

**The Early Findings of an Urban Education Teacher Preparation Program: A Case Study**

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**Abstract**

A university near a major city in Georgia and a large, urban school district established a Professional Development School (PDS) in which the majority of junior and senior-level pre-service teacher coursework and fieldwork took place at seven urban, high-needs public schools. The purpose of this study was to provide preliminary feedback to the middle grades teacher preparation program concerning the UE (Urban Education) program in preparation for the second cohort of UE interns and the second year of study with the first cohort. What emerged from the study was evidence that the program, for its participating teacher candidates, leads to commitment, strengthens self-efficacy, and fosters early development of teacher efficacy, but which ultimately evolves into teacher candidate overconfidence. As pressure continues to mount concerning the quality of education in America, teacher preparation programs must improve their programs in order to better prepare teachers for diverse classrooms. This study relates one such effort toward that end.

## Introduction

To provide the most effective preparation for future teachers, it is incumbent upon universities to collaborate with school systems when designing and implementing their teacher preparation programs. Effective teacher preparation curricula and experiences should provide knowledge of and experiences in working with students from diverse backgrounds in diverse settings. The following study relates the early findings of the effects on pre-service teachers of a new urban-emphasis teacher preparation program that established a professional development school (PDS) with urban schools in a metropolitan area of Georgia.

The combination of increasingly diverse students populating American schools combined with a teacher workforce consisting primarily of white, female teachers requires institutions of higher education to continually improve and expand their teacher education programs (Wiggins & Follo, 1996; Zeichner, 2003). Although minority enrollment in teacher education programs is increasing, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), white female teachers continue to dominate the classroom, comprising over 71% of teacher education candidates. In addition, the number of students whose first language is other than English has increased from 4.7 million in 1998 to 11.2 million students in 2009. Classrooms across the United States continue to be more racially and culturally diverse than in the past. The challenge for teacher preparation programs is to create programs which bridge the gap between the pre-service teachers' beliefs and their previous school experiences, addressing the reality of the increasingly diverse classroom environments in which they will teach (Bales & Saffold, 2011).

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the primary organization which accredits institutions with teacher preparation programs, seeks to ensure that teachers are prepared for the reality of the classroom and to meet the needs of every student (NCATE, 2008). NCATE standards require pre-service teachers to have authentic experiences which expose interns to the realities and diversities of the school environment.

Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) reported the following aspects of teacher education programs that produce successful teachers:

- Collaborative arrangements between university programs and local school districts, professional development schools (PDS);
- Clear and consistent vision of teaching and learning;
- Strategies employed in teacher education programs, such as case studies and teaching portfolios; and
- Opportunities for initial university coursework which combine school and community fieldwork.

Internship experiences for teacher candidates are a typical component of most teacher preparation programs. Both NCATE and the National Association of Professional Schools (NAPDS) postulate that experience in the field serve as an important aspect of any teacher preparation program (NCATE, 2008; NAPDS, 2008). Although studies on the effectiveness of internship experiences have been inconclusive, it has been found that the length of time of the actual internship experience affects the overall outcome. Foote and Cook-Cottone (2004) found that pre-service teachers following the traditional model of student teaching without much exposure to the environment beforehand suffered dissonance about the experience. A developmental model requiring a certain number of hours of field experience in an urban environment before the onset of student teaching was found to be beneficial for pre-service

teachers. McKinney et al. (2008), however, found no significant differences between interns who experienced a traditional student teaching experience with those that completed an internship within a PDS. It is noteworthy that this study only focused on the student teaching experience, not on other aspects of the teacher preparation program that may have impacted the results.

### **Professional Development School (PDS)**

Because it has become so commonplace for universities to work in collaboration with local school systems in the preparation of teaching, the term professional development school has become a catch all term for any collaborative work between universities and local school systems. NAPDS developed a set of standards that must be in place to be explicitly termed a professional development school. Among these standards is the understanding that PDS encourages community involvement and provides a structure where all parties are involved in decision-making and research (NAPDS, 2008).

### **Description of Setting and Program**

Pharr University, one of the largest producers of teachers in Georgia, established a partnership with an area school district located outside a large city. The school district, one of the largest in the United States, has a student enrollment of 107,681 with 112 schools including 67 elementary schools, 25 middle schools, and 16 high schools. In an effort to improve the teacher education program at the university of 25,000 students, a program was created utilizing a Professional Development School model in which the majority of junior- and senior-level pre-service teacher coursework and fieldwork takes place at seven urban, high-needs public schools in the school district that include five elementary schools and one middle and high school.

Like many urban schools, these schools are in a high-crime area with a highly transient, diverse student body; they struggle to make mandated adequate yearly progress (AYP). The majority of students qualify for free or reduced lunch and many students' first language is other than English. The school's ethnic breakdown includes: Asian 2%, Black, 38%, Hispanic, 48%, Multi-Racial, 4%, White 8%.

The Urban Education (UE) program differs from the traditional teacher preparation program at Pharr University in several ways. The students must apply to the program through a highly competitive selection process that includes an application and interview. Selected students then become members of a cohort. The middle school cohort completes its education courses and fieldwork together on an urban school campus. Education courses are co-taught by university and school district instructors. The UE interns participate in an intensive two-year induction program that includes extensive clinical experiences in the field. Further elements of the UE option include preparing the interns to teach with a strong focus on literacy; including families as stakeholders; developing pedagogy effectively to instruct students with disabilities, English language learners, and students of poverty. The UE interns spend a substantial amount of time at the schools and have the opportunity to immerse themselves in both the school and the community through observations, coursework, and interactions with students and parents.

Year one of the program in this study involved the eight junior-level, middle school UE interns spending two days per week attending to coursework and fieldwork connected to the college courses and one day per week in the classroom with their collaborating teacher. The first semester found the interns immersed in the middle school for their education courses, with built in coordinated field experiences, where they took foundation-level education courses in addition

to EDMG 3300, *Success in the Middle School*. Additionally, they completed 55 hours of fieldwork in urban middle school classrooms. Content courses, in subjects such as history and English, were taught on the university campus. Because middle grades certification in Georgia addresses grades 4-8, the second semester of the UE program took place at an elementary school where the UE interns completed their remaining foundation courses and an instruction and assessment course. During this semester, students perform 55-65 hours of fieldwork per semester, which translates into a minimum of 110 hours of fieldwork per student during the first year of the program.

During the first semester of their senior year of college, the interns will take education methods courses, content courses, and a classroom management course. Like the first year of the program, the coursework is closely aligned with the fieldwork. The students must clock 180 hours working in a middle school classroom in addition to their coursework. The second semester experience closely aligns with the traditional student teaching experience with the interns fully immersed in the middle school for 75 full school days in addition to completing a reading methods course. At the time of this study, the middle grades UE interns were completing their first year of teacher training (for most of them, their junior year in college).

### **Methodology**

This study was intended to provide preliminary feedback to the middle grades teacher preparation program on the UE program as it prepared for the second cohort of UE interns and began the second year with this first cohort. A qualitative, case study design was selected in order to allow others to understand the meanings people have constructed about their experiences in the program—how they make sense of their world (Merriam, 1998). In this type of research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis using an inductive, investigative strategy and ending with a thick, rich description of the area under analysis (Merriam, 2009). The research question guiding the study is “What is the preliminary impact of the Middle Grades Urban Education Program?”

### **Data Collection**

Conducted during spring 2011, the second semester of the UE program, the study’s data collection included a focus group interview with six middle grades UE interns; individual interviews with three UE interns, the middle grades liaison and a Pharr University professor who taught this group for two consecutive semesters; a class observation; a panel discussion observation; field notes; quantitative survey results; and researcher-generated documents which contained relevant, background material, clues, and insights into the phenomenon under study and, in some instances, helped to triangulate the findings (Merriam, 2009).

Below is a list of the data collected and how the data were utilized in the study.

<b>Data Collected</b>	<b>How Data were used in the Study</b>
Five individual interviews	Triangulation
Focus group interview with six UE interns	Triangulation
Class observation	Triangulation
Field notes	Triangulation
Panel Discussion observation	Background information
Documents:	Background information and Triangulation
• Syllabi (4)	Background information
• Performance measures and objectives document	Background information
• Course outlines (2)	Background information
• Program form from traditional teacher preparation program	Background information and Triangulation
• Roles and Responsibilities of site coordinator and liaison document	Background information
• Roles and responsibilities of collaboration committee document	Background information
• UE option presentation to potential candidates at Pharr University	Background information
• UE Intern Quantitative Survey	Triangulation
• Literature	Triangulation
Researcher memos (thoughts after interviews and observations— initial, rudimentary analysis jotted in margins of interviews and field notes; insights as data analysis progressed)	Analysis; Audit trail; used to establish credibility/ trustworthiness
Researcher log	Audit trail; used to establish credibility/ trustworthiness

### **Participant Selection**

Purposeful sampling, considered to be the most appropriate sampling strategy in qualitative research, was employed. Based on the assumption that the investigators want to discover, understand, and attain insight into the phenomenon under study, they need a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 2009). For the focus group interview, purposeful sampling was employed. Six of the eight UE interns consented to be a part of the focus group interview. Using maximum variation sampling, three participants from the focus group were selected for individual interviews. In maximum variation sampling, the researcher seeks common patterns that emerge from a great variation of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). The criteria for selection were *confirming* and *disconfirming* or negative experiences. One participant was selected because she offered negative comments about the operation of the program; another because she was so positive about her experience; and one because she did not seem to be an integral part the group.

## Interviews

Guided, in part, by flexibly worded questions, the focus group interview used an exploratory, semi-structured format. For example, the interns were asked to describe their experiences in the UE program, including successes and challenges; exciting and not-so-exciting moments; and unexpected experiences or moments. The individual interviews provided insight into important issues. The final question “You are interviewing with a principal for a teaching position in an urban school after graduating. What would you say to the principal when asked: ‘How has your teacher preparation program prepared you to teach in this school?’” provided a wealth of data. The interviews varied in length from 30 to 50 minutes.

## Data Analysis

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The constant comparative method was used in the analysis of the data. The constant comparative method of data analysis involves comparing one segment of data to another segment to ascertain similarities and differences and then grouping related segments, organizing them into categories or themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

*ATLAS.ti* software aided in the management and analysis of the data. Coding, a system for organizing and managing data by assigning shorthand designations to various aspects of the data in order to retrieve specific pieces of it (Merriam, 2009), was employed starting with open coding. Axial coding followed, identifying categories that cut across all sets of data. The categories were then merged, and a newly defined, experimental logic diagram with four themes emerged.

## Trustworthiness/Validity and Limitations

The applied nature of inquiries in education makes it imperative that researchers can exhibit confidence in the results of a particular study. Determining the trustworthiness or validity of a qualitative study involves examination of its component parts (Merriam, 2009), particularly in how well they answer the questions “How do these research findings match reality?” and “How trustworthy are the findings?” These questions speak to the meaning the researcher makes of the reality he or she observes. Multiple strategies were employed to enhance trustworthiness during this study including the following: triangulation using multiple methods of data collection; maximum variation sampling; member checks; peer review by members of the Research Academy; and the maintenance of a clear audit trail through research memos, researcher log, and the utilization of *ATLAS.ti* in managing the data and analysis.

A major limitation included being unable to interview collaborating teachers who worked with the interns in the field due to the school system research approval process. Although interviews were conducted later for a follow-up grounded theory study, these data are not included in this study.

## Reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity directly relates to the integrity of the researcher(s) in conducting the research. In qualitative research, the researcher is the lens, the instrument, through which the study is filtered (Merriam, 2009). One author in this study serves as a high school mathematics teacher and worked as a graduate assistant to the other researcher. Prior to the study, she had neither involvement with any teacher preparation program nor the participants.

The other author worked as a member of the Research Academy for the overall program and in that role was involved in all aspects of research for the program, although not involved in all studies conducted in the PDS. Although involved in the traditional teacher preparation program earlier in her career, for the past five years her involvement has been at the graduate level. Neither researcher was involved in the development of the program, had any vested interest in the program, and had ever met the UE interns prior to the study. Since the purpose of this study was to provide preliminary feedback to the middle grades teacher preparation program in order to plan for the next cohort of interns, there was no pressure from any stakeholder to influence the results in any way.

## Findings

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data: Commitment (stated by the students as “Commitment Now, Success Always”); Challenges (“They call us pioneers; we feel like guinea pigs”); Perceived Benefits (“So I think it is very much preparing me for the career that I set out to do”); and Self-Efficacy, Teacher Efficacy, Pride, Overconfidence (“I am going to have on my [graduation] cap: “I have made it! I am one little black girl...””). The UE program design led to commitment, enhanced self-efficacy, and fostered early development of teacher efficacy among its students, which it appears transformed into overconfidence in the UE interns (Figure 1). Readers should note that these findings have been extrapolated from the early stages of the UE program and that research is ongoing. These interns will be followed for two more years in order to determine the ultimate impact of the urban education program on these interns through their first year of teaching.

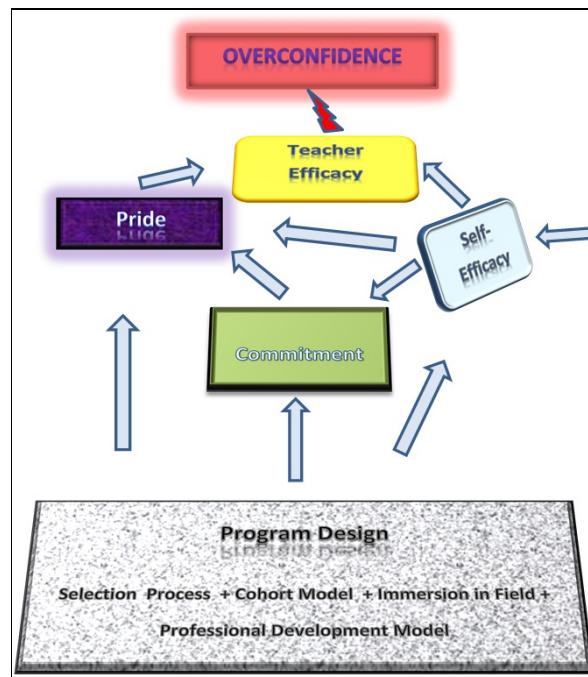


Figure 1. Middle Grades Intern Development Model for 1<sup>st</sup> Year of UE Program

**Commitment - “Commitment Now, Success Always!”:**

The UE interns voiced deep commitment to the UE program. Underlying that commitment is *value*, the value the participants have for the program. Although the implementation of the newly designed program was not seamless in its first year, the participants, from the interns to the professors and liaison, recognized the value of the program. They show clear commitment to improving the program for themselves and future interns. As part of this commitment, a strong sense of community emerged. As was noted during the class observation, “I am observing a community of learners.” Both the collaborating teachers and their students treated the interns as co-teachers; they felt this attitude empowered them to have more authority in the classroom, specifically in terms of classroom management. One participant stated, “I believe in the UE program.” Another added, “It’s not just another campus organization that you can just drop in once a month; you have commitment...”

Student 5: It’s go hard or go home. That’s it!

Student 4: It’s go home. If we hadn’t stuck together and...

Student 3: That’s pretty much what this is, for real.

Student 4: Just...

Student 3: You rearrange your whole life. I have two kids...

Student 4: A job, and this program.

Student 3: Commitment now; Success later.

They eventually converged on the slogan: Commitment Now, Success Forever. (Focus Group Interview)

**Commitment of UE Interns to each other and middle grade students.** The UE interns developed a strong bond to each other as evidenced by their comments during the focus group interview: “So it’s kind of like we get to go through it together. Like instead of doing this one big giant step by ourselves, you feel you’re backed and you have support by, you know, your other classmates.” Another added, “...and I think the only ones who understand the pain we’re going through is each other. We help each other get through this period.” This commitment to one another was noted during the observation: “But they are solidly behind each other, in support of one another. They seem to respect one another even if their personalities are not the same.” And they check on each other when one doesn’t show up for class.

You know, because if we don’t [come to class], we’re going to get at least 3-4 text messages of “Where are you? Aren’t you coming to class today? What happened? Are you okay?” It’s like, if I miss a class, that’s what happens. Or if someone else misses a class, I’m typing, “Where are you at? Are you okay? Do you need a ride to school? What’s the problem?” (Individual Interview)

**Commitment to urban education students and the middle school.** The UE interns are clear in their commitment to the middle grade students as well. Although they enjoyed working with elementary students during the spring of their first year of the program, the experience in the elementary school seemed to especially deepen their commitment to middle grade students. According to one intern during an individual interview, “I’ve learned a lot just observing, you know, their behaviors; and I mean, it is beneficial to be in a middle school and an elementary school even though I’d rather be in the middle school the whole time.” Though not criticizing



the elementary school where they were placed spring semester, they made it clear that they were ready to return to Urbana Middle School in the fall, to return *home*.

Though not all of these factors were goals of the program, together they created more intense commitment. As one student articulated, “I’m just happy that we’re going back to [the middle school] where they knew us.”

### **Challenges - “They call us pioneers; we feel like guinea pigs”:**

**Communication Issues.** Like any new program, rough edges exist. Things need to be polished and refined as the UE program develops. This seemed particularly irritating to the UE interns.

It is like when dealing with your first year teaching because there are so many different curve balls you’re going through. With the [UE] program, I feel like we started out—very unorganized. Like ‘You need to do 15 hours’ and then at the end of week, ‘You need to have 50 hours!’ (Individual interview)

Another student remarked during the focus group interview, “I feel like sometimes they have expectations, and they want us to do something, and we do it. But then we get it back, and they say, ‘Well, that’s not good enough.’ Well, then, what do they really want?!” Another added, “There’s no congruence between what’s expected and what’s occurring.” After articulating all their frustrations about communication, the students came around in support of the program. As one student later remarked during an individual interview,

The program has to have some serious changes, from the numerous night classes to the unknown answers to questions, these things need to be addressed and fixed for the future of this program. But being that [it] is a new program, they have to work all the clinks [sic] out. For a new program, it is good, but it could be great.

This intern’s comment illustrates the UE interns’ resolute commitment to the program regardless of its shortcomings.

**Programmatic Issues.** New programs often have issues to work out during their infancy? The UE teacher preparation program is no exception. The interns struggled meeting the demands of coursework combined with increased time commitment in the field. The interns were very outspoken about their perceived programmatic problems in the UE option. They seemed to understand, on one hand, how difficult it is to start a new program; but on the other hand, they were frustrated. As one student remarked, “The stress level, it’s high. But, it’s like the slogan, ‘Commitment now- Success forever,’ in the beginning it was kind of unorganized a little bit, and I don’t think it was necessarily unorganized. I think it was just wasn’t thought from a student’s perspective.”

The program differs from the traditional teacher education program at Pharr University, but the students seemed unclear as to how, which caused stress. The students were convinced it was nine additional hours, when that is not the case, as evidenced by program documents examined. Because the hours are divided differently from the traditional program, it appeared to the students that more hours were included in the middle grades UE program when, in fact, there were not.

**Other Challenges.** In addition to programmatic and communication issues, some general challenges emerged as well such as time. The Pharr professors and the Urbana Middle School teachers co-teach the education content courses at the urban school campus. Finding the time to plan for the classes proved problematic. With Urbana Middle School teachers teaching in their own classrooms all day, collaborative planning for the weekly content courses for the UE interns was difficult, often impossible. This sometimes impacted the course instruction, which was set up to be a collaborative program design.

Because middle grade certification includes grades 4-8, it was important to offer the interns an experience at the elementary level. This requirement created challenges for the Pharr University personnel participating on the collaboration team. They had to continue their work with Urbana Middle School, preparing for the remainder of the interns' experience the following year. Meanwhile the interns were at another school for a semester-long internship at the elementary level without the support they had become accustomed to at the middle school. Coordinating two collaborating teams, one with the middle school and one with the elementary school, was not feasible. Therefore the interns' experience was not as rich as it was during the first semester. They felt they had been "dropped off" without the support to which they had become accustomed. It is important to note, however, that these interns received much more support, even during their elementary experience, than their counterparts in the traditional program.

Other challenges included travel expenses for the interns, specifically gas for their vehicles. With the rising cost of gasoline, a hardship was experienced since the program requires more hours of field experience than the traditional program, and their education classes are on site, which was between 15-20 miles from the university campus.

Two concerns loom large but lie further down the road. First, building capacity may become a challenge as the program grows, as more interns come into the program and two cohorts are operating simultaneously. Second, sustainability of the program after funding may also be a challenge. Currently, school district personnel who are serving as supervisors to our interns as a part of the Collaborating Team, in addition to those working to develop and maintain the program, are paid with grant monies. The hope is that, once the program is established and the PDS is solidly established, the amount of time and effort on the part of the school district personnel will be lessened.

**Perceived Benefits - "So I think it is very much preparing me for the career that I set out to Do":**

Even though the program is in its infancy, all proclaimed the benefits of the program. The interns expressed that their best experience in the program was time spent in the classroom. According to one intern, "The classroom experiences have really help [sic] me gain a clear understanding about what teaching at different grade levels will be like." Another added, "The field experience in the classroom and working with the CT [collaborating teacher] has been the most beneficial part of the program." Another intern added, "I received excellent CT's that took time to work with me and understood what I needed to become a successful teacher."

The interns admitted being pushed out of their comfort zone by having to both create and teach lessons. One stated "even though you don't have everything, they supplied you with what you need." They recognized the benefits of connecting the theory they were learning in the university classroom to the real world in the middle school classroom. According to one intern,

The assignments that we do, the lesson plans we develop, lesson plans just like the regular ed [sic] students, but we have to implement them. That's pushed us out of our comfort zone now because it's like, you know, you really want us to stand up there and teach this? Y'all really trust me. (Individual interview)

Another intern added,

I think this has expanded my understanding 'cause [sic] I had an understanding from a student's point of view. And you get that understanding from your teacher's point of view is totally different. So I think it is very much preparing me for the career that I set out to do. (Individual interview)

The interns expressed the benefits of viewing education from a student's point of view and a teacher's point of view, as well as looking at the family and the community. They loved working with the urban students in the schools. And they especially valued the small education classes as well as building relationships with their cohort group. UE interns are aware of whom to approach with a problem, unlike students in the traditional program. According to the interns, they have learned how to teach "life-long lessons," not "year-long lessons." In addition, they also see this experience as enhancing their resume, making it easier to attain employment after graduation.

What seemed most beneficial to the interns were the relationships they established with each other. One stated that she believed without the bond between UE interns, some might not be able to make it through the program.

### **Self-Efficacy, Teacher Efficacy, Pride, Overconfidence - "I am going to have on my [graduation] cap: 'I have made it!' I am one little black girl...":**

The interns expressed their pride in the program, pride for being selected for the program, and pride for sticking it out. According to one intern during the focus group interview, "I am going to have on my cap [graduation], 'I have made it!' I am one little black girl..."

Self-Efficacy, an individual's belief about his or her capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect his or her life (Bandura, 1994), was also evident. Self-efficacy beliefs are future-oriented beliefs. Considering they are only in the first year of the teacher preparation program, this heightened sense of self-efficacy was unexpected. The interns have neither taken the methods block of instruction in the semester prior to student teaching nor have student taught; yet their perception of their ability to teach effectively is pronounced. They seem excessively confident to point of overconfidence. According to one intern,

They all see me no matter what grade level it was—they all saw me as a teacher. Even, um, when they knew I was from Pharr University. I was still the teacher there. You know? Um, there was an instance... There were two substitutes and just me, and they [students] didn't give any attention to the substitutes. It was me. They look at you like an adult; they'll talk to you like an adult. I said to her [student], "You know, you are a child; you have to respect her [the teacher]. Imagine how you'd feel if you're an adult and some child talks to you like that? She's the teacher. You're not. You're here to learn

something. It doesn't matter if she likes you are not. You are to be respectful and do what you are supposed to do. (Individual interview)

During the class observation, the following was noted while observing the students during their Pharr University class instruction on the elementary school campus:

Students are chatty, exhilarated, empowered. All students are responsive—a bit silly at first, reflecting strong community spirit and acceptance. The response level is strong, especially for the time of day. The inquiry method the professor is using is pulling the students into the lesson well. Students share openly. Teachers give positive reinforcement...

*My Thought:* how much ownership of a program by the interns becomes dangerous for the program? They think they know best...but do they? How do you manage this as a teacher or coordinator? My field notes ... reflect what I had observed although, at the time, didn't understand: The students feel ownership for the program, too, and want to be acknowledged for what *they* know. They want their ideas to be valued. Is this empowerment? Is this community only? Is this 'We survived'? It somehow seems bigger to me than even empowerment, just not sure what it is yet.

The external evaluator of the program surveyed the UE interns after their first year. In a portion of the evaluation, interns were asked to respond to the following questions: "Where would you rate yourself at this point in your program in relationship to the characteristics of an effective urban education program?" and "How well prepared are you in each of the following categories: Culturally-responsive pedagogy, Literacy, Family engagement, Technology integration, Differentiated instruction for specific student populations targeted by the UE program, Classroom management, Working with English language learners, and Working with students with disabilities?"

The results of the survey for seven of the eight UE interns reflect the overconfidence of these pre-service teachers at this stage in the program. All the middle school UE interns thought they were well to very well prepared in the areas of literacy and differentiated instruction. In terms of classroom management and technology integration, 86% of the interns rated themselves as being well to very well prepared. Seventy-two percent of the interns thought they were well to very well prepared to work with students with disabilities and to address culturally-responsive pedagogy. The category in which the interns felt least efficacious was in working with English language learners with only 57% feeling well to very well prepared. It is important to note that none of the students felt unprepared or poorly prepared in any of the categories. Since there were so few interns, the external evaluator did not seek to determine the significance of these findings compared to the high school and elementary intern surveys, instead only reported percentages. In general, according to the ratings, the middle school interns seemed more efficacious than the other two groups.

## Discussion

This study investigated the early impact of the newly developed, middle grades Urban Education Program at Pharr University. The results of this study demonstrate the complexities involved with the implementation of a new program and the effects different components of the

program have on those involved. Teacher efficacy is “the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 233). The authentic experiences in which the UE interns participated provided a platform to strengthen beliefs about their ability to teach.

Findings from this study revealed interns, early in their program of study, who are very confident in their ability to teach. This confidence evolved into overconfidence for the middle grade interns, findings that are consistent with the literature on self-efficacy and overconfidence. One study found overinflated self-views of college students, when 68% of the time, the students gave themselves higher marks than their teachers (Falchikov & Boud, 1989). Bandura (1997) asserted that in order to accurately judge one’s ability to perform a task, one must have accurate knowledge of what is involved to meet the demands. Early into a task, it is difficult for people to recognize the complexity of the cognition required to complete the task. The most common form of judgment disparity is when efficacy beliefs exceed performance.

The interns could have been unaware of the complexities involved in teaching due to the supportive environment of the PDS. Positive appraisals of beliefs do not necessarily mean the interns have inflated views of themselves. Rather, the disparities may stem from lack of knowledge of the task demands or lack of understanding on how the social system works (Bandura, 1997).

Why is overconfidence of concern? Being overconfident could place the interns in situations they are unprepared to handle, situations that could be deleterious to them, the students they teach, and/or the school or university. It is important to note that the early childhood and high school studies did not find overconfidence in their interns. The program participants in the three studies, primarily differed by ethnicity and gender. Most of the middle grade interns were black; while all participants in this sample were black. Participants in the high school and early childhood studies were not as diverse as the middle grade participants, all reflecting the make-up of program participants. The high school study included one white male participant. There were no male interns in either the middle school or early childhood programs. Stankov and Lee (2008) found gender and ethnic differences in confidence, with men and African Americans showing higher overconfidence bias than women and Whites or Hispanics, respectively. Although the findings from that study are not consistent with other findings in the literature, they present one possible explanation as to why the middle grade interns in this study emerged as overconfident.

### **Implications**

After the conclusion of this study, the collaborating teachers were interviewed, and preliminary findings suggest that the collaborating teachers who were not a part of the collaborative teams have perceived misconceptions about the UE interns and the program. Even though the teachers were given information on the program, they perceived that the interns were in the final stages of their program, either in the methods block or student teaching phases of their program. As a result, their expectations of the interns’ capabilities were inflated, both from a pedagogical and content point of view. Some required the interns to create lesson plans and teach them. Considering these interns had not yet learned how to write lesson plans, this was surprising. It helps to explain why the interns emerged as overconfident in this study. This

additional finding indicates that consistent and explicit communication is needed to ensure fluidity with the expectations when implementing any new teacher preparation program.

Why would the teachers think these students were further along in their program of study than they were? It is understandable how this could happen when these schools are involved with other teacher preparation programs, not just the one at Pharr University. In the past, teachers experience with interns this immersed in the schools was in their final phase of teacher preparation. With so much on the plates of teachers today, especially ones in underperforming schools such as these, it is understandable that they may not have read the entire booklet explaining the particulars of the program. However, according to NCATE (2008) and Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005), partnerships between school systems and universities must create expectations that are not only agreed upon but are also communicated to all parties involved including the community surrounding the schools. Additionally, the nine essential characteristics of a PDS stipulate that roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined for all parties (NAPDS, 2008). As the PDS between Pharr University and this cluster of schools becomes more entrenched, expectations should become better understood, which may eliminate the overconfidence of the UE interns in the future. The findings of overconfidence from this study indicate that checks should be put in place at all levels to ensure that interns are not put in positions where their decisions could, not only jeopardize the program, but also jeopardize their futures as teachers.

Studies have found that teacher efficacy increases during student teaching and then falls during the first year of solo classroom experience (Sahin & Atay, 2010; Wolfolk-Hoy & Spero, 2005). It remains to be seen whether these interns will experience the same type of fluctuation. With the intense two-year immersion in the field in urban school settings, it is possible these interns will not experience the decline in teacher efficacy during their first year of teaching. In fact, after working with these interns, I will be surprised if they experience anything but profound teacher efficacy during their first year of teaching and thereafter. As one intern expressed,

I have no doubt that I won't be nervous when I walk into a [my own] classroom. I think the idea will still be fascinating to me but as far as doing what I have been taught to do, I think, um, so far I have been well-trained to do it. There's still growth there. But I think we've been well trained to do it so I won't be nervous about my performance.

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