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Community: The Missing Piece in Preparing Teacher Candidates for Future Urban Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Preparing successful teacher candidates in urban schools requires educator preparation programs to integrate the exploration of community and cultures into the curriculum. Understanding the importance of community, interpreting and analyzing cultural implications, and creating new perceptions and understandings of urban students are essential for new teachers to be successful in urban classrooms. This qualitative study was conducted within an educator preparation program at an urban-serving university located in the midwestern United States. The authors analyzed 280 electronic reflective journals written by 53 teacher candidates over a 2-year period to determine if the course influenced teacher candidates' perspectives on urban issues. Implications for practice and recommendations for improvements include offering the course earlier in the program. Doing so would allow more time for teacher candidates to develop a deeper understanding and acquisition of the culturally sustaining abilities needed to create meaningful classroom communities for diverse learners.

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Building dynamic classroom communities is grounded in “knowing” students in the classroom. Understanding students’ cultural and social factors is the foundation on which classroom communities are built. However, finding ways to meaningfully introduce urban cultures and experiences to teacher candidates (TCs) is a challenge for many Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs). This article presents how one course offered in an urban-serving university is introducing TCs, many who come from monocultural backgrounds, to urban communities. The overarching course objective is to familiarize TCs with knowledge, skills, and philosophies that encourage them to view urban students as having positive funds of knowledge and cultural capital. Through the incorporation of community experiences, such as creating urban neighborhood walking maps and volunteer work, into this introductory course, TCs acquired hands-on experiences and personal interactions with community stakeholders and resources in the urban center. In turn, this interaction allowed TCs to develop an understanding of community assets available to the schools in which they would be student teaching. By introducing and identifying these urban community assets, EPPs can be instrumental in the development of TCs’ knowledge and experiences necessary to build future dynamic classroom communities.

