Georgia Educational Researcher

Enhancing HBCU Teacher Education Experience Through Authentic University-School Partnerships

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study sought to examine teacher education candidates' practice-based field experiences and relationships with a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and an urban P-12 school. As informed by the Networked Improvement Community (NIC) and Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) conceptual frameworks, the three phases of data collection indicated highly favorable results of desired objectives for an innovative, authentic field experience for local pre-service teacher candidates and P-12 partners. The study also evidences a positive effect on students' achievement as a result of this field experience. Recommendations for future research, education preparation programs, and building partnerships with P-12 schools are discussed.

Keywords

Teacher education, Historically Black College and University (HBCU), urban education, university-school partnerships, reading education, pre-service candidates

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Introduction

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) are not only required to produce highly effective teachers, but are equally responsible for keeping up with the growing demands of policy, accreditation, certification, and building sustainable relationships in the diverse communities they serve. As a vital component of teacher education programs, authentic clinical/field experiences opportunities must be provided to teacher candidates to align theory to practice (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). Unfortunately, research on teacher education programs have documented a disconnect between university courses and field/clinical experiences (Clarke & Winsdale, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009; NCATE, 2010; Zeichner, 2010; CAEP, 2013). This fact plagues HBCUs and their counterparts equally. To address the gap between what we know is important and what is currently under addressed in teacher education requires that teacher education programs begin to make authentic clinical and field experiences the core of their professional preparation (Anagnostopoulos, Smith, & Basmadjian, 2007; Ball & Forzani, 2009; Zeichner, 2010). In addition, teacher preparation programs must develop university-public school partnerships to design high quality experiences that are mutually beneficial for all stakeholders (Clarke & Winsdale, 2019; Lucero, 2017; NCATE, 2010). Regardless of the numerous disadvantages HBCUs face to produce minority teachers, often in underprivileged communities, the responsibility for building and maintaining sustainable partnerships remains the same and innovative strategies are needed.

Literature Review

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) have been central to the preparation of teachers of color for more than 100 years. The missions and visions of HBCUs are rooted in their commitments to preparing and producing effective teachers of color for children, especially children attending urban schools (Moffett, Brownlee-Williams & Thompson, 2014). Consistent with their historic missions, schools of education continue to have a dominant presence on HBCU campuses (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011). Equally consistent are the continuous obstacles that plague schools of education at HBCUs----limited resources, candidates' need for more remediation and academic support, racism, poverty, low expectations, and stringent policies (Collins, Davis & Adriel, 2013; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Jacobs, 2015; Pogue, 2019; Walker, 2015; Moffett, Brownlee-Williams, & Thompson, 2014). These obstacles are exacerbated by a national conversation which includes debates on the contemporary relevance of teacher education programs while HBCUs themselves continue to have to evidence their broader institutional relevance (Collins, Davis & Adriel, 2013; Sawchuk, 2013).

Nonetheless, HBCUs produce 50% of Black teachers with bachelor's degrees (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Colin, Davis, Hilton, 2013) despite the fact that they represent only 4% of all American universities and colleges, enroll approximately 16% of all African Americans in 4-year institutions, and graduate 30% of African Americans earning bachelor's degrees (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Colin, Davis, Hilton, 2013). These statistics demonstrate how important teacher education continues to be at HBCUs.

The impact of Schools of Education at HBCUs is irrefutable. HBCUs and alternative routes to certification tend to enroll a more racially diverse population of teacher candidates; 16% of all black teacher candidates attend HBCUs, but that represents only 2% of all those preparing to teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Nonetheless, teachers of color make a difference in the lives of students of color as well as white students, for they do more than teach content. They dispel myths of racial inferiority and incompetence while also serving as models of intellectual authority, surrogate parents, mentors and guides to their students. Teachers of color appear to be more committed to teaching students of color in difficult-to-staff schools and more apt to persist in those settings (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011). In addition, research on HBCUs affirm that they possess a consummate understanding of the relationship between education and this society, serve as role models, translate the schools' cultural and linguistic environment for their peers and their students, and foster culturally relevant teaching (Dilworth, 2012).

Such work is of critical importance to K-12 classrooms as they become increasingly diverse. By 2024, 56% of students in K-12 schools will be students of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Unfortunately, the existing teaching workforce does not trend towards the same kind of diversity. White teachers account for 82% of the US teaching workforce. Especially problematic is that this workforce is only 18% Black and only 2% of the Black teaching population is male. Despite evidence that teachers of color are important for the academic successes of all students (Dilworth, 2012; Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011), the teaching profession remains predominately White, female, and middle-class (Colin, Davis, Hilton, 2013).

As previously stated, HBCUs, are responsible for helping to address this disparity by preparing Black teachers for the nation. However, one of the largest challenges facing schools of education (SOEs) at HBCUs is accreditation. Because unaccredited institutions are not eligible to award federal and state student aid, including veterans' benefits, loans and grants, this phenomenon will lead to a loss of students, and some credit hours earned by students at an unaccredited institution may not transfer (Gasman, 2006)—outcomes that severely impact the budgets of

institutions, many of which are already money poor. This phenomenon is compiled by steady decreases in state funding, and additional expenses for teacher candidates.

HBCU Schools of Education are therefore required to meet the needs of accrediting bodies with fewer dollars than many of their predominately white institution (PWI) counterparts. As a result, HBCUs have to contend with a need to sufficiently fund and develop systems of accountability, assessment, and instruction that meet professional certification requirements, academic standards and accreditation requirements, and academic rigor to generate professional, highly qualified educators that are sensitive to the needs of urban education and growing US diversity.

The purpose of this paper is to describe how one small HBCU in rural Georgia has used community partnerships to improve the educational experiences, dispositions, and preparation of students enrolled in a teacher education program.

Theoretical Frameworks

Although there are efforts being made in teacher education programs to improve candidate preparation, very little empirical work has been conducted that sheds light on how practice-based field experiences impact candidates' instructional techniques in their future classrooms as in-service practitioners (Forzani, 2014; Price, 2004; National Research Council, 2010). Furthermore, very little evidence is known about how field-based experiences impacts P-12 partnerships (Eisenhbardt, Besnoy, & Steele, 2012). In addition, there is evidence that parents should be a fundamental part of the partnership equation and an integral component for field and clinical experiences. For the purpose of this study, parental involvement is the engagement of parents in all components of their children's educational experiences (Ferrara, 2009; Graue & Brown, 2003 ; Uludag, 2008). Uludag's (2008) research results suggested that teacher education programs, where parental involvement instruction and activities were integrated into the courses, helped preservice teachers become better prepared and would carry positive opinions toward parents as partners. Likewise, Teacher candidates and teachers tend to develop their own sense of parent involvement from their cultural backgrounds (Graue & Brown, 2003; Ferrara, 2009).

To address candidates' instructional techniques, how field experiences impacts P-12 partnerships and parental involvement, the investigators decided to use the Networked Improvement Community (NIC) format to provide a theoretical framework for the study (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2010). The NIC joins academic research, clinical practice, and community expertise through a PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) cycle. (Langley et al., 2009, as cited by Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow,

2010). These incremental steps would make it feasible to build relationships, establish a partnership, and make long term improvements with the local school of this study that would be mutually beneficial for all parties involved. To answer our overarching research question the researchers considered, 1) what key elements are essential for effective and authentic practice-based field experiences? 2) What key factors are critical to building and maintain relationships with P-12 schools that are mutually beneficial to all parties?

Methods

A mixed-methods design of quantitative and qualitative data was performed. Surveys, interviews and evaluation instruments were used for data collection. The qualitative portion of the study included collecting data related to the needs of P-12 partners, content knowledge of teacher candidates, partners' perspectives of teacher candidates, and candidates' self-reported growth. The quantitative section includes candidates' impact on learners as determined by various assessments of student learning outcomes. Methodological considerations regarding study priorities, timeline, data collection, and communication methods were informed by the NIC's PDSA cycles as outlined in the theoretical framework (Langley, et al., 2009, as cited by Bryk, Gomez & Grunow, 2010).

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a Title I elementary school in the southeast region of the United States in partnership with a local HBCU. During the initial PDSA Cycle, the school principal identified reading as the primary area of concern for school improvement, and selected 2nd grade as the grade level of focus for the partnership's efforts. Five 2nd grade teachers would serve as cooperating teachers for the study's project. The investigators chose the required remedial reading course for early childhood teacher candidates to serve as the focus course. Two of the investigators also taught the course; two sections of the course were used, and thirty teacher candidates participated. The teacher candidates received six weeks of orientation and content instruction prior to their ten-week field placements in the classroom.

Study Design

During the initial PDSA phase, data were collected through interviews with P-12 administrators, surveys and meetings with cooperating teachers to determine partners' needs and to inform university partners' design for a mutually beneficial project. Also, during phase one, teacher candidates received the six-week orientation of course content instruction, partner's school routines and policies, project expectations, and project timeline.

Phase two began with teacher candidates' ten-week field placements in the 2nd grade classrooms. Data were collected throughout the ten-weeks while University faculty concurrently observed teacher candidates in their 2nd grade classrooms. Other data included oral and written evaluations from administrators and cooperating teachers on teacher candidates. Also during this phase, teacher candidates were responsible for generating prescriptive and diagnostic reports based on 2nd grade students' literacy. These reports served as one of the early childhood program's key assessment for candidate knowledge.

For the final phase of the study teacher candidates' journals, key program assessments, and meeting minutes were collected and reviewed. Surveys were administered to candidates, cooperating teachers and P-12 partners for additional quantitative data to inform this project's findings. Table 1 outlines the three phases and how they align with the data sources and analyses used to cull study findings.

Table 1
Data Sources and Methods

Phase	Research Question	Data Source(s)	Data Analysis
Phase One (a)	What key elements are essential for effective practice-based field experiences? (RQ1)	• P-12 Administrator Interviews • Meeting Minutes • Surveys	• Multi-level coding • Descriptive quantitative statistics
	What key factors are critical to building and maintaining relationships with P-12 partners that are mutually beneficial to all parties? (RQ2)	• P-12 Administrator Interviews • Pre-service teacher interviews • University Faculty • Surveys Interviews • P-12 Teacher Interviews • Meeting Minutes	• Multi-level coding • Descriptive quantitative statistics

Phase One and ongoing	Background Info for Needs Assessment	• P-12 Student Achievement data • 2nd Grade STAR Reading Failing Grades Report	• Descriptive Statistics
Phase Two	RQ1 & RQ2	• P-12 Administrator Interviews • Classroom observations of pre-service candidates	• Multi-level coding
Phase Three	RQ1 & RQ2	• Key Program Assessments • P-12 Administrator Interviews • Cooperating Teacher Interviews • Cooperating Teacher surveys • Pre-service candidates • Course Evaluations • Surveys	• Multi-level coding • Descriptive quantitative statistics

Data Collection

As previously mentioned, data were collected throughout the various PDSA cycles. Additional data were collected also throughout the project to ascertain candidates' impact on learners as determined by student achievement tests (School Improvement Plan Reports, STAR Reading Test and Student Learning Outcome Reports).

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted after the first PDSA cycle concluded and prior to the beginning of the second PDSA cycle. Evaluation surveys of all project participants were collected at the end of the PDSA cycles.

Cooperating teachers were given a 13-question Likert Scale survey to be completed on their assigned teacher candidate(s). This survey was used to note candidates' progress, teaching skills, and content knowledge. Teacher candidates were given a 22-question Likert Scale survey that served as a course evaluation tool. P-12 school administrators and teachers were given the School Administration Survey. This open-ended survey was designed for the teachers and administrators to evaluate the project and make recommendations for future projects. Follow up interviews for faculty, candidates, teachers, and administration were completed at the end of the PDSA cycles. The interview questions were open-ended. The three initial interview questions were: 1) What were the strengths of this project? 2) What were the challenges or weakness of this project? 3) Based on the lessons learned from the initial project, what would be your recommendations for the future? All data sources were used for methods triangulation in an effort to examine the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods (Patton, 2002).

Findings

Overall, the responses of teacher candidates' evaluation (n=24) of the course were highly favorable. Over 90% strongly agreed that the course objectives were met or exceeded their expectations. The findings further indicated that teacher candidates' attendance (M=1.08) was exemplary and they were fully engaged (M=1.33). The results also indicated that the two University faculty's quality of instruction was excellent (M=1.25).

The cooperating teachers' evaluation (n=26) of teacher candidates revealed that 100% believed the project met the desired objectives. Most notable were the cooperating teachers evaluation of several items in the survey. The results of student-centered academic environment (M=1.73), commitment to ethics and professional development (M=1.73), and candidates' ability to demonstrate proficiency towards diagnosing and prescribing research-based strategies in reading (M=1.77) were noteworthy. Thus, candidates were able to address individual learning differences with their assigned 2nd grade readers *to fulfill course's project; however, teacher candidates engaged all readers under the guidance of their cooperating teacher.* Furthermore, the findings suggest that the six-week orientation, facilitated by the University faculty, was effective and promoted the project's success.

The teachers and administrators identified the students on the 2nd grade failing list in reading as those most in need of intervention. Thus, placement of teacher candidates was solely second grade and students on the aforementioned list were assigned to the teacher candidates. The data showed a statistically significant decrease (percentage of change= -76%) of students on the failing grades report from

pre (n=17) to post (n=4). Two of the students remaining on the failing grades report were students who relocated to another school during the grading period. Similar findings were reported from 2nd graders' individual STAR Reading Test results.

All of the Administration and Cooperating Teachers (n=7) agreed that the project met the expected outcomes (100%). 70% of the participants felt that the project exceeded the original objectives. Support of the classroom teachers, support of students with reading difficulties, and the presence of University faculty on site were identified as elements that exceeded the original expectations. Candidates "entered the project's placement with a clear understanding of what was expected of them (AT4)" was also a contributing factor.

The Administration and Cooperating Teachers identified a variety of strengths of the project.

....*"a healthy flow of positive role models inside the school working with young children on a daily basis and providing them with academic support each day." (AT1)*
The candidates "came at a time that we had no supplemental support in the classroom". "...we really needed help" (AT3)
The candidate "were well prepared" to provide specific reading support in the classroom. (AT4)
"The strengths of the project...were the quality of the 'candidates' and the assistance provided in the classroom to foster education". (AT6)
"The strengths that felt most beneficial were the quality of teacher candidates sent into my classroom to work with my students. They were knowledgeable, prepared, and willing to get to work...my students eyes would light up every time our doors opened and a candidate entered." (AT7)

Although there were no weakness identified on the Administration and Cooperating Teacher survey, there were several recommendations for support in the future.
"I would like to see more support for the entire school from EPP in reading".....specifically in "Phonics and Comprehension"... "our tests shows that reading comprehension is a deficit in our schools."(AT1)
"...benefit from support in math, science, and social studies aligned with Common Core Performance Standards" (AT2)
"This was awesome. No changes!" (AT3)
"...to support math as well as reading." (AT4)
"...loved this program and looking forward to the next cycle." (AT6)

"Please use ...second grade again in the future! ...Students could also be remediated in the areas of addition/subtraction fluency, and regrouping."(AT7)

All of the Administration and Cooperating Teachers would like for the project to continue at their school (100%).

"This was an awesome experience for our children and teachers." (AT1)

"The project was very beneficial and we love to support future educators in this manner." (AT2)

"This was a wonderful experience for me and the students-my students and candidates." (AT4)

"Sure. It was a great experience." (AT5)

"Yes, please continue this program" at our school. (AT6)

"Absolutely! We love and appreciate all the university has done and do for us in the future! Thank you!" (AT7)

The participants of the survey added several comments that they felt the researchers should consider in the future.

"More programs such as this should be encouraged and funded for the benefit of our future. Students need to see positive role models such as college students on a weekly basis in some capacity. (Not just sports, parades, and parties) These candidates can have a strong impact on our test scores. Younger students learn from older students...it's a fact!! We need them [candidates]!!" (AT1)

"Please continue to assign university faculty with the knowledge and enthusiasm to partner with the schools..."(AT2)

"...The university faculty provided a wonderful experience for the candidates and cooperating teachers" (AT4)

"allow candidates....to work on other grade levels...spread them throughout the grade levels." (AT5)

"Again...thank you for the quality of the teacher candidates you provided for our students. They are a huge indicator of the success of our second grade students!" (AT7)

The following are the strengths of the project identified in video-taped interviews:

Table 2
Videotaped Interview Responses

Strengths	Challenges

HBCU	**HBCU**
Improved relationship between HBCU & P-12 School	*Lack of faculty support in P-12 settings*
Connected theory to practice for candidates	*Candidate resistance to the project design*
Streamlined the connection between the course and faculty research agenda	
P-12 School	**P-12 School**
Improved teacher and leadership evaluations for teacher and administrative participants	*Lack of candidate knowledge about local diagnostic measures*
Provided support for reading achievement and school improvement outcomes	*Need for field experiences to be longer*
	Desire for candidate support on other grade levels & content
Candidates	**Candidates**
Provided an opportunity to apply content in course with support of mentor teacher and faculty	*Disconnect between field experience and other courses*
	Conflict with course deadlines and program completion requirements (i.e. GACE, edTPA, etc.)
	Frustration with not feeling as prepared in reading courses prior to Practicum III

Discussion

Accreditation standards have led to more precise, outcomes based expectations. However, the standards may have an adverse effect on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) according to a group of HBCU education deans and administrators. This group represented educator preparation programs that graduate more than 50 percent of all Black public school teachers. The group contends that accreditation standards will negatively "impact the delivery of their educator programs." Some concerns are increased admissions criteria,

accountability issues, budget restraints for institutions, and additional expenses for teacher candidates (Gasman et.al, 2006; Hawkins, 2013). Despite these concerns, educator preparation programs at HBCUs must provide more functional field experiences and increase collaborative efforts with K-12 school systems to ensure that teacher candidates have more instructional responsibilities during field experiences (Daniels, Patterson & Dunston, 2010; Teaching 2030, 2014*).*

As suggested in the literature and as supported by this study's findings, an intentional effort to align field-based experiences, course assignments, and method's course content to move teacher candidates from novice candidates to emerging professionals is necessary (Capraro, 2010; Forzani, 2014; Watts & Levine, 2010). The study's findings are further supported because it utilized a core of high leverage practices for alignment and focused on the work of the classroom (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford & Wyckoff, 2009; Teaching Works, 2013). Furthermore, The Networked Improvement Community (NIC) and PDSA Model was an appropriate model for this study. The model recommended starting small focusing on single elements (Byrk et al., 2010). This study focused on one course, one content area, one grade level, and one school. Due to the singularity and presence of faculty on site this study was manageable.

The implications from this study are limited due to its singular nature, but may provide a realistic beginning for HBCUs to develop K-12 partnerships. Using the NIC framework of incremental steps and the presence of full-time University faculty on site made this study not only mutually beneficial to all parties involved, but also was financially feasible for the University. By merging research, operating on a shorter timeline and repeating implementation phases, PDSA preserved financial and human resources while facilitating engagement and reform (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2010). The NIC's theoretical framework also solidified a well-structured and systematic field experience model, with parental involvement, that significantly impacted learners' achievements. Starting with one school and one course may aid with establishing a field experience model of partnerships sufficient for accreditation purposes.

However, more research is needed about urban and rural partnership developments especially for most HBCUs. As minority serving institutions, HBCUs are uniquely qualified to address the nation's need to increase the number of culturally and ethnically diverse teachers (Matthews, 2009; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011). This increase could help alleviate achievement gaps for the students and schools with the greatest needs (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011). HBCUs are more than learning institutions; they are also cultural and economic incubators in their localities and regions (Crawford, 2017). They are well poised to inform policy by

contributing literature on the recruitment, retention and matriculation of teachers of color.

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