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The Impact of an Urban Immersion Field Experience on Teacher Candidates' Concerns Regarding Teaching in Urban Districts: A Cross-University Comparison

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THE IMPACT OF AN URBAN IMMERSION FIELD EXPERIENCE ON TEACHER
CANDIDATES' CONCERNS REGARDING TEACHING IN URBAN DISTRICTS: A
CROSS-UNIVERSITY COMPARISON

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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Title: The Impact of an Urban Immersion Field Experience on Teacher Candidates' Concerns Regarding Teaching in Urban Districts: A Cross-University Comparison

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The role of public education in the United States is to provide all children with equal access to quality education. However, the United States is experiencing a massive achievement gap. Large populations of students from diverse backgrounds, such as those found in urban districts, continue to suffer from achievement gaps perpetuated by the fact that urban districts are often forced to hire under-prepared educators that lack commitment to urban education.

Teacher preparation programs have created curricula and field experiences to increase the number of teachers trained and committed to serve urban schools. This study examined one such program, the Philadelphia Urban Seminar, a cultural immersion experience involving 16 universities from Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (1) it examined the impact of an urban immersion program on candidates' beliefs, concerns, and employment desires regarding urban students, schools, and communities; (2) it explored how the contextual components differed among participating universities and determined whether those factors influenced candidates' concerns and intentions regarding urban schools and career choices.

A total of 143 candidates participated in this study. Data were collected from pre- and post- experience questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The data analysis revealed that after participating in the urban experience: (a) candidates beliefs and concerns toward teaching and living in an urban setting had become more positive; (b) there was a significant increase in the number of candidates willing to teach in urban schools; (c) candidates indicated a deeper understanding of the issues of urban education; and (d) reflection and shared experience were indicated as integral components for dispelling misconceptions and fears and developing deeper understanding and commitment to urban education.

Additional research in preparing teacher candidates to work in inner-city classrooms is needed. However, the findings in this study indicate that a cultural immersion experience with the inclusion of both shared-experience reflection and instruction along with individual reflective practice is a positive program addition that opens teacher candidates to new career choices that they may have never considered without participating in this experience.