practices as needed to be more effective. In this way their confidence will be boosted because they will understand what is needed from them in this new environment. A more confident teacher is a better teacher.

The next long term professional development strategy to help support and

empower teachers new to the urban environment is co-teaching. This is “two or more teachers planning, teaching, and assessing the same students in the interest of creating a learning community and maintaining a commitment to collaboration with students and each other” (Gordon, 2004, p.63). This process is a way for two teachers to work together for the betterment of their students by critiquing each other, researching new techniques to try, and helping each other to become better at recognizing best practices. For example, while one teacher is teaching a whole group lesson, the other can be working with small groups. In connection to the coaching discussed previously, co-teaching can be used as an opportunity for analyzing and reflecting upon teaching practices, as well as it can be used to help better a lesson, curriculum, or assessment (Gordon, 2004, p.64-65).

Cognitive and Moral Development

The dimensions to be developed in the BTA program are cognitive development, and moral development. These dimensions have to be “interrelated and integrated into a holistic program” (Gordon, 2004, p. 211). They cannot be addressed separately; on the contrary, they have to be integrated through different activities so that confidence can be built among novice teachers. These dimensions will be developed in groups with the assistance of their mentors and support teams as follows.

Confidence is gained through knowledge and experience; therefore, the BTA professional development program is focused on “effective teaching of essential knowledge and skills” (Gordon, 2004, p. 201). If we want students to develop higher-level thinking skills, novice teachers have to achieve *cognitive development* through enhancing their processing and decision-making skills. The cognitive development stimulation has to be done from lower to higher stages; it will take place during the peer-

coaching program and through reflective teachers' activities. As novice teachers are grouped and assigned to a mentor according to their specialty, it will be easier for them to acquire new teaching techniques and develop new skills. It is essential that coaches talk to the group and collect participants' opinions before beginning a new cycle. *Reflective teachers* will allow novice teachers to assess where their teaching skills are at the beginning of the program, compared to what they would like their teaching to be. Reflective teaching is a continuous cycle, which involves reflecting, planning, acting, and observing. According to Ash (1993), this cycle has neither a beginning nor an end, but each stage is supported by the previous one and the base for the next stage (Gordon, 2004).

Another important point for these white novice teachers is to foster *moral development*, it is necessary for teachers to have a standard idea of what they consider to be acceptable in class, in terms of the language used, the rules, and all the behavior related to their students. In order to foster moral development, novice teachers will participate in an activity called, *ideal teacher*. At the end of each cycle, after having discussed the reflective teacher activity, the coach/mentor is going to ask the novice teachers to draw a line segment on bulletin board paper and write conventional teacher on one end, and ideal teacher on the other end. In groups, teachers have to discuss where they place themselves in the continuum, and then reflect about their behavior in class and find out what keeps them away from reaching the ideal teacher line segment. It is necessary for novice teachers to identify the classroom practices that keep them away from the ideal, and more importantly find the causes of this undesirable practice and then write them down on the paper. At the end of the semester, novice teachers have to share

their progress with their groups and mentors, and discuss if the action plan needs revising.

The implementation of *individualized professional development* is critical for novice teachers, and this assistance should be provided until the teacher reaches a level where they feel confident. This program has to be tailored to the teacher's personal objectives, learning styles, and preferred activities. Before implementing the individualized professional development program, novice teachers will be assessed on their needs by using the Preliminary Assessment for Individualized Professional development (Appendix C, pp. 219-220). Based on the results, the teacher has to prepare his/her own professional development plan focusing on an area for development; this plan has to be reviewed, approved, and supported by the school. Once the focus area is identified, the teacher needs to gather data by filming his or her class, keeping a reflection journal, and asking students to complete feedback questionnaires; this data will help the teacher better understand and narrow down his/her focus area. Then, the teacher is ready to write down specific objectives and design a suitable one or two year action plan which will lead to self-improvement; the growth activities can be carried out either individually or in groups. Formative and ongoing evaluation is required, as well as a final evaluation at the end of the project, which should be accompanied by formative data collected during the project. The final evaluation can also take the form of a portfolio (Gordon, 2004).

Conclusion

When a white teacher goes into an urban school for the first time, it is often a very different experience. They are taking on a new culture and they need to treat it as

such. The same way you should respect a different culture when you go abroad, white teachers going into urban settings are encountering a new culture. One of the biggest problems with urban education is the high turnover rate of teachers. There are a variety of reasons for why new teachers might leave, but we believe that one of them is a lack of proper preparation and support. Professional development for novice white teachers in urban schools is not only necessary, but it is imperative to their success. There needs to be a support system so that they do not feel like they are alone on an island. When this support system is in place, they can move on to learning about the students and culture and improving themselves as educators. Without this professional development, teachers will not get the necessary resources they need to be successful in the urban setting and will likely contribute to the high turnover rate of urban schools. Empowering teachers through this program will lead to empowerment of students and eventually successful educational outcomes, which in the end, is everyone's goal.

References

Caine, R.N., & Caine, G. (1997). *Education of the edge of possibility*. Alexandria, VA.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Cohen, A. D., Oxford, R. L., & Chi, J. C. (2002). *Learning style survey*. Minneapolis, MN: Center

for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota.

Gordon, S. P. (2004). *Professional development for school improvement: Empowering learning*

communities. Boston: Pearson Education. Inc.

Gorski, P. (2008). Good intentions are not enough: A decolonizing intercultural education.

Intercultural Education, 19(6), 515-525.

Jacobs, H.H. (1997). *Mapping the big picture: Integrating curriculum & assessment K-12*. Alexandria VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Landsman, J. (2001). *White teacher talks about race*. London: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Parker, J. (1994). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Southern Education Foundation. (2001). *Patterns of excellence: Policy perspectives on diversity in teaching and school leadership*. Atlanta, GA: Author.

Wise, T. (2008). *The pathology of privilege: Racism, white denial & the costs of inequality*. [Transcript]. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation.