AN EXPLORATION OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCES AND DISCURSIVE PRACTICES
OF ALTERNATIVELY PREPARED BEGINNING ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL URBAN TEACHERS

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DEDICATION

To my parents
Mary & Joseph DiGiovanni
AN EXPLORATION OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCES AND DISCURSIVE PRACTICES OF ALTERNATIVELY PREPARED BEGINNING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL URBAN TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how the differing mindset of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers, which stems in large part from greater life experience, manifests itself in their discursive practices. A group of 23 first year elementary school teachers enrolled in a two-year alternative teacher certification program located in a large mid-Atlantic urban city were selected to participate in the study.

Framing this study was the overarching research question: What are the different life experiences of beginning teachers in an alternative certification program and how do these different life experiences shape their discursive practices in urban school settings? To gain insight into this question, five sub-questions pertaining to life experiences and discursive practices were asked. As the life experiences and discursive practices of members of the sample population were examined, an inductive approach predominately utilizing qualitative research methods was employed to explore the research questions. Three primary data collection tools, two qualitative (individual interviews and classroom
observations) and one quantitative (modified version of the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs), were used to gather a preponderance of the data. A secondary data collection tool, a follow-up questionnaire, was also used to gather data relative to themes that surfaced during interviews and observations. All 23 participants completed the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs, a subset of 8 (of the 23) participants participated in interviews and observations and a subset of 21 (of the 23) participants completed the follow-up questionnaire.

Study findings revealed that life experiences make a difference in the discursive practices of alternatively prepared teachers and that a nexus exists between life experience and teachers’ discursive practices. Demographic data from this study further suggested that alternative teacher certification programs attract more teachers of color, older individuals and men than traditional teacher preparation programs. Results also offered insight into the structure of alternative certification programs indicating that it is advantageous for participants to progress through programs in cohorts and to receive instruction in the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching from university-based professors.
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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

The Problem and Its Context

This study employed primarily qualitative research methods to explore the impact of life experience on the discursive practices of alternatively prepared teachers as a way of contributing to the literature on teacher quality and alternative certification programs.

Specifically, the study focuses on the experiences and practices of a group of beginning teachers enrolled in the Urban Teachers Project, a pseudonym for a two-year alternative teacher certification program located in a large mid-Atlantic urban city. Alternatively prepared teachers are those individuals with at least a bachelor's degree and considerable life experience who choose a non-traditional avenue to become licensed to teach in the public school system. This includes avenues ranging from emergency certification to sophisticated, well-designed programs that thoroughly address the professional preparation of individuals (Feistritzer, 2002).

Teacher education has traditionally been the responsibility of higher education institutions and conducted within the context of state teacher certification requirements. Traditional routes to teacher certification typically include the completion of undergraduate or masters level teacher education programs that lead to initial state
licensure. As each state in the U.S. sets its own teacher licensure requirements, requirements vary significantly from state to state (Recruiting New Teachers, 2003a). Such differences notwithstanding, most states require that teacher certification candidates have at least a bachelor’s degree; complete an approved, accredited teacher education program; have a major or minor in education for elementary education teaching; have a major in the subject area in which they plan to teach for middle and high school teaching; have a strong liberal arts foundation; and pass a Praxis (beginning teacher assessment produced by Educational Testing Service) or state teaching exam (Recruiting New Teachers, 2003a).

Pursuant to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the federal government has expanded its voice in teacher preparation, requiring that all teachers, including practicing teachers, be “highly qualified” by 2006. According to Section 9101 of the Act, a “highly qualified teacher” is someone with a bachelor’s degree who is licensed to teach on the basis of full state certification or passage of a state licensure exam. Further requirements have been established for teachers just entering the profession. At the elementary school level, a “highly qualified” new teacher is one who has passed a test of subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing and mathematics. At the middle and high school level, a “highly qualified” new teacher must have passed a rigorous exam or have the equivalent of an undergraduate major in each of the subjects he or she teaches (Whitehurst, 2002). These requirements, which took effect in Fall 2002 for Title I schools and will apply to all current and new teachers in 2006, aim to decrease the
number of uncertified teachers and teachers practicing in subject areas in which they are unprepared.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 legitimized alternative certification programs as an acceptable means for entering the teaching profession. Under Title II, Part A: Grants for Improving Teacher Quality, the law awards grants to alternative certification programs that recruit and retain highly qualified mid-career professionals and recent college graduates as teachers in high-need schools. This law lends support to the development and enhancement of alternative certification programs. Traditional college and university based teacher education programs are neither the sole nor the required mode of teacher preparation (Cochran-Smith, 2002).

Alternative teacher certification programs have been offered as at least a partial solution to the problems of a homogenous teaching force, subject-specific shortages, and urban school staffing voids. In Zeichner and Schulte’s (2001) meta-analysis of peer reviewed research on the topic, researchers found that programs are able to attract higher percentages of people of color, men, and older individuals, as well as prospective teachers committed to working in urban areas.

The capacity of alternative certification programs to attract people of color inures greatly to the benefit of the American education system, given the lack of diversity within the current teaching force. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2000), in 1993-1994, 87% of public elementary and secondary schools students were Caucasian, 7% African American, 4% Hispanic, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander, and less than 1%
American Indian or Alaskan Native. These statistics are troublesome considering that students of color are expected to constitute a majority of all K-12 students in the United States by 2035, while the proportion of Caucasian teachers is not expected to diminish significantly in upcoming years (Clewell & Villegas, 2001).

In addition to helping to diversify the teaching force, alternative certification programs possess the inherent capacity to vitiate staffing shortages in urban regions. Haberman (1991) argued that graduates of traditional certification programs seek positions in locations where they are not needed (i.e., suburban towns) and avoid teaching in locations (i.e., urban cities) where they are needed. Data reported in the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education’s (AACTE, 1989) study, Research about Teacher Education III, illustrate this argument. Findings indicated that only 4% of undergraduate students studying to be teachers wanted to teach in inner cities. Moreover, the findings revealed that most preservice teachers educated in traditional, university-based programs were young, Caucasian, middle-class females who grew up in small towns within 100 miles of their college and anticipated teaching in a small town or suburban school. The findings of this comprehensive 1989 study are reaffirmed by related, but more recent, studies (see Chizhik, 2003; Sleeter, 2001; Zimphur & Ashburn, 1992).

Unlike traditionally prepared teachers, alternatively prepared teachers often report a preference to teach in urban settings. Natriello and Zumwalt (1993) found that teachers graduating from traditional teacher education programs express less desire and
willingness to teach in urban school settings than alternatively prepared teachers. These results are consistent with Stoddert’s (1993) finding that alternative routes to teacher certification attract individuals with more positive dispositions to teaching in culturally diverse contexts and are generally more amenable to living and working in urban environments than traditionally educated teachers.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore how the differing mindset of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers, which stems in large part from greater life experience, manifests itself in their discursive practices. Prior research indicates that alternatively prepared teachers differ from traditionally prepared teachers in multiple ways (Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993; Schoon & Sandoval, 2000; Stoddert, 1992, 1993). Ducharme and Ducharme (1996) stated, “There are clearly some age and experience differences between 19-year olds preparing to teach and a 47-year old veteran of military service” (p. 1036). A crucial difference is that traditionally prepared college graduates have limited life and work experiences to draw from when entering the profession, while alternatively prepared teachers can draw upon lessons learned through life experience and knowledge gained in prior professions to assist them in classroom settings.

**Research Questions**

The overarching research question framing this study was: What are the different
life experiences of beginning teachers in an alternative certification program and how do these different life experiences shape their discursive practices in urban school settings? To gain insight into this question, the following sub-questions were asked.

1. What are the demographic characteristics and educational beliefs of a group of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers?

2. What are the personal experiences and professional backgrounds of a group of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school teachers?

3. How do the professional backgrounds and personal experiences of a group of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers influence their educational beliefs and, therefore, their teaching pedagogies?

4. What can be said about the “quality” of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers as evidenced by their life experiences and discursive practices?

5. What insights can be gained into the capacity of alternative certification programs to prepare a new cadre of elementary school urban teachers?

Rationale behind the Research

Studies show that most traditionally prepared preservice teachers, those individuals preparing to become classroom teachers by participating in established teacher education programs, prefer to teach in suburban rather than urban school settings (Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993; Stoddert, 1992, 1993; Zimphur & Ashburn, 1992). This
reality, in concert with high rates of teacher turnover/attrition and other factors, have
contributed to staffing shortages in urban public schools (Oakes, Franke, Quartz, &
Rogers, 2002). Alternative certification programs have been offered as a solution to
these staffing shortages.

Alternative certification programs aim to improve the quality of teachers working
in urban areas by creating programs that recruit mature individuals with greater life
experience into the teaching profession. Stodder and Floden (1996) argue that the
effects of maturity and prior work experience are critical issues to explore when
researching alternatively prepared teachers. In addition to exploring the backgrounds and
experiences of alternatively prepared teachers, it is also important to consider the extent
to which such backgrounds and experiences influence the construction of educational
belief systems and, in turn, teaching pedagogies.

The overwhelming majority of the literature on alternative teacher certification
tends to focus on whether one structural model (alternative or traditional) is “better” than
another (Zeichner & Shulte, 2001). Other related literature comprises a collection of the
characteristic strengths (e.g., capacity to attract non-traditional candidates for difficult to
fill positions) and weaknesses (e.g., truncated period of supervised student teaching) of
alternative certification programs (Dial & Stevens, 1993; Dill, 1996; Finn & Madigan,
2001).

Consideration of these attributes is helpful in providing basic information about
the traits of alternatively prepared teachers, evidence as to structure of different types of
programs, and rhetoric for government policy makers and teacher educators to speak in
generalities about these programs. These generalizations have been used to attest to the
public the promise of such programs as a viable avenue for putting quality teachers in
classrooms. However, they do not “put a face” on the alternatively prepared teacher.
Accordingly, a study exploring the life experiences and discursive practices of
individuals prepared through an alternative teacher certification program is warranted.

**Significance of the Study**

Partially in response to the present gap in alternative certification literature, the
following study offers theoretical and practical outcomes to inform the development of
teacher education curricula and to “embody” the beginning alternatively prepared urban
elementary school teacher. This embodiment takes the form of a contextualized analysis
of the discursive practices related to educational beliefs and teaching practices manifest
in the alternatively prepared teacher’s classroom on a day to day basis.

Many previous studies treat alternatively prepared teachers primarily as numerical
statistics representing quantitative data used to describe the quality of such teachers
(Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2004; Shen, 1998). One of the contributions of this study
to the field of education is to add to the literature on teacher quality by “putting a face”
on the alternatively prepared teacher.

There are myriad ways to measure teacher quality. Many studies assess quality
by examining easily measurable inputs such as academic degrees and years of experience
(Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; McCabe, 2003). According to Temin (2003), when evaluating teacher quality, intangible indicators, not just tangible indicators like grades on a college transcript and performance on an aptitude test, must be considered. However, studies continue to focus specifically on tangible indicators that provide only statistical data (Decker et al., 2004). At the outset, therefore, this study contributes to the literature on the quality of alternatively prepared teachers by focusing on two intangible indicators of teacher quality: life experiences and discursive practices.

**The Research Participants**

Twenty-three individuals enrolled in the Urban Teachers Project, a pseudonym for a two-year alternative teacher certification program located in a large mid-Atlantic urban city, participated in this study. The Urban Teachers Project includes a six-week summer institute that provides supervised teaching at a summer school site, graduate level coursework for the duration of the program, and mentoring by both a university-based clinical faculty member and an experienced public school classroom teacher. All 23 participants completed the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs, a subset of 8 (of the 23) participants participated in interviews and observations and a subset of 21 (of the 23) participants completed the follow-up questionnaire.

**Limitations**

As a supporter and alumna of "traditional" bachelor and masters degree teacher
education programs, my attitude toward alternative programs could be deemed “guardedly optimistic.” This view engendered the potential for bias against alternative certification programs. To diminish this possibility, strategies aimed to enhance the study’s validity and, consequently, reduce inherent or unintended bias were implemented. Specifically, the data were triangulated and mechanically recorded; participant feedback was solicited; reflective field notes were taken; and connotative, descriptive language was used.

In addition to limitations attributable to personal bias, there were also possible limitations associated with the sample population. Study participants were enrolled in an alternative teacher certification program at the time this study was completed. Their subsequent devotion of time and energy in this regard might be termed a tacit endorsement of alternative preparation programs. Moreover, as the sample population was small, the findings lack significant generalizability - a term that refers to the applicability of the findings to settings and contexts different from the one in which they were obtained (Mills, 2003). In qualitative work, generalizability is often measured by the transferability of the findings, so that the emphasis is on the quality of the description, the data, categories, procedures and how well other researchers can transfer the findings in other settings (McMillan & Wergin, 2002). Although the generalizability of this study’s findings may be weak, the transferability of the findings is strong because of the concurrent compilation of an audit trail and provision to readers of a rich, thick description of the phenomenon (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).
Assumptions

Two major assumptions underpinned this study. The first was that alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers have life experiences that differ from most traditionally prepared beginning teachers. Due to their age, traditionally prepared teachers have limited life and work experiences to draw from when entering the profession, while alternatively prepared teachers can draw upon lessons learned through life experience and knowledge gained in prior professions to assist them in classroom settings. The second assumption was that alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers can discuss personal experiences and professional backgrounds that influence the construction of their educational beliefs and pedagogical practices.

Definition of Terms

Alternative teacher certification. Every non-traditional avenue to becoming licensed to teach, from emergency certification to sophisticated and well-designed programs that address the professional preparation of individuals who already have at least a bachelor’s degree and considerable life experience (Feistritzer, 2002).

Beginning teachers. In the context of this study, the term refers to individuals who are in their first year of teaching.

Educational beliefs. In the context of this study, the term refers to beliefs teachers hold
with respect to progressive and transmissive approaches toward education.

**Career switchers.** In this study, the term refers to individuals who left another profession to enter the teaching profession.

**Certification.** The process by which a non-governmental agency or association grants special professional recognition to an individual who has met predetermined qualifications (Recruiting New Teachers, 2003b).

**Deprofessionalization.** Undermining of the credibility, as well as the professionalization, of a field (Zumwalt, 1991).

**Discursive practices.** In the context of this study, the term refers to ways of talking, doing and being associated with ones educational beliefs and teaching pedagogies.

**Habitus.** Socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions and/or predispositions (Bourdieu, 1977).

**Licensure.** The official recognition by a state governmental agency that an individual meets state-mandated requirements and is, therefore, approved to practice as a professional in that state (Recruiting New Teachers, 2003b).
**Non-traditional teacher.** An older individual, member of a racial/ethnic group, a male in many instances and/or an individual with prior career experience (Kizu, 2002).

**Progressive.** In the context of this study, the term is used to refer to a philosophy of education that proffers that students must be active learners whose own personal and social experiences are important to the educational process (Witcher, Sewall, Arnold, & Travers, 2001).

**Teacher beliefs.** Tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms and academic material to be taught (Kagan, 1992).

**Teacher quality.** In this study, the U.S. Department of Education’s (1999) definition of teacher quality as some measure of the dynamic characteristics, abilities and decisions of teachers was followed.

**Text.** Any stretch of oral or written language such as a conversation or story (Gee, 1996).

**Transmissive.** In the context of this study, the term is used to refer to a philosophy of education that proffers that the teacher is the one who knows and transmits important knowledge to the student (Witcher et al., 2001).
**Organization of the Study**

This study is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a basis for exploration of the phenomenon. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review that examines teachers' beliefs, details the history of traditional and alternative teacher education programs, explores the role of alternative certification programs in staffing schools, and evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of programs. Chapter 3 describes the methodological procedures and research design employed in this study. More specifically, this chapter details sampling procedures, data collection instruments and procedures, data analysis methods, and steps taken to enhance validity. Chapter 4 outlines the study's findings and includes an analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter 5 offers conclusions and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Overview

In order to contextualize the aforementioned research questions, a review of the literature relative to beginning teachers’ beliefs and practices, history of traditional and alternative teacher education programs, supply and demand issues in teacher recruitment and retention, notable strengths and weaknesses of alternative teacher certification programs follows. Interrelationships among these areas of research provide a theoretical and practical framework for this study.

Beginning Teachers’ Beliefs

The set of beliefs teachers have constructed acts as a lens through which they view their practices (Bliem & Davinroy, 1997). As beliefs hold such significance, a substantial amount of research on the topic has been conducted. A majority of the research has examined the beliefs of traditionally prepared preservice and beginning teachers (Kagan, 1992). Findings from studies of this population have identified myriad factors influencing the construction of belief systems. Factors include prior experiences as elementary and high school students (Calderhead & Robson, 1991), enrollment in traditional teacher education programs (O’Connell Rust, 1994), prior personal
experiences (Lortie, 1975), and their supervising teachers' belief systems (Nettle, 1998). A common thread running through the literature is the inherent influence of traditionally prepared beginning teachers' experiences as primary, secondary and university students on the development of their belief systems.

Research that specifically examines factors relevant to the construction of alternatively prepared beginning teachers' beliefs remains quite scant. The paucity of research in this area could be attributable to the relative infancy of alternative certification programs and smaller number of teachers prepared in this manner. Regardless of the explanation, one cannot simply accept that findings relative to traditionally prepared teachers are applicable to alternatively prepared teachers.

Of the work that has examined alternatively prepared beginning teachers' beliefs, study findings suggest that life experiences influence beliefs. Crow, Levine and Nager (1990) found evidence of this claim in their study of career switchers. Researchers found that past professional experiences assist career changers in negotiating their new roles as classroom teachers (Crow et al., 1990). This study suggests that professional life experiences influence the construction of alternatively prepared teachers' belief systems.

In examining the development either of traditionally or alternatively prepared teachers' beliefs, it is important to remember that this examination cannot be done in a vacuum, void of any connection to the environment from which beliefs sprung. Gates' (2002) study of teachers' beliefs found that much of the research on the topic fails to consider how beliefs are constructed within the larger social world, and that future work must consider this context.
One strategy to this end, argued Gates (2002), centers on an examination of a teacher’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Gates argued, “Our habitus forms the generative principles that organize our social practices leading to social action and provide us with systems of dispositions that force (or allow us) to act characteristically in different situations” (p. 4). One’s habitus is at the heart of his/her thoughts and dispositions and manifests itself in belief and action. By researching habitus, one can explore previously opaque routes to the core of teachers’ belief systems. Such an exploration is worthwhile, for it is the ways of being or habitus that forms an individual's belief system about teaching and learning and subsequently shapes one's teaching practices.

**Beginning Teachers’ Practices**

While studies of "belief construction" are instructive to a certain extent, the nexus between beliefs and practices must also be considered (Richardson, 1996). A substantive body of research on this relationship indicates that the beliefs teachers hold impact their practices in classroom settings (see Kagan, 1992; O’Connell Rust, 1994; Stipek, Givvin, Salmon, & MacGyvers, 2001; and Virta, 2002). A high school English teacher in Elbaz’s (1981) case study personifies this truism. In her study, Elbaz found that the teacher’s beliefs about teaching served as an organizing, functioning unit that formed the basis for classroom behaviors.

Evidence of this claim can also be seen in Stipek et al.’s (2001) study of fourth-sixth grade teachers’ beliefs and practices related to mathematics instruction. In this study, researchers found that classroom practices reflected reported beliefs. For example,
teachers, who believed that mathematics is a set of operations and procedures to be learned and that teachers should always be in control, acted accordingly. They implemented practices that emphasized strong accountability and performance, allocated little autonomy to students and maintained an environment in which mistakes were something to be avoided.

Although there is a substantial amount of research detailing the extent to which traditionally prepared teachers’ beliefs influence classroom practices, research specifically exploring the relationship is wanting in the case of alternatively prepared beginning teachers. The following study aims to add to this relatively new, much-needed area of research. However, prerequisite to a meaningful addition to this body of research is a review of the literature pertaining to alternative certification programs and teachers trained thereunder.

**History of Teacher Education**

A broad overview of the evolution of American teacher education since the 1800s is necessary because it provides an understanding as to why and how alternative teacher certification programs developed. The “official” preparation of public school teachers commenced in the mid-1800s with the development of normal schools. In the preceding years, qualifications for teaching varied. According to Lucas (1997), some teachers were barely literate homemakers with no formal training, while others had earned college degrees. Most had honed their skills “on the job” or while serving as apprentices to teachers who had instructed them in the past (McNergney & Herbert, 2001).
Qualifications for teaching remained arbitrary until the common school movement and subsequent normal school movement, when proposals requiring individuals to participate in some form of professional preparation started to emerge.

The common school movement, advanced by Horace Mann in the mid-1800s, promoted a universal tax-supported system of free schools (McNergney & Herbert, 2001). The consequential rise in student numbers resulting from the common school movement engendered an increased need for classroom teachers. In order to address the demand for teachers, Mann introduced the concept of normal schools to the Massachusetts state legislature in 1838 (McNergney & Herbert, 2001). Normal schools were public teachers' colleges that required candidates to declare an intention to teach; pass an entrance examination covering primary school subject areas; and document good moral character before acceptance (Lucas, 1997). Upon completing the one-year normal school training program, participants were awarded a certificate that enabled them to teach in a Massachusetts elementary school.

It was not long before other states followed suit and started developing normal schools. These specialized schools, which did not require students to possess a high school diploma, remained in existence until World War I (Lucas, 1997). After the war, requirements for teacher preparation intensified and the attainment of a four-year high school diploma became the norm rather than the exception (Dial & Stevens, 1993). With new requirements, normal schools were absorbed within or evolved into four-year colleges or universities (Lucas, 1997). This shift in responsibility also led to the development of "schools of education" within higher education institutions.
In the 1970s, problems associated with the existing method of preparing teachers through higher education institutions emerged. Until the 1970s, women constituted the majority of education majors. However, in the wake of the women's rights movement of the 1960s, women sought out opportunities in other fields. Consequently, fewer women majored in education and the number of college graduates qualified to teach declined (Dial & Stevens, 1993).

With fewer individuals entering the teaching profession upon graduating from college, school systems were left with staffing shortages. To alleviate the problem, several states issued emergency teaching certificates which allowed individuals to serve as classroom teachers without having completed a university sponsored teacher education certification program (Feistritzer, 1993). The state of New Jersey, however, dealt with the issue in a slightly different manner. Instead of issuing emergency teaching certificates, the state developed an alternative teacher certification program in 1983.

New Jersey's alternative certification program garnered much media attention and precipitated the development of alternative routes to certification in other states (Dial & Stevens, 1993). By 2002, 45 states and the District of Columbia had adopted some form of alternative teacher certification (Feistritzer, 2002). The National Center for Education Information estimates that more than 175,000 persons have been licensed to teach through alternative certification programs since their inception in 1983 (Feistritzer, 2002).

When examining alternative certification, it is necessary to discuss relevant
terminology, as no clear consensus exists as to the definition of the term. According to Feistritzer (1999), "The term ‘alternative teacher certification’ has been used to refer to every avenue to becoming licensed to teach, from emergency certification to very sophisticated and well-designed programs that address the professional preparation needs of the growing population of individuals who already have at least a baccalaureate degree and considerable life experience and want to become teachers" (p. 1). Moreover, components of programs differ widely from state to state and region to region. In Wilson, Floden and Ferrini-Mundy’s (2002) meta-analysis of teacher preparation programs researchers found that programs labeled as “alternative” vary from 1-year to 2-year preservice models to programs offering a few weeks of training before placement as classroom teachers.

Supply & Demand

As discussed above, the initial impetus (and continued need) for alternative certification programs was the law of supply and demand: an overabundance of teaching jobs and a lack of traditionally trained teachers to staff them. Staffing shortages in the 1960s were the result of fewer individuals entering the profession. Current shortages, however, are increasingly attributable to the high attrition rate of beginning teachers and an increased number of teacher retirements, rather than a paucity of individuals entering the profession.
Many beginning teachers leave the profession within their first few years of teaching. Hudson (2001) found that there is a 9% attrition rate for first year teachers and, of those that stay, close to 50% leave within the first three to five years. Central among the reasons why new teachers leave the profession are poor working conditions, classroom management and discipline problems, difficulty working with parents, an excessive amount of paperwork, and little opportunity for career advancement (Gold, 1996).

With regard to teacher retirements, the data provided in the Digest of Education Statistics 2000 indicated that in 1993-1994, 67% of the teachers in elementary and secondary public schools were over forty-years old (United States Department of Education, NCES, 2000). Of the 67% in this group, 42% were in the 40-49 year old age group and the remaining 25% were over 50 years old. Many teachers hired during the baby-boom era of the 1960s are nearing retirement and these soon-to-be vacant positions will need to be filled.

In addition to job vacancies attributable to attrition or retirement, districts also must staff positions created due to increased student populations. Enrollments in kindergarten through twelfth grade classrooms have been on the rise and are projected to continue to climb through the first decade of this century. According to the U.S. Department of Education, NCES (2000, ¶ 1), “rising immigration rates...and the baby boom echo — the 25 percent increase in the number of annual births starting in the mid-1970s and peak in 1990 — are boosting school enrollment.”
The high attrition rate of beginning teachers, impending number of teacher retirements and ongoing growth in student enrollments portend a significant need for new teachers in upcoming years. Some researchers project that the United States will require two million teachers within the next ten years to adequately staff its schools (Hudson, 2001). Conversely, others question the urgency and extent of the need. There are those who argue that blanket shortages are not forthcoming, but instead, subject and region specific shortages are more likely to occur (Clewell, Darke, Davis-Googe, Forcier, & Manes, 2000). Regardless of the specifics of impending teacher shortages, there is consensus that shortages are likely in one form or another, and that remedial action must be taken. Alternative certification programs represent one present and future form of “action” to address shortages.

**Alternative Teacher Certification Program Formats**

Alternative teacher preparation programs are generally considered one of three types: national, state or district programs. These three types of programs differ in design and format, but each aims to prepare individuals with at least a bachelor’s degree in a major other than education to serve as classroom teachers.

The most prominent national alternative route to teacher preparation is Teach for America. This program is primarily funded through contributions from private corporations, foundations and individuals. However, it did receive a small amount of federal funding – 5% of its budget – until June 2003 when federal funding was cut. Teach For America's (2003, ¶ 21) mission is to “build a corps of some of the nation's most
outstanding recent college graduates, of all academic majors and career interests, who will commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools and who will become lifelong leaders in the effort to expand educational opportunity.” Since its inception in 1990, Teach for America has trained over 9,000 teachers.

An important distinction must be made with respect to the overall intent of Teach for America. Unlike most alternative teacher certification programs that aim to produce a cadre of teachers who will remain in the profession, the goal of Teach for America (2003, ¶2) is to “close the achievement gap that exists between children growing up in low-income areas and their peers in higher income areas.” The intent of the program is not to produce a new, permanent group of classroom teachers, but instead, to address concerns over achievement gaps between students of varying socioeconomic levels.

In addition to Teach for America, there are two other national alternative certification programs, both of which are federally funded. One program, Troops to Teachers, was instituted by the Department of Defense in 1994. This program aims to prepare retired military personnel to serve as classroom teachers. The second program, the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, was developed in 2001 through a five year, $35 million grant from the Department of Education. This program offers Passport Certification (i.e. teacher certification) to any individual with a bachelor’s degree or higher who has passed a background check and two computer-based examinations. Currently, Pennsylvania, Idaho and Florida are the only states that recognize this method of teacher certification.
State sponsored programs have proliferated since the first program was introduced in New Jersey in 1983. Requirements for entrance and completion of state-sponsored programs vary widely. Some states sponsor programs requiring participants to complete courses in classroom instruction, engage in supervised student teaching internships and collaborate with a mentor. Other, more lenient, states offer programs that allow individuals to teach without any on-site support or supervision, while taking traditional teacher education courses (Feistritzer, 1993).

In addition to state programs, district sponsored programs have been created to address the unique needs that districts present. Two well-received district sponsored programs were developed in Los Angeles and Houston. These programs have received acclaim for successes in recruiting teachers of color to work in urban areas (Newman & Thomas, 1999).

**Program Strengths**

Alternative routes to teacher certification have been used to address staffing shortages that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century and continued through the turn of the century. Research indicates that such programs possess inherent strengths that distinguish them from traditional teacher education programs. Central among these strengths are their demonstrated capacities to diversify the teaching force, address regional shortages typically found in rural and urban areas, and staff hard-to-fill teaching positions. Simply stated, these programs possess the unique functionality to prepare a diverse group of individuals to teach in areas most afflicted by teaching shortages.
Diversification of the Teaching Force

In both urban and rural areas, a tremendous lack of diversity exists within the teaching force. This lack of diversity is particularly problematic in urban areas with large percentages of minority students. In large urban areas, 69% of the student body is African American, Latino, Native American and Asian American, as compared to just 35% of the teaching populace (Hudson, 2001).

Given the limited number of minority teachers employed in schools, it is conceivable that a student could progress through his/her entire education without being instructed by a teacher from a minority group (Middleton, Mason, Stillwell, & Parker, 1988). Kohl and Witty (1996) argued that “this mismatch is critical because a monocultural teaching and administrative staff is less likely to be able to use the values, cultural backgrounds, family experiences of minority children” (p. 843). Supporting this view are Piercynski, Matranga and Peltier (1997) who believe that a lack of instruction from minority teachers is troublesome considering that minority teachers serve as role models for all students, may be better equipped to meet the learning needs of minority students, and can help minority students transcend language barriers.

This is not to say that students of color need teachers of color in order to succeed, but that students of color should have the opportunity to be educated by teachers that reflect their racial/ethnic backgrounds - just as Caucasian students should have the opportunity to be taught by teachers who do not mirror their racial backgrounds. Consequently, alternative certification programs that promote the diversification of the
teaching force merit consideration. Research findings establish that alternative certification programs are more likely to train members of cultural minority groups than traditional teacher education programs (Houston, Marshall, & McDavid, 1993; Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993; Schoon & Sandoval, 2000; Shen, 1998; Stoddert, 1992, 1993).

Houston et al.'s (1993) two-year study comparing alternatively and traditionally trained Houston, Texas teachers found that a greater number of minority candidates completed alternative certification programs than traditional teacher education programs. Researchers found that 67% of traditionally certified teachers in their study were Caucasian, compared with just 48% of alternatively certified teachers.

Diversification of the teaching force extends beyond race to gender and age. Programs also bring men and mature individuals into the profession – two groups often underrepresented in traditional undergraduate elementary school teacher education programs. Houston et al. (1993) found that alternative certification programs prepare more men and mature individuals than traditional certification programs. Moreover, researchers concluded that individuals in traditional certification programs are more likely to be young, white females than those enrolled in alternative certification programs.

Address Staffing Shortages

In addition to helping diversify the teaching force, research further indicates that alternative certification programs assist in the staffing of teaching positions that are often
difficult to fill (Feistritzer, 1993; Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993). This includes positions in rural and urban areas in the fields of mathematics, science and special education (Berry, 2000). Evidence of this unique capacity can be seen in Hawk and Schmidt’s (1989) study of teachers in North Carolina where researchers found that the state’s alternative certification program successfully prepared individuals to serve in math and science positions in rural areas of the state.

Programs also help to staff difficult to fill positions in urban areas. Schoon and Sandoval (2000) reported promising results in their study of Northwest Indiana’s Urban Teacher Education Program, an alternative certification program for urban middle- and high- school math teachers. Researchers found that in the program’s ten years of operation, graduates, their principals, administrators and professors enthusiastically proclaimed the program’s successes.

Open the Door

Alternative certification programs are supported by many who believe that colleges of education monopolize teacher licensure and “close the door” to a potential new reservoir of teachers. Supporters argue that alternative approaches that allow individuals to become certified teachers without graduating from traditional teacher preparation programs facilitate recruitment of highly-skilled people from the private sector (Haberman, 1991). These individuals, often referred to as “career switchers,” embrace programs because they open the door to careers previously closed to them.
Program supporters believe that attracting career switchers into the teaching profession is desirable because such individuals bring attributes that enrich educational environments. Stoddert’s (1993) study compared demographic characteristics and attitudes toward the teaching profession of traditionally and alternatively prepared teachers. Study findings indicated that, unlike the traditionally trained teachers involved in the study, the majority of alternatively trained teachers were over 26 years old and brought positive dispositions to teaching in urban school settings (Stoddert, 1993).

Career switchers who enter the teaching profession through alternative certification programs not only bring positive dispositions toward school settings, but also substantial life experience that often proves invaluable in teaching. In Crow et al.’s (1990) study of individuals who left other occupations for teaching, researchers found that career switchers drew on management, organization, stress-coping and myriad other skills honed through earlier professional and personal experiences when dealing with problems in their classroom settings.

Crow et al’s (1990) work tapped into a largely unexplored area of research – the connection between alternatively prepared teachers’ past experiences and their teaching practices. Researchers found that “career changers who perceived continuity between past and present demands were more likely to negotiate the novice role successfully than those who emphasized a disparity between the past and present” (p. 218).
Program Weaknesses

These successes and strengths notwithstanding, alternative certification programs do not want for detractors. While prior research findings suggest that alternative certification programs have a number of positive attributes, findings have also identified several shortcomings. Major limitations addressed in the literature include: (1) the limited amount of training provided to prospective teachers and lack of substantive supervised student teaching opportunities; (2) the inability of programs to lower the attrition rate of teachers; and (3) the “deprofessionalization” of the teaching profession that programs may engender.

Limited Training & Supervision

Perhaps the most prevalent criticism of alternative certification programs stems from the amount of coursework, training and supervision provided to participants. Given the truncated design of many programs, it is argued that programs cannot provide the amount of coursework in pedagogy and supervised student teaching requisite for effective teaching to occur (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Jelmberg, 1996). Unlike traditional programs that mandate a substantial amount of coursework and supervised student teaching, alternative certification programs provide coursework over a condensed period of time and supervision while holding a teaching position - not while student teaching.
Alternative certification program opponents argue that the lack of formal training and limited student teaching found in some programs render participants less capable of becoming effective classroom teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Lackzo-Kerr & Berliner, 2003). Darling-Hammond’s (1990) review of research on alternative certification programs found that a preponderance of the research established that fully prepared teachers are more successful with students than teachers without full preparation and certification. These findings are supported by Guyton and Farokhi (1987), who concluded that knowledge of teaching and learning gained through participation in traditional teacher education programs correlates strongly with teacher performance.

**Attrition Rate**

Research on the topic also indicates that alternatively prepared teachers do not necessarily stay in the teaching profession any longer than traditionally prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993; Stoddert, 1993). Natriello and Zumwalt’s (1993) study of teachers trained through New Jersey’s alternative teacher certification program found that teachers in the program left positions at rates similar to those of traditionally trained teachers.

Further evidence of the high attrition rate of alternatively prepared teachers can be found in Stoddert’s (1993) study exploring the retention rate of teachers trained through Los Angeles’ alternative certification program. Stoddert discovered that alternatively prepared teachers leave the profession at similar or higher rates than traditionally trained
teachers. Study findings revealed that 52% of teachers prepared through the program had left teaching within the first six years of program operation.

Deprofessionalization of the Teaching Profession

Alternative certification is perceived by some as an attempt to undermine the credibility, as well as the professionalism, of teaching. Critics argue that poorly designed programs devalue and deprofessionalize the teaching profession. Among the most significant critics of alternative certification programs are officials from teachers’ unions. Officials from both the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) worry that alternative routes to certification have the potential to diminish the respect currently afforded the teaching profession (Feldman, 1998; Hess, 2003).

In a recent article by Hess (2003), VanderVeen of the NEA’s Teacher Quality Department stated that “We [the NEA] want teaching to be a profession. Other established professions, like engineers, doctors, and airline pilots, don’t have alternative routes. This [alternative certification programs] is just a way of filling slots and keeping down salaries” (p. 2). In the same article, Harrell, NEA’s Elementary & Secondary Education Act Coordinator, argued that alternative certification programs that “emphasize on-the-job training could put lots of unskilled people in classrooms” (Hess, 2003, p.1). This is not to say that union officials completely oppose programs; instead, they support programs that mandate levels of training and supervision equivalent to those found in traditional teacher education programs (Feldman, 1998).
Critics also question the existence of programs at a time when requirements for traditional programs are on the rise and becoming more stringent. Wise (1994) addresses this concern in his article, “Choosing Between Professionalism and Amateurism.” Wise noted therein that initiatives (proposed by the National Council of Association of Teacher Educators, the National Board of Professional Teaching and the Council of Chief State School Officers) aimed to strengthen traditional entry into the teaching profession have been undermined by alternative teacher certification programs.

**Effective Programs**

Although there is much disagreement as to the role, efficacy and quality of alternative certification programs, the literature offers insight into areas that members of both camps consider characteristic of effective programs. Darling-Hammond (1990), whose research has predominately addressed the limitations of programs, stated that:

Lengthier programs...typically include a substantial amount of study in educational foundations (child development, learning theory, etc.) and teaching methods, alongside an intensively supervised internship or student teaching experience....These programs assume that teachers need to know a great deal about learners and learning as well as subject specific pedagogy in order to be able to teach effectively. Like traditional programs, they incorporate supervised clinical teaching into their preservice programs rather than assuming that such opportunities will materialize after the teacher has begun full-time teaching. (p. 130)

In addition to lengthier programs that include a substantial amount of coursework and a supervised student teaching period, the literature indicates that the most effective programs are those that:

- Include a mentoring program that aims to support beginning teachers;
• Address specific state and district needs;
• Allow participants to progress through program in cohorts;
• Are tailored to meet the specific needs of participants;
• Prepare individuals for specific positions in specific schools;
• Create multiple pathways into the teaching profession; and
• Are created in conjunction with members of state department of education, colleges and universities and local school districts (Feistritzer, 2002).

The ongoing debate over alternative teacher education programs is political in many respects and driven as much by ideology as by pedagogy. Those who have lost faith in the ability of higher education programs to adequately prepare teachers (Finn & Madigan, 2001) look for evidence that supports alternative certification, while those with an interest in maintaining the traditional – but improved – model of teacher education look for deficits in the alternative model (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

As Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act has opened the door to federal funding of alternative certification programs, these programs will doubtless remain the subject of much debate in upcoming years. Only unbiased and objective research of programs and the teachers that are trained thereunder will determine if alternative certification programs possess the ongoing vitality to address teacher shortages and provide a viable alternative to traditional teacher education programs. This study aims to offer new insight into this much-needed area of research by exploring the professional backgrounds, personal experiences, educational beliefs and classroom practices of a group of urban teachers prepared through an alternative teacher certification program.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

Overview

This study employed primarily qualitative research methods to explore the impact of life experience on the discursive practices of alternatively prepared teachers as a way of contributing to the literature on teacher quality and alternative certification programs. Specifically, the study focuses on the experiences and practices of a group of first year elementary school teachers in the Urban Teachers Project.

As the life experiences and discursive practices of members of the research population were examined, an inductive approach predominately utilizing qualitative research methods was employed to explore research questions (see Appendix A). More specifically, Creswell’s (1994) “dominant-less-dominant” approach was used, enabling the researcher to conduct a mainly qualitative research study, complemented to a small degree by a quantitative component (see Figure 1). Three primary data collection tools used, two qualitative (individual interviews and classroom observations) and one quantitative (survey of educational beliefs), were used to gather a preponderance of the data. A secondary data collection tool, a follow-up questionnaire, was also used to gather data relative to themes that surfaced during interviews and observations.
Figure 1. Methodology Framework

Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs
(23 Individuals)

Individual Interviews
(8 Individuals)

Classroom Observations
(8 Individuals)

Follow-Up Questionnaire
(21 Individuals)
Participants & Sampling Procedures

Participants were selected from a population of individuals enrolled in the Urban Teachers Project. This program includes a six-week summer institute that provides supervised teaching at a summer school site, graduate level coursework for the duration of the program, and mentoring from both a university-based supervisor and experienced public school classroom teacher. In selecting a sample from the participants in the program, two of Patton's (1987) purposeful sampling strategies - convenience and criterion - were utilized.

Convenience sampling was used to select a group of beginning elementary school teachers to complete a modified version of the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs and, later, a follow-up questionnaire. The researcher surveyed a group of teachers enrolled in their first year of the program during two of their graduate school classes in the Spring 2004. The Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs, a tool for gathering information on the educational beliefs of study participants, was administered at the beginning of the semester; while the follow-up questionnaire, exploring themes that surfaced during interviews and observations, was distributed in the latter part of the semester.

Criterion sampling, which mandates the selection of participants who satisfy important criteria (Patton, 1987), assisted the researcher in selecting focal participants to interview and observe. The researcher used this procedure as part of a multi-step endeavor to select a subset of focal individuals from the larger sample population. This process mandated: (1) identification of individuals willing to be interviewed and
observed; (2) consideration of the meaning of “non-traditional” as stated in the definitions section of Chapter 1; and (3) selection of a subset of individuals who were representative of the sample population. The eight focal individuals selected for interviews and observations were provided with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

According to Patton (1987) and Merriam (1998), there are no clear guidelines to assist researchers in determining the ideal size of a purposeful sample. In reference to selecting samples for qualitative research, Patton stated, “The sample should be large enough to be credible given the purpose... but small enough to permit adequate depth and detail for each case or unit in the sample” (p. 58). Merriam believed that the nature of the research questions asked should be considered when deciding on a sample size. Congruous with Patton and Merriam’s advice, the researcher selected a sample consisting of twenty-three teachers to be surveyed and a subset of eight teachers to be interviewed and observed. This enabled her to gather descriptive, in-depth data of every research question.

**Methods of Data Collection**

The decision to conduct this study using both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools had a dual premise. First, it was necessary to establish a context for analyzing the overarching educational beliefs of alternatively prepared teachers to ensure an accurate analysis of the construction of such beliefs. The Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs (a quantitative tool) brought this information to light propitiously. Moreover, data obtained from the survey provided the researcher with fertile areas for
exploration during interviews and observations. Second, the interviews and observations (qualitative tools) gave the researcher an opportunity to flesh out specific details about participants' experiences that could not be examined through use of a survey alone.

Regarding the use of surveys in researching teachers' beliefs, Pajares (1992) stated, "Results [from self-report instruments and belief inventories] can help detect inconsistencies and areas that merit attention, but additional measures such as open-ended interviews and . . . observation of behavior must be included if richer more accurate inferences are to be made" (p. 327). In this study, use of a survey without completing interviews and observations would not have yielded the breadth of in-depth data necessary to explore the lived experiences of the sample population.

**Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs**

LeCompte and Priessle (1993) suggested that surveys can provide material for baseline data in qualitative research studies and can measure the "strength of feeling" individuals have about a phenomenon. In the context of this study, a survey was used to (1) provide background information for the researcher to explore during interviews and observations and (2) to serve as a means for the researcher to assess the "strength of feeling" participants held toward a particular educational belief system.

An understanding of the nature of participants' educational beliefs is a prerequisite to an examination of their genesis, a major focus of this study. In order to obtain such knowledge, the participants were administered a modified version of the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs (see Appendix B). The modified survey,
like the original survey, measured tendencies participants held toward progressive and transmissive educational belief systems. Minor modifications to the original instrument were made so that questions fit the study participants (Creswell, 2002) and fit with the purpose of the study.

The modified survey, which included 40 Likert-scale questions, 7 forced-choice demographic questions and 3 open-ended response questions, was used to help the researcher collect baseline data that was further examined during the interviews and observations phase of the study. Changes to the original survey included rewording of the third question (the word secondary was changed to elementary); modifications and additions to demographic questions; and the addition of open-ended response questions. No major changes were made to the content of the 40-Likert scale questions. The researcher sought and obtained permission to use the modified version of the survey from the survey developers, Drs. Witcher & Travers (see Appendix C).

As the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs was contained within a predominately qualitative study, validity and reliability standards for qualitative research studies applied (Gall et al., 1996). The survey’s validity, accordingly, was checked through pilot-testing, triangulation of data and member checking of findings. Although, for the purpose of this study, the survey’s validity was assessed through use of the aforementioned methods, it is important to note that the original survey developers established strong content validity and reliability of survey questions. To determine content validity, Drs. Witcher and Travers (1999) submitted the instrument to experts in progressive and transmissive philosophies of education who found almost unanimous
agreement across items, with a combined accuracy of 98%. In terms of test-retest reliability, survey developers found that pre- and post-test scores correlated from a random sampling of the survey questions found that the correlation was computed to be at .63, which is statistically significant at less than the 0.01 level (Witcher & Travers, 1999).

After the modified survey was pilot-tested, it was administered to the sample population of 23 teachers. Together with the survey, participants were provided a letter of informed consent detailing its purpose and use and their potential involvement in the study’s other facets (see Appendix D). As this study was not intended to test a hypothesis, quantitative data yielded from the survey were primarily qualitatively interpreted. The researcher calculated basic descriptive statistics relative to participants’ responses on the Likert-scale and forced-choice demographic questions; however, in an effort to find emerging patterns, responses were mainly qualitatively interpreted.

**Individual Interviews**

Individual interviews elicited the roles that personal experiences and professional backgrounds play in shaping beliefs and practices. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated, “Interviews gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (p. 95). This data collection tool provided clarity and specificity as to participants’ personal and professional life experiences and detailed their trials and tribulations in classroom settings.
Interview formats fall on a continuum ranging from structured to unstructured. In structured interviews, there is a predetermined order and wording of questions, while unstructured interviews contain open-ended, exploratory questions (Merriam, 1998). Situated in the middle of this continuum are semi-structured interviews that allow both researcher and subject to shape the content of the interview by including a mix of structured and unstructured questions. Because semi-structured interviews allow both the interviewer and interviewee to maintain some control over topics of conversation, this format was employed.

Following the administration of the survey and preliminary analysis of survey findings, individual interviews with the selected subset of eight focal participants were conducted. A framing set of questions that explored emergent themes was used with every interviewee (see Appendix E). Each interview occurred in person, lasted approximately one hour and occurred before an observation of the interviewees' classroom. Of those individuals willing to be interviewed more than once, follow-up interviews subsequent to classroom observations were conducted. During follow-up interviews, the researcher sought to confirm themes that surfaced during initial interviews and observations.

Classroom Observations of Teachers

As a third method of data collection, the researcher observed the subset of eight focal participants in their classroom settings. During observations, the researcher examined ways that espoused educational beliefs manifested in teaching practices. This
form of data collection provided the researcher with an opportunity to explore the nexus between theoretical rhetoric and teaching practice.

The ultimate success of the data collection tools rested on the ability of participants to convey information orally and in writing. According to Gall et al. (1996), this information is limited by participants' knowledge, memory, and ability to convey information clearly and accurately and, also, by how they wish to be perceived by outsiders such as the researchers. Observation, in contrast, allows researchers to formulate their own version of what is occurring, independent of the participants' statements. The inclusion of selected observations... provides a more complete description of the phenomena than would be possible by just referring to interview statements or documents. Just as importantly, observations provide an alternate source of data for verifying the information obtained by other methods. (p. 344)

Observations lasted approximately two to three hours, occurred on multiple occasions and commenced after the researcher became acclimated to classroom settings and established rapport with participants. While conducting observations, the researcher assumed the role of observer-participant. In this function, her primary responsibility was to observe classroom teachers, not to interact with teachers and/or students. Creswell's (2002) suggestion to record reflective and descriptive field notes on an observation protocol was followed (see Appendix F). Reflective notes included statements about the researcher's own subjective thoughts and ideas, while descriptive notes contained objective records of what occurred in classroom settings. The observation protocol included space for field notes pertaining to teaching style, class assignments, materials used to support instruction, classroom design and management style. Field notes were recorded during and immediately following classroom observations.
To gather evidence reflective of the transfer of beliefs into practice, the researcher created a “Beliefs into Practice” chart that identified beliefs and practices grounded in progressive and transmissive philosophies of education (see Appendix G). The creation of this chart was a two-step process. First, a content analysis of Likert-scale questions from the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs was conducted to identify themes grounded in progressive and transmissive philosophies of education. Next, beliefs and practices identified as progressive or transmissive were validated against prior research within each domain.

For example, in the case of the Likert-scale survey question, “The teacher should be the determiner and evaluator of all action in the classroom since she or he is morally obligated to be such,” the researcher identified the traditional belief of “teacher as authoritative figure” within the context of this question. This belief was then validated by researching the “role of classroom teacher in the learning process” in the literature espousing progressive and traditional philosophies of education. The researcher found that progressive theorists (e.g., Counts, 1932; Dewey, 1938/1998) would most likely disagree with the construct of “teacher as authoritative figure,” while traditional theorists (e.g., Adler, 1982; Hirsch, 1987) would generally support this construct. In the case of this question, after consideration of question content and theoretical models, the term “teacher as facilitator” was developed and categorized as progressive, while “teacher as authoritative figure” was developed and categorized as transmissive. This multi-step process promoted the development of the “Beliefs into Practice” chart that was used
during observations to assist in the identification of progressive and transmissive beliefs and practices.

**Additional Data Collection Tool: Follow-Up Questionnaire**

Consistent with qualitative research studies, areas ripe for exploration emerged once data collection and analysis begin. In reference to evolving methodologies in qualitative work, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated,

> Although they [qualitative researchers] may have a general idea of how they will proceed with a study and what they are interested in, to state exactly how to accomplish their work would be presumptuous. A full account of procedures is best described in retrospect, a narrative what happened, written after the study is completed. The study itself structures the research, not preconceived ideas or any precise research design. (p. 49)

In this vein, the researcher found it necessary to explore themes that surfaced during interviews and observations. Accordingly, a follow-up questionnaire that explored emergent themes was created and administered to the entire sample population during one of their graduate class sessions (see Appendix H). This questionnaire, which contained closed- and open-response questions about future professional plans, was completed by 21 of the 23 initial survey completers. The discrepancy in the number of individuals completing the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs (23) and number completing the follow-up questionnaire (21) is attributable to the differing amount of study participants present at class on the days that the survey and questionnaire were administered.
Data Collection & Analysis

The collection of data occurred until the point of theoretical saturation—when every category was so well developed that no new information could be added (Creswell, 2002). The Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs was administered to the sample population during the early part of the Spring 2004 semester, while the follow-up questionnaire was distributed during the latter part of the semester. Interviews began once surveys were reviewed for patterns and a subset of focal individuals to interview had been selected. Concomitant tape recording and verbatim transcriptions of individual interviews occurred throughout the data collection phase of this study. This two step process (recording and transcribing) facilitated the accurate compilation of the experiences and words of study participants.

Gathering of observation data began after several interviews had been conducted and rapport had been established with the focal participants. Field notes from classroom observations were recorded on the observation protocol sheet during and immediately following observations. The follow-up questionnaire, which explored themes that surfaced during interviews and observations, was administered during a graduate class session toward the end of the data collection phase.

Survey and questionnaire findings were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative descriptive statistics obtained from responses on Likert and forced choice items were calculated and a qualitative content analysis of responses followed. Additionally, qualitative analysis of open-ended survey and questionnaire questions occurred. Qualitative analyses of interview transcripts and field notes were
conducted to unearth emerging patterns and anomalies, and confirm/disconfirm survey findings.

To assist the researcher in coding and analyzing data, Qualrus software was used. Qualrus is a qualitative analysis computer program that enables users to mark segments (paragraphs, quotations, etc.) of text with qualitative codes (categories describing the phenomenon) then retrieve and analyze those codes (Brent, Slusarz, & Thompson, 2002). While data were collected, segments thereof were simultaneously reviewed for coding categories. Discourse analyses of data were conducted to assist the researcher in the development of coding categories and the assignment of data segments to coding categories. Once data were sorted into categories, categories were organized into themes — similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea (Creswell, 2002). Lastly, themes were organized under corresponding research questions.

Theoretical models relative to habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), teaching pedagogies (Dewey, 1938/1998; Dyson, 1997) and teacher preparation (Crow et al. 1990; Haberman, 1995) were used to frame analysis of the data. The researcher did not aim to “test” any one particular theory, but instead to examine how current study findings fit within the context of existing theoretical frameworks.

**Methodological Issues**

**Validity**

Several strategies aimed at increasing the study’s internal and external validity were employed. Internal validity, defined as the extent to which research findings
comport with reality (Merriam, 1998), was enhanced through triangulation of data and member checking. Triangulation is the process of using multiple data sources to establish the validity of findings (Gall et al., 1996). The use of the three sources of data – survey questions, individual interviews and observations of teachers - diminished potential biases and strengthened internal validity.

A second check on the accuracy of the data was accomplished through member checking. Focal participants were provided copies of their comments and asked to check them for accuracy. The process of member checking revealed inconsistencies between participants’ life experiences and collected data and ensured that the life experiences of participants were accurately reflected in study findings.

External validity measures the extent to which the results of one study are applicable to other situations (Merriam, 1998). Strong external validity is often dependent on a large, random sample population. This study’s employ of a small, purposeful sample population renders it difficult to make strong claims as to its applicability. However, proactive steps were taken to strengthen the study’s external validity. An audit trail was compiled and readers were provided a rich, thick description of the phenomenon.

White, Woodfield and Ritchie (2003) proffered that an audit trail makes the research process more apparent to the reader. An explicit discussion of the research design, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis procedures and study limitations facilitated the creation of an audit trail for this study. Additionally, appendices of relevant documents are included. As readers may track steps taken in the
completion of the study, they can check the study’s reasoning and methodological rigor (Krathwohl, 1998).

A second strategy purposed to enhance the external validity of the study is its thorough description of the phenomenon. Merriam (1998) stated, “Providing enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation” (p. 211) is an effective way to enhance generalizability. Accordingly, readers are provided direct quotes from participants and a comprehensive description of the phenomenon.

**Ethical Considerations**

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that two issues dominate official guidelines of ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm. The researchers posited, “These guidelines attempt to insure that: (1) subjects voluntarily commit to the study and understand the nature, dangers and obligations of it; and (2) subjects are not exposed to risks that are greater than the gains they might receive” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 43). To prevent such complications, participants were given an informed consent form. This form (see Appendix D) provided a clear description of the study, detailed the use of its findings, and articulated possible dangers associated with involvement in the study for participants.

**Subjectivity & Observer Effect**

Much debate has transpired in the effort to ameliorate the subjectivity inherent in
qualitative research. Some view subjectivity as taking sides (Roman & Apple, 1990), while others accept that researchers' emotions and predispositions influence the research process (LeCompte, 1987; Peshkin, 1988; Stake, 1981). In concert with the latter view, the researcher believes that it is nearly impossible to separate predispositions from qualitative research studies.

To vitiate subjectivity, Lecompte (1987) recommended that researchers locate and address bias resulting from their own personal history and professional training. Accordingly, possible bias stemming from the researcher's own completion of a traditional teacher education program was identified as a potential limitation in Chapter 1. Moreover, to address bias that emerged during the data collection and analysis phases of the study, comments on the researcher's own subjectivity were recorded in reflective field notes and considered during the analysis phase of this study.

A second limitation pertains to the "observer" or Heisenberg effect. During observations, the researcher's presence may have altered the norm by impacting, in some fashion, those observed (Gall et al., 1996). In order to minimize the effect of her presence on teachers, the researcher spent time building rapport with teachers and getting acclimated in classroom settings before beginning to collect data. This process encouraged participants to act naturally while data were recorded.
CHAPTER 4

Findings & Discussion

Overview

I wrote a play about my fourth grade teacher called, “Poinsettia’s are Always Red and Green.” My teacher passed out mimeograph sheets with poinsettias on them and told us to color them. I colored mine using every color I could, using all my crayons. I drew veins and leaves with different colors. I used purple and pink and orange to color my poinsettias. Well, she picked up my paper and drew a big F on it with a bright red magic marker. She held it up and said, “Children don’t you know that poinsettias are always red and green.” The point when I’m becoming like that fourth grade teacher, I stop myself.

- Jim, First Grade Teacher

The above vignette encapsulates the impact all teachers – good and bad – have on their students’ lives. Jim, who is now in his fourties, has held on to the memory of this incident with his fourth grade teacher for over thirty years. Clearly, what teachers do in classrooms matter beyond the time students spend there. Given this lasting impression, consideration of the “quality” of all teachers - including alternatively prepared teachers who enter the profession with unconventional forms of preparation - is critical. In this study, the “quality” of alternatively prepared teachers was measured through an analysis of dynamic characteristics, abilities and decisions (USDOE, 1999) manifested in life experiences and discursive practices.
As noted in previous chapters, many studies (Dial & Stevens, 1993; Dill, 1996; Finn & Madigan, 2001) reveal numerous differences between traditionally prepared and alternatively prepared teachers. One of these differences is in the extent of life experience that alternatively prepared teachers bring to their teaching. To this end, the study explores the impact of life experience on the discursive practices of alternatively prepared teachers. Stated differently, this study explores the impact of life experience on a teacher’s ways of talking, doing and being as manifested in their educational beliefs and teaching pedagogies. To examine this phenomenon, the researcher collected and analyzed data that contributes to the research on alternatively certified teachers by “putting a face” on alternatively prepared beginning urban school teachers.

The following chapter is divided into five sections, each of which focuses on a single research question. Chapter sections are written around descriptive statistics, quotes and vignettes from the data and include discussion and analysis of other research pertinent to the main themes of each research question. Although each research question is explored separately, there is a significant amount of interplay between questions because it is impossible to explore one question without exploring another.

As discussed in the previous chapter, 23 individuals completed the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs; 8 (of the 23) participated in interviews and observations; and 21 (of the 23) completed the follow-up questionnaire. Because a majority of this study’s data pertains to the 8 focal participants, they were assigned pseudonyms. The other 15 participants who solely completed the Witcher-Travers Survey
of Educational Beliefs and follow-up questionnaire were not provided with pseudonyms unless they were quoted in the write up of the research.

**Demographic Characteristics and Educational Beliefs**

My personal experiences – being an immigrant and ESL student – helped me realize the value of an education. Students will succeed if they are given a chance, no matter where they come from.

- Lynn, First Grade Teacher

This section explores the research question: What are the demographic characteristics and educational beliefs of a group of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers? To gain insight into this question, data gathered through the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs were both quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. Quantitative data obtained through analysis of Likert-scale and closed-response questions provided insight into the demographic characteristics and educational beliefs of the sample population, while qualitative analysis of open-ended response questions “put a face” on members of the sample population thus embodying them by making visible their thoughts and teaching practices through detailed description.

**Demographic Variables**

Table 1 provides information on the demographic variables of the 23 surveyed participants, while Table 2 includes a description of the demographic variables of the
subset of 8 interviewed and observed focal participants. Table 1 demonstrates that 74% of those completing the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs were women; 53% were under the age of thirty; and 43% were white, non-Hispanic. To contextualize these findings and as a point of comparison, it is helpful to consider other research relative to the demographic variables of traditionally prepared beginning teachers and other alternatively prepared beginning teachers. Houston et al.’s (1993) study comparing first-year elementary school traditionally prepared teachers with first-year alternatively prepared elementary school teachers provides such a context. In their study, Houston and his colleagues found that 94% of traditionally prepared teachers were women, compared with 76% of alternatively prepared teachers that were women. The findings also revealed that 77% of the traditionally prepared teachers were under the age of thirty, while only 39% of alternatively prepared teachers were in this age range. Moreover, researchers found that 67% of traditionally prepared teachers were white, non-Hispanic; compared with just 48% of alternatively prepared teachers who were white, non-Hispanic.

Results from the current study are consistent with those of Houston et al. (1993) and consonant with other studies exploring demographic variables of alternatively prepared teachers (Chizhik, 2003; Sleeter, 2001; Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992). Current study findings indicate that alternative teacher certification programs prepare more teachers of color, older individuals and more men than traditional teacher education programs.
Table 1. Demographic Characteristics and Educational Beliefs of Sample Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade level taught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second grade</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third grade</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth grade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other teaching experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Beliefs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmissive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total N = 23
Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Subset of Interviewed and Observed Focal Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Other Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Prior Career Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>Yes (environmental educator)</td>
<td>Environmental educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>Sixth Grade</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Child welfare policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>Yes (tutoring, college teaching)</td>
<td>Publishing professional, non-profit management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>Yes (SAT preparation)</td>
<td>Non-profit direct marketer, bookseller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>Yes (training on public health topics)</td>
<td>Health educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>Yes (developed K-6 environmental education courses)</td>
<td>Park naturalist, marketing, public relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>Fourth Grade</td>
<td>Yes (computer teacher)</td>
<td>Information professional (i.e., web developer, corporate librarian)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Also consistent with Houston et al.'s (1993) study, findings from the current study suggest that females tend to represent the dominant gender of individuals enrolled in elementary school alternative teacher certification programs, constituting almost 75% of the teachers involved in this study. The data do not reveal why women dominate program populations. It appears that, like traditional elementary school teacher education programs that tend to be populated by women, elementary school alternative certification programs continue to perpetuate the gender barrier that has persisted in the field for many years.

King (1996), who conducted a study exploring the under-representation of men in primary school teaching positions, offered reasons for the shortage of male elementary teachers. He argued that the public perception that primary school teaching is “women’s work” and that men who teach primary grades are deviant in some way has had a strong impact on men’s decisions about whether to enter teaching.

When a male does choose to break the social taboo of working with women, there are serious consequences to be paid. The category of “male primary teacher” has been crafted so that it implicitly includes negative, low-prestige features such as “feminine”... and “pedophile.” These cultural and semantic loadings on the “male primary teacher” are the reason why the voices of these professionals are muted. (King, 1996, p. 10)

Unfortunately, further consideration of this topic lay beyond the scope of this study. Future research focusing on recruitment and retention of male elementary school teachers is warranted.

In addition to recruiting a racially diverse applicant pool, alternative certification programs attract individuals with prior teaching experience to the profession. Of the
sample population, 56% accumulated some form of prior teaching experience with children or adults before becoming classroom teachers. Types of experience include: long-term substitute elementary school teacher, Americorps volunteer at an elementary school, yoga and meditation instructor, computer teacher, English as a Second Language in a foreign country, SAT instructor, religious education teacher, adjunct faculty at a university, tutor and environmental educator.

Qualitative comments detailed on an open-ended response survey question exploring this area suggest that prior teaching experience helps participants to understand students' developmental levels. Michael commented, "My teaching experience abroad showed me that social backgrounds can completely alter a child's thinking patterns." Prior teaching experience also appears to ameliorate participants' transition into the profession. During an interview, Lynn stated, "A lot of my experiences over the last few years have built toward it. I first started tutoring and then I started teaching college English. I did that on purpose because I was slowly trying to ease myself into teaching and prepare myself for this new experience."

In addition to gathering data relative to participants' demographic variables, the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs also produced data pertaining to the overarching educational beliefs of the sample population. These are discussed in the following section.
Educational Beliefs

The overarching educational beliefs revealed through the prism of the Witcher-Travers survey are tantamount to the teachers’ theoretical orientations toward teaching. Findings from the 40 Likert-type scale questions show that 26% (6 participants) of the sample population express progressive beliefs, 61% (14 participants) express eclectic beliefs and 13% (3 participants) express transmissive beliefs. To contextualize these findings and by way of comparison, it is helpful to consider Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs findings relative to traditionally prepared preservice teachers. In Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher and Travers’ (2002) study, examining the educational beliefs of preservice teachers and using the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs, researchers found that 12.7% of the sample population identified as progressive, 59% as eclectic and 28.4% as transmissive. Although a similar amount of teachers from both studies seemingly hold eclectic beliefs (61% in the current study as compared to 59% in Minor et al.’s study), the amount of individuals who identify as progressive (26% in the current study as compared to 12.7% in Minor et al.’s study) and transmissive (13% in the current study as compared to 28.4% in Minor et al.’s study) diverges.

Further analyses of the data indicate that of those who identify themselves as eclectic (meaning that one’s beliefs are grounded in both progressive and transmissive frameworks), a majority seem to be drawn to a progressive, rather than transmissive, belief system. According to the survey scoring scale, scores below 17 suggest a transmissive orientation, scores ranging from 17-23 suggest an eclectic orientation and
scores over 23 suggest a progressive view. Of the 61% of participants who identified themselves as eclectic, 79% had a score that ranged from 20-23, just below the cut-off score for progressivism.

While these findings initially indicate that many study participants believe in and support progressive educational beliefs, their theoretical orientations appear to be unstable. Participants do not appear to have a strong grasp on a theoretical framework for their teaching, thus explaining their eclectic orientation. However, when the survey data is layered with the observational and interview data, this apparent instability may be attributable to a lack of specificity provided by the survey instrument. The detailed accounts of the participants’ experiences and observational data provide evidence that the participants do have more stable theoretical orientations than the quantitative data revealed. This is discussed later in the chapter.

**Personal Experiences & Professional Backgrounds**

My background with child welfare has shaped my views on how to relate to children and the necessity of quality education for all children.

– Jill, Fifth Grade Teacher

The following section explores the research question: What are the personal experiences and professional backgrounds of a group of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers? To explore this question, data obtained through the open-ended survey responses, interview transcripts and observation field notes were analyzed.
Personal Experiences

The findings indicate that alternately prepared teachers enter the profession with a vast array of ultimately influential personal experiences. Familial life, ethnicity, educational preparation and general life experience associated with age all appear to matter in the lives of alternatively prepared teachers.

Family

A family history in the profession is one factor that shapes the beliefs of alternatively prepared teachers and their decisions to become teachers. Jessica noted that “My mother, aunts and cousins were all teachers and I have always valued education and teachers. I recognize and am sensitive to good and bad teaching practices as a result of this.” Kim, another study participant stated, “I had thought about it [becoming a teacher] previously. My mother’s a teacher, so she was kind of pushing me in that direction, and I really didn’t want to do it. But then I ended up working with kids so much that I got a real interest in it and I wanted to get more involved.” Michelle remarked, “My dad has a doctorate in political science. He taught for a small amount of time, so he values education.”

Jessica, Kim and Michelle all have family members who favor the education establishment. They had role models who introduced them to the teaching profession long before entering an alternative certification program. Feiman-Nemser (1987) commented, “Learning to teach begins long before formal programs of teacher
preparation. Its roots are personal experiences with parents and teachers and images and patterns of teaching shaped by culture” (pp. 166-167). With such roots, these study participants unsurprisingly felt a connection to the field of education and chose to enter the teaching profession.

Ethnicity

There is a shortage of teachers from ethnically under-represented groups currently enrolled in and who have graduated from traditional teacher education programs. Of prospective teachers enrolled in traditional teacher education programs, 92% are Caucasian (AACTE, 1989). Darling-Hammond and Sclan (1996) argued that there are several reasons to be concerned about such statistics.

The importance of minority teachers as role models for majority and minority teachers is one reason. In addition, minority teachers often bring a special level of understanding to the experiences of their minority students and a perspective on school policy and practice that is critical for all schools and districts to include. (p. 74)

Prior research on alternative certification programs indicates that programs diversify the teaching populace by attracting a more diverse group of teachers (Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993; Schoon & Sandoval, 2000; Shen, 1998; Stoddert, 1992, 1993).

Findings from this study provide further evidence of this claim. According to the data obtained through the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs, 70% of the sample population are teachers of color.

Darling-Hammond and Sclan (1996) argued that teachers from under-represented
groups can positively influence students from minority groups because they have first hand experience of what it feels like to be a member of the minority. Lynn, a teacher of color, supported and illustrated this point.

I'm a first generation immigrant. That immigrant experience has really made me very sensitive to my immigrant population – especially girls. Immigrant girls hide, they don't speak up and are usually very well behaved. They blend in very well and you usually can't tell if they don't understand something. So, I'm particularly good at paying attention to those children. And I know how most immigrant children are brought up. It is a very strict environment with lots of family responsibilities and you will get in trouble if you act out in school. Sometimes my goals with those kids are social - if they are academically on par. I have one little boy that I let get away with things on purpose just to get him interacting with others.

Michelle, also a teacher of color, further illustrates this point when discussing how her own childhood friendships help to facilitate connections with her African-American students. “All my friends were African American. I definitely can slip into that vernacular. I understand what the slang is. When they [her students] try to say something cryptically I understand it.” Michelle’s ability to connect her students because of her ethnicity and knowledge as an ‘insider’ is not atypical.

Teachers of color in Dyson’s (1997) study consisting of urban area elementary school teachers, spoke about the rewards of feeling a sense of connection with students and communities. For example, Andrea, an African-American teacher involved in Dyson’s study, stated, “Sometimes kids do need someone of their same race to bond with them . . . so that they can see that there is some hope for them. I can remember . . . a third grade student of mine, and I’m her godmother now, and she’s 26” (p. 15).

Michelle’s comments pertaining to the differing experience of her Caucasian
colleague likewise reflect the import of race.

There is a difference. Ms. Smith, she's white, but she's from Chicago. She speaks in an urban black way and has a kind of twang to her voice, but she's a white woman. And she has the same problems that I do. In the end, she's doing the same stuff I do. But there is a difference . . . there's a separation because of race. I look more like them. They're not going to be surprised if we share the same experiences as much as Ms. Smith, like . . . well I do that, too. In the end, everyone has to adapt to them. Because in the end, I'm a young black female, but I didn't grow up in this community. I grew up in a different community and I realize that's something I have to reflect on.

The previous comments raise a crucial point regarding what Erickson (1999) refers to as cultural boundaries (neutral spaces that are accessible to members of diverse socio-cultural groups) and cultural borders (barriers related to cultural differences that are not neutral). As a result of differing life experiences, cultural differences exist between Michelle and her students (Erickson, 1999). It is important for Michelle (and other study participants) to reflect on how she can frame cultural differences as boundaries rather than borders. Erickson (1999) argued that one way to frame differences as boundaries is to approach the culture of students and teachers forthrightly. "In every classroom there is an excellent resource for the study of within-group cultural diversity as well as between-group diversity. That resource is the everyday experience and cultural practices of the students and teachers themselves"( p. 47). By exploring and validating students and teachers' experiences and cultural practices, neutral spaces that are accessible to members of diverse socio-cultural groups (i.e., cultural boundaries) can be created within classroom settings, thereby framing differences as boundaries rather than borders.

During an interview, Jill, a Caucasian teacher, discussed the impact of her own ethnicity, as well as prior professional experiences, on her ability to connect with
students.

One thing that I think is unique about my position is that I'm the only white teacher here. It has been good because I've generally worked with under-served populations. I think a lot of people - especially White women - come in and say these poor little inner city kids... I need to baby them and coddle them. These kids just smell that from a mile away. They take advantage of it.

Jill, whose class is comprised of all females, uses her unique position as the sole Caucasian teacher in her school to explore intra-group cultural diversity as well as inter-group diversity. In her words,

I think it is unique how race has become an issue... I have learned a lot. Some of my girls have never been close to a white person. I talk to them about it. What do I say about white people... we all don't know each other. Any time someone white comes into this building kids that aren't even in my class run up to me. It has been a good thing... it has taught me a lot. It has even taught me how I think about things and challenged me, because I've never been in a situation where it was just me. One thing that I have found very interesting is that the kids call me light-skinned because white is a very derogatory term. They have gotten in fights over it. Some other little boy said at least my teacher is not white and my students said my teacher is not white she is light skinned... I even said to one of my girls you can call me white. And she said no I can't. My grandma said that is a bad thing to say.

According to Erickson (1999), "If school is a secure place to try on new cultures and voices, if cultural diversity is treated as boundaries rather than as borders, then students and their teachers can establish safe places in which to explore growing relationships with new cultures and old ones" (p. 56). Jill's treatment of diversity as a "boundary" rather than a "border" and her comfort with venturing into the complexities of race appears beneficial to both her and her students. She recognizes that being colorblind does not serve her students or her well. Carol, a white teacher in Johnson's (2002) study, expressed similar sentiments. "I thought it was wrong to see color. Like
the T-Shirts that say, "Love Sees NO Color. As I've come to learn, you're missing the person who is that color. You're missing a big part of that person if you refuse to see it. . . My eyes have been opened" (p. 154).

Jill (and other study participants) is not blind to the differences of race, ethnicity, culture and language that exist within classrooms, schools and communities and what it means to cross the boundaries of difference. Like the urban elementary school teachers in Dyson’s (1997) study, current participants recognize that differences matter and should be discussed because they influence both children’s and adults’ sense of social belonging and personhood.

Study findings suggest that life experiences influence alternatively prepared elementary school beginning teachers by helping them to recognize, respect and validate the differences present within their schools and communities. The data reveal that the experiences of alternatively prepared urban teachers of color facilitate bonding with students of color and that the experiences of alternatively prepared Caucasian teachers help enhance understanding of student diversity. These findings are consistent with those of Dyson (1997), who found that the personal experiences of urban elementary school engender a sense of connection, familiarity and comfort with the children and families served by their schools.

Life Experience

Demographic data obtained from the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational
Beliefs reveal that 48% of the sample population was under the age of thirty, while 52% were over thirty. To provide a context for these findings and as a point of comparison, it is helpful to consider prior research on the age of beginning traditionally prepared and other alternatively prepared teachers. Houston et al.'s (1993) study comparing first-year elementary school traditionally and alternatively prepared teachers provides such a context. Researchers found that 77% of the traditionally prepared teachers in their study were thirty or under, while only 39% of alternatively prepared teachers were thirty or under. Results from the current study are congruous with Houston et al. findings and other studies (Dill, 1996; Stoddert, 1993) suggesting that alternative teacher certification programs attract older, more mature individuals.

Qualitative data obtained through interviews and open-ended survey questions provide insight into the influence that age has in the lives of alternatively prepared teachers. The findings suggest that general life experiences associated with age and subsequent maturity positively influence alternatively prepared teachers. For example, Lynn stated, “As a 22-year-old, I think this would have overwhelmed me because this would have been my first experience with some of these issues.” Jill, also commenting on the attribute of age stated, “Personally, I don't know how 21-year-olds can do it. There is no way a 21-year-old could come into this school.”

Lynn also spoke about what it meant for her to have had greater exposure to the world before entering the teaching profession.

Having greater exposure to the world and different types of people has definitely helped. Having richer life experiences matters. I'm recently divorced. When speaking to mothers that are in that situation I can draw from my own experiences — I
understand how crazy that stage is... I know they are hurting. My father dying within the last couple of years... I know a little boy whose baby brother died and I can see that his parents are in the first stage of grief. I think having richer life experiences helps.

Underpinning Lynn’s comments is the value that elementary school teachers place on children as complex people, with memories, dreams, family stresses and cultural values (Dyson, 1997). Lynn’s general experiences, a product of her age and maturity, facilitate awareness of her students’ needs and, consequently, help her to assist them in coping with life’s challenges. The data suggest that general life experience attributable to age and maturity help alternatively prepared teachers address the challenges inherent in elementary school classroom settings. Alternatively prepared teachers have life experiences beyond academia’s ivory tower. This is a byproduct of the passage of time, the aging process and maturation.

Educational Experience

Results from studies exploring traditionally prepared teachers suggest that experiences as primary, secondary and university students have a significant influence on the construction of their belief systems and subsequent teaching practices (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; O’Connell, 1994; Lortie, 1975; Nettle, 1998). Similarly, the alternatively prepared teachers in this study appear to be influenced by their own experiences as students. When reflecting on their experiences as elementary school students, participants commented on the impact that educational experiences have on their beliefs and practices. Kim, who transferred from teaching at one school to another school,
stated:

I'm constantly comparing my childhood experience to what schools [where I teach] are like. The first school I was at was a Pre-K through 8, so they had metal detectors and they patted kids down - little kids every day. To me that was just mind blowing. You know, my experience [in elementary school] was just walking in a school and the principal saying “good morning.” Everything was so different.

Although participants’ primary school experiences were ultimately a positive influence, the experiences in a vacuum were not always affirming. Jim stated, “I actually had a very negative experience in elementary school myself, so it’s really sort of funny that I had this drive to become an elementary school teacher.” Like Jim, Keith also had a negative experience as an elementary school student. When asked to describe his own schooling experience, Keith stated:

I guess the most striking thing about my own education is that other than a few moments here and there, I have absolutely no recollection of it. I’m not a person with a bad memory, but I allow myself to forget things that have no meaning for me. I don't let them take up space in my brain. So, as an adult looking back on my own elementary education, it had no meaning for me. I recall very few things. Eighth grade is probably where my memory starts of actually enjoying school and starting to get something out of it.

When further probed about why his experience was so negative, Keith commented:

I think it had to do with the way I was taught - particularly in math. It was very much, sit down and open your book to page twenty-four. Here is what a right angle looks like. Okay, now answer problems one through twenty. I don't ever remember being given a manipulative. It was a very, very traditional education. And, of course, I hated it with a passion.

Keith went on to describe how this experience influences him in the classroom.

That experience impacts me as a teacher. If you're going to take the time to do something in class, you may as well make it meaningful and don't just go through the motions. I really had an awful time until I got to eighth grade and had a great science teacher. I guess I teach a lot of the way he does. He was the first teacher who brought his real life experiences into the classroom. He had been in the service. He served in
World War II. Everything that we learned he tied into something.

This finding - that prior schooling experiences have a lasting influence on
alternatively prepared teachers - is consonant with findings from studies exploring the
influence of early schooling experiences on traditionally prepared teachers. Kagan
(1992) found that many traditionally prepared elementary school beginning teachers enter
the profession with personal beliefs about classrooms associated with recollections of
their own student days. Beginning teachers from both groups draw from their experience
as students when assuming the position of classroom teacher. As Keith aptly described
it:

*Teachers have experienced being students before. So, a lot of it [becoming a teacher]
is tearing away the myths of what you think teaching is all about. We all grow up and
have memories of our own experiences as students. And then to be a teacher, you have
to *peel back* [italics added] all the things that you experienced and then put yourself
back together. *Remold* [italics added] your whole concept of what a teacher is and
what they do.*

In the process of *peeling back* their experiences as students and *remolding* themselves as
teachers, study participants found that life experience matters.

Current study findings also suggest that experiences in higher education settings
matter - although not to the same extent as primary school experiences. Michelle, who
double-majored in neuro-science and African American Studies, remarked, “It [neuro-
science major] helps, like that taxonomy, Bloom and Kohlberg stuff. All that
development stuff helps. I realize how it became practical. Like, oh okay, he can't think
abstractly because he's ten...he has to develop concrete thinking skills.”
Lynn's comments about the connection between her masters degree in English and classroom practice provide another example of the influence of higher education experiences. Remarking on the use of journals, Lynn stated, “The use of journals came from my graduate experience in writing where I learned how much writing has to do with confidence. There needs to be time for writing in the classroom in a relaxed way. Journals are a way for students to develop expressive writing skills, gain confidence and get over their fear of writing.”

Although higher education experiences appear to impact both traditionally and alternatively prepared teachers, their impact surfaces in different ways. Traditionally prepared teachers draw from pedagogical knowledge gained in undergraduate preservice teacher education courses (Wilson et al., 2002; Richardson, 1999) when they begin teaching. Conversely, alternatively prepared teachers (who begin teaching with fewer courses in pedagogy due to the truncated design of most programs) appear to draw from knowledge gained through subject specific bachelors or masters degree coursework. Michelle, for example, did not major in elementary education as an undergraduate. However, she considered theories learned through psychology courses to help her understand students’ developmental levels.

Significantly, Michelle and Lynn were the only two teachers who spoke at length about the influence of prior higher education experiences on current classroom practices and their use of these higher education experiences as theoretical tools to frame their teaching practices. Most of the other participants reflected on their primary school
experiences when asked to discuss prior schooling experiences. Lastly, it should be noted that several participants did speak about the influence of graduate education classes affiliated with the alternative teacher certification program in which they were enrolled at the time of the study. These classes are discussed at a later point in this chapter.

**Professional Backgrounds**

Alternatively prepared teachers bring a wide range of personal experiences as well as professional experiences into classroom settings. Their transition from one career to another often involves a significant change in the type of work they perform as well as their professional responsibilities. Skills honed in prior work environments appear instrumental in helping them to navigate their roles as classroom teachers.

**Past Work Experiences**

Findings indicate that alternatively prepared teachers enter the profession with career experiences from many different fields. Related data emerged in responses to the survey question: “What type of work did you do prior to becoming a teacher?” Former positions held by members of the larger sample population include: comedic writer, copy editor, entrepreneur, data analyst, writer, manager in a global consulting firm, human resources management, consultant, public policy developer, marketing/promotion in music industry, internationally-based ESL teacher, consultant in a non-profit agency, student, long-term substitute, law firm clerk and Americorp volunteer. This diverse list
of professions suggest that alternatively prepared elementary school teachers are not drawn from any one particular field, but instead from multiple fields.

In an open-ended response question included on the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs, participants described how past professional experiences influence their educational beliefs and classroom practices. Matthew wrote:

Having worked for an organization that deals with issues such as educational reform programs internationally and domestically, I saw children who were unable to attend school because there were no resources at all. If children are given an opportunity, they are able to achieve anything and especially with caring educators.

In this vein, John a former consultant, commented, "In consulting you deal with shades of gray and have to be able to think outside the box. That is impossible without a good education."

Prior professional experience appears to enhance alternatively prepared teachers' understanding of students and the import of a quality education. The findings suggest that prior work experience engendered a cognizance of the value of a quality education for all students. Moreover, findings suggest that prior work experience eases the transition from one profession to another. Diane, for example, found that her experience with the Peace Corps enlightened her to different perspectives and that this insight helped her more fully comprehend her new role.

Skills Honed in Prior Professions

As evidenced by the above comments, alternatively prepared teachers believe that skills honed in prior work environments have been instrumental in helping them to
negotiate their roles as classroom teachers and to address everyday classroom concerns (i.e., developing lesson plans, working with parents). Skills such as time-management, multi-tasking and public speaking - all of which were necessitated by prior professional endeavors - assist in coping with the pressures of being beginning teachers. This finding is consistent with Crow et al.'s (1990) finding that career changers’ skills honed in prior professional environments help them to address the demands and challenges of a new occupation.

When asked if and how skills honed in previous professional experiences aid her in the classroom, Jennifer, a former health educator, responded:

Absolutely ... everything from ... the curriculum development piece with thinking about overall goals and objectives and designing learning activities to helping learners meet those goals. Even though I was training mostly adults – lessons were always very interactive. Activities focused on applying what they were learning. That transferred really well, the general facilitation and teaching skills. Much of the adult learning theory I've used in developing and facilitating training is applicable to teaching youth. For example, educational games and application activities are useful for both groups.

Lynn draws from skills developed in an office environment to help her develop relationships with parents. “When talking to parents I tell them that before I was a teacher I worked for years in an office. I know how hard it is to get away.” Moreover, interpersonal skills honed through work at a national special education organization assist her in communicating with parents.

It has helped me significantly that I worked at the Special Education Society [pseudonym]. The parents are very demanding. I worked with volunteers and parents for almost five years. So, my skills in communicating with parents are very high. That has definitely helped me. That is one thing that is like my skin [italics added]. I almost don't think about it. It is interesting for me to see how other teachers have such a difficult time with this.
It is like her skin. The ease with which Lynn interacts with parents has undoubtedly helped her establish a sense of community within her classroom setting.

Previous work experience also appears to help alternatively prepared teachers understand student diversity. Commenting further on her work in the field of special education, Lynn stated, “Having greater exposure to the world and different types of people with different backgrounds has helped. From working at the Special Education Society, I learned that something comes from somewhere. This makes me less frustrated. My disability background just makes me more aware.”

Findings also suggest that problem-solving skills gained through previous work experience help alternatively prepared teachers handle classroom challenges. Lynn draws from her previous profession when grappling with problems.

Deal with it at your level. This is a management principle. Don't let it get to your principal is how I look at it. I should do everything I can to manage it here. Then, I inform my principal. That is definitely from the professional field. Going to the principal should be the last resort.

Like Lynn, experiences gained in other work settings help Keith meet challenges faced as an educator. Prior experience managing deadlines helps him navigate his way through the maze of paperwork and red tape associated with school bureaucracies — a maze that often overwhelms beginning teachers. In Keith’s words,

I know fifty-percent of teaching is teaching. The other fifty-percent is dealing with administration, and parents and all that other kind of stuff. And without a doubt the hardest part of my job is dealing with the bureaucracy of being a teacher, dealing with the administration, having forms filled out in a certain way, and presented at a certain time. I mean that literally is at least half of the job. And that part of the job I feel confident about. I’m on top of it because I was used to working with deadlines. I know what happens when people ask you for information and you don't get it to them.
That messes up their whole system of procedures and before you know it, you’ve messed up.

Further comments by Lynn also address how previously developed skills help her cope with deadlines and stress associated with being a first year teacher.

Organization has helped. I not overwhelmed by the hard work or being tired because I have had significant professional challenges that required me to work until 1:00 A.M. or be at a meeting at 7:00 A.M. I am never worried about oversleeping. Meeting deadlines has also helped. In my former career I didn't miss a deadline in ten years. So things like that don't stress me out.

The career experiences of alternatively prepared teachers differ from those of traditionally prepared teachers who, due to age, do not have the vast array of career experience to draw from when entering the teaching profession. Unlike most traditionally prepared beginning teachers, alternatively prepared teachers enter the profession with prior professional experiences that influence them in classroom settings. Current study findings support Crow et al. 's (1990) conclusion that past professional experiences assist career changers in negotiating their new roles as classroom teachers.

**Beliefs into Practice**

I know a lot of the more old-school teachers run classrooms where the kids don't talk. I think my classroom's very different because I want them to talk. They're children. They should express themselves.

- Kim, First Grade Teacher

The following section explores the research question: How do the professional backgrounds and personal experiences of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers influence their educational beliefs and, therefore, their teaching
pedagogies? While the previous sections provide insight into the life experiences of alternatively prepared teachers, the current section explores the nexus between life experiences and discursive practices. Because the following section specifically explores classroom-based practices, most of the data pertain to the eight focal participants who were interviewed and observed.

The data from the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs reveal that the eight focal participants hold either progressive or eclectic (i.e., combination of progressive and transmissive) tendencies, with their scores ranging from 19-29. (See Chapter 3 for further discussion of survey scoring guidelines.) Qualitative data obtained through interviews, observations and open-ended survey response questions further reveal that the eight focal participants, through their discursive ways of talking, doing, and acting possess progressive-based tendencies. This is not to say that transmissive tendencies were not present, because they were and will be discussed later in the chapter. However, since participants expressed mainly progressive beliefs and practices, such beliefs and practices emerged as the central aspect of discussion.

**Beliefs**

The qualitative findings reveal that study participants tend to support progressive (student-centered), rather than traditional (teacher-centered), beliefs and practices. This includes the belief that teaching should be more than the development of discreet academic skills – a principle associated with progressivism. Kim, a first-grade teacher,
remarked:

I'm teaching them social skills. We talk about so many social skills, we talk about at your house, in your community. I mean I'm teaching them how to live. I think teaching them how [italics added] to think rather than think this way [italics added] is important.

Kim sees her role as helping children to move from the 'local' space of the classroom to the community and beyond. She refers to this as 'teaching them how to live.' Her comment 'teaching them how to think rather than think this way' underscores 'thinkers' in the world. Vasquez, Muise, Adamson, Heffernan and Chiola-Nakai (2003) describe this idea as giving children different ways of thinking about lots of different things so that they can make informed decisions in their lives.

Jennifer also notes the importance of developing children's thinking skills when she referenced the importance of discovery learning - another progressive based principle. She stated, "I try to get kids to discover things rather than just telling them. It's hard because some of the kids never thought that way before. They just want you to say the answer."

Jennifer and Kim's observations are consistent with other participants' written responses and oral comments, which also provide insight into the role teachers should play in the learning process. Many participants expressed this view by indicating that teachers are not just vessels for the transmission of academic content. In fact, 91% of the sample population agree or strongly agree that the role of the classroom teacher includes that of project director, learning consultant and psychological counselor.

When questioned about her function in the learning process, Suzanne stated, "I
view myself more as a facilitator or learning coach. I think that's the old school vs. new school. I hope that I get them interested in their own learning.” In response to the same question, Michelle commented, “I'm the flashlight. I can help them see certain things, help them see clearer.” In the words of Kim, “I think my role is to open their eyes to different things, to present them with findings and have them come up with ideas. I don't do that much lecturing.”

Ornstein (1999) argued that those who subscribe to traditional philosophies of education consider the teacher an authority on subject matter - one who dominates lessons with explanations and lectures. The progressive proponent views the teacher as a learning guide and agent for change. Participants’ rhetoric was consistently progressive. Although knowledge of espoused beliefs is informative, observation of the extent to which these beliefs manifest themselves in practice is crucial. Subsequent sections explore this nexus.

Classroom Practice

The classroom observations validate the findings from the interview and survey data and provide concrete examples of the participants’ extension of espoused beliefs into practice. Observations revealed that the focal teachers implemented a variety of progressive-based practices including learning centers, morning meeting, shared reading, cooperative groups and sharing time. Their classrooms were organized in ways that promoted high levels of student interaction, another signpost of progressive practices. In
most rooms, students' desks were placed in groups of three or four, while teachers' desks were inconspicuously placed in the rear of rooms. Walls were decorated with student created work. For example, Kim's "Family & Friends" bulletin board contained stories and pictures about activities students completed with loved ones.

Utilization of learning centers, spaces where students work together to complete tasks, was among the most prevalent progressive-based practices present in classrooms the researcher observed. During one observation in Keith's room, students worked at different learning centers addressing multiple curricula areas, such as reading, writing, math, science and social studies. Keith allowed students to choose a learning center of interest to them, but reminded them of his requirement that they complete work contained at all centers by a certain point in time. At one center, students played a math board game constructed by one of their classmates. (The game appeared to be a source of pride for its creator as she shared it during "show and tell" time.) Through this lesson, Keith not only provided students with choices, but also encouraged the use of student-created materials. Both practices (opportunity for student choice and use of student-created materials) are suggestive of a progressive-leaning belief system.

Another example of the use of learning centers surfaced when peeking in the door of Kim's classroom. During an observation, Kim's students completed language arts activities at three different reading centers. Team leaders were assigned to help students work cooperatively at each center. Before students began working at centers, everyone reviewed center rules. Jointly, Kim and her class discussed the importance of sharing
supplies and space while at centers, practicing safe behavior at all times and freezing when the buzzer signaling movement between centers rang. Observations revealed how Kim and Keith implemented student-centered activities grounded in progressive beliefs.

Teachers also aim to connect experience and education, a practice consistent with progressive philosophies of education. Dewey (1938/1998), often considered the “father” of progressive education, believed that “anything which can be called a study, whether it by arithmetic, history or geography . . . , must be derived from materials which at the outset fall within the scope of ordinary life” (p. 86-87). Elaborating on Dewey’s principles, Darling-Hammond (1998) stated, “The critical issue in an education that seeks to make learning meaningful is the ability of the teacher to forge interactions among students’ . . . prior knowledge and the subject matter under study – to bring it into experience. . . rather than assume that the learner’s experience is irrelevant” (p. 153).

Keith’s math lesson on division constructively translates Dewey’s (1938/1998) principles into practice. When Keith introduced the concept of division to his students, he began with a student-led discussion about their experiences with division in the “real” world. He asked his class to consider and discuss their use of division in their homes, communities and lives. Students brainstormed a list of places (e.g., store, mall) and people (e.g., accountants, teachers) who use division. Keith thereby established that, “Division is not just something you do during the school day.” It was important for Keith that his students understood that division is, and will continue to be, relevant to their lives outside the confines of classroom walls.
Dewey (1938/1998) argued that educative experiences are those governed by a "principle of continuity." What is learned must feed into future understanding and enhancement of experience (Green, 1998). Not only are Keith's practices reflective of Dewey's "principle of continuity," but also recommendations made by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM, 2003). The NCTM advocates a student-centered problem-solving approach to attacking math problems and the educator's ongoing duty to relate mathematical concepts to everyday life. Although Keith was able to implement progressive practices, this task was not always easy. Administrative and curricula constraints hindering teachers' practices are explored in the following section.

Easier Said than Done

The extension of beliefs into practice is not always a smooth process. Progressive classroom environments, which often provide students with choices and a sense of freedom, can be difficult for beginning teachers to create and at times result in rooms that appear "messy" to onlookers. Lynn, a teacher espousing strong progressive beliefs, stated, "It appears that I have the worst behaved class in the school because the kids have a lot of freedom. People walk in and they see crazy things and I'm sure they think I'm a horrible teacher. My principal does not like it."

Observations of Lynn's room revealed that a "quiet buzz" filled the air with the voices of children working and moving between activities. It appeared to be a welcoming environment where students were encouraged to interact with each other and
support one another in the learning process. Students sat in tables of four-five students and worked cooperatively to complete academic tasks during observations. During one observation, the researcher observed students working cooperatively in reading groups — a practice Lynn was exposed to in a graduate class and was eager to try. Lynn told the researcher that she felt good about the progress students were making in their reading groups. In her words, “One of the best things I've done was start reading groups.”

However, several weeks after the researcher observed Lynn's students working in reading groups, Lynn informed her that her principal criticized her use of reading groups during an observation of her teaching. Lynn reported that her principal told her that reading groups are a bad idea; the focus should always be on her - the teacher - not on her students; and that she should try to create a quieter learning environment. Lynn was upset by this feedback and reported feeling disheartened by her principal’s lack of support for her student-centered teaching methodologies.

Although Lynn disagreed with her principal's comments, she did not feel that she was able to question her authority. Accordingly, she removed the tables from her room and brought in a desk for every student. Lynn reported that after her principal’s critique, students were sitting in rows of desks instead of small groups at tables. Instead of completing student-centered cooperative learning activities, students worked independently on teacher-directed class assignments. This new disconnect between Lynn’s espoused beliefs and classroom practices was not welcomed or initiated. Her principal’s lack of support for her instructional practices was instrumental in her decision
to stop using reading groups – not her belief that reading groups were ineffective.

Lynn was not the only teacher who experienced difficulty extending beliefs into practice. Jim relayed a story about his principal’s resistance to the use of a video he created while working as a park naturalist. According to Jim, his principal felt that the video did not appropriately “fit” into the curriculum. In his words,

I was showing a ten-minute tape about the snake program that I used to do. I used to travel around the state with 19 different snakes. I was showing it one morning and my principal came in and said, "Is this a part of your language arts program?" I said, "Well it’s about public speaking and how to present yourself." And she said, “You can't show this film. This is language arts.”

Jim and Lynn both faced administrative pressures that were difficult to handle. Dyson (2002) stated, “Inner city schools can be highly monitored places, with children, teachers and parents all under stricter guidelines, and given such guidelines, the messiness of human emotion and activity, of learning itself, becomes nothing but trouble” (p. 17). This “trouble” was evident in Jim and Kim’s stories. Their highly regulated school environments resulted in a disconnect between what they believed they should do and what they had to do.

Another reason for this disconnect could be the apparent instability in theoretical orientations undergirding beliefs. Earlier in this chapter it was revealed through the survey data that 61% of participants were found to have expressed an eclectic orientation toward teaching but that a majority of these individuals (79%) scored just below the cut-off score to fit the progressivism category. Analysis of these data suggests that although many study participants seemed to believe in and support progressive educational beliefs,
their theoretical orientations appear to be a bit unstable.

One reason for this instability could be the competing influences they encounter. A close examination of the data on participants’ past experiences illuminate the complexity of developing a particular theoretical orientation due to the various personal and professional influences in the participants’ lives. Developing a theoretical orientation is a process in which participants struggle to develop their own discursive practices from sometimes complimentary but sometimes conflicting experiences. However, although they are still a bit unstable in their beliefs, they still try to find ways to implement what they believe to be good practice. For example, participants negotiated their way through administrators telling them what to do without completely abandoning their own theoretical orientations.

Although participants told stories of defeat, they also told of stories of success. Current study findings are consistent with those of Dyson (2002) who found “stories of school pressure followed by stories of possible actions” in her work with urban area elementary school teachers. For example, Lynn eventually remedied her troubles, negotiating personal beliefs and administrative directives, by developing an instructional strategy that enabled her to address her principal’s concerns and use reading groups simultaneously. After asking herself, “How can I comply with my principal’s request while still allowing students to work in reading groups?” Lynn devised and implemented, “Quiet Reading Time,” a portion of the day when some students work independently at their desks while others work in a small reading group with her. In the
end, Lynn found a way to address her principal's concerns without abandoning what she believed to be effective practice.

Like Lynn, Suzanne also found a way to "personalize" the reading curriculum. During an interview she shared with the researcher, "We have Houghton Mifflin but I support it with other things. They [her students] have stories on tape that they listen to. My low group listens to stories, while my middle group does vocabulary work in pairs. My upper group usually reads independently." Suzanne's ability to adapt the curriculum to suit her needs has allowed her to retain ownership over practices while still covering required material.

Haberman (1995) believed that successful urban teachers, "star" teachers as he deemed them, "do not view themselves as change agents, per se, but they do seek ways to give themselves and their students greater latitude within the traditional curriculum" (p. 779). The findings indicate that like Haberman's "star teachers," study participants found ways to give themselves latitude by creating spaces for curricular flexibility. However, the focal participants do more than Haberman's "star" teachers because not only are they able to find latitude within the traditional curriculum, but they do so while engaging in discursive teaching practices that maintain their progressive theoretical orientation.

**Nexus between Life Experience and Discursive Practices**

Classroom observations, interview transcripts and survey responses suggest that a nexus exists between life experience and the teachers' discursive practices. An example
of the life experience/discursive practices nexus can be found in Kim's background and practices. Kim, is a white, female teacher in the under 30 age range. She is a former environmental educator who now teaches first grade. As an environmental educator, Kim worked at a community garden, where she prepared and led environmental education programs for adolescents. During an interview, Kim described how, in her former position, she "helped children discover information rather than force factual information on them."

During interactions with Kim, she spoke about the importance of experiential learning during an interview and wrote about it in an open-ended survey response question. Kim noted that she started a community garden at her school and organized field trips to outdoor sites. During one observation, her students composed journal entries that included vocabulary words (e.g., decompose, worm) learned on a recent class trip to a creek. This was not a typical trip for students, but instead one organized by Kim because of her belief in the importance of experiential, environmentally based, learning opportunities. When collection of data was completed, Kim was planning another class field trip – this time to an aquarium.

Further evidence of the nexus can be found in data produced while in Jennifer's classroom. Jennifer is a white teacher in the 30-39 age range. She is a former health educator who now teaches second grade. Walking into Jennifer's classroom, one encounters walls covered with posters that, according to Jennifer, fulfill two purposes: (1) to serve as resources to students and (2) to promote positive behavior. During every
observation in Jennifer’s room, she consistently encouraged students to use resources posted around the classroom to help them solve problems. When asked about this practice, Jennifer stated, “The use of posters on walls is influenced by prior work with HIV awareness. I would always tell people to use the posters as resources. I do the same thing with my students. I encourage them to use resources that are posted throughout the room.”

Observations of Keith likewise demonstrate the apparent nexus between life experience and discursive practices. Keith is a mixed-race, male fourth grade teacher in the 40-49 age range. Before teaching, he spent fifteen years as an information professional including stints as a corporate librarian, web developer and online researcher. When asked if he used skills honed in prior jobs in the classroom setting, Keith responded:

Absolutely. Researching is important to me... being able to find resources, be they online or books, or just me as a teacher being able to provide things to my class. I use my skills that way a lot. My fourth graders have all been assigned a state that they have to research online.

Discussions with Keith unearthed the myriad influences of his personal and professional experiences on his teaching career. During an interview, Keith spoke about his primary schooling experience, learning style and classroom practices.

The worst time for me [as an elementary school student] was after lunch when the teacher would sit there and read a story. I hated story time. I’m not an auditory person, I’m very visual. So it’s torture for me to sit there and have someone read to me. Even today I can’t stand it – if there’s something in the paper, I have to read it myself. If someone starts to read me something, it’s like no! I’ll read it myself.
[Because] I'm very visual, I give a lot of visuals to support [my teaching].

When asked to describe the impact of this experience on his teaching, Keith stated:

I read a lot to my students this year at the beginning of school because I really wanted them to acclimate to my voice, accent and dialect. So I do read to them, but I am very cautious. It's never more than twenty minutes. It's not something that I do every day. I guess it does affect me.

Classroom observations validate the influence of personal and professional experiences that Keith described during interviews. In addition to observation of students conducting research for state projects, the researcher watched Keith utilize visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning tools to support his instruction. For example, during a math lesson, Keith used an overhead projector and manipulatives to visually and kinesthetically support auditory information. It was evident that Keith did not expect his students to retain all verbal information and, accordingly, provided visual and kinesthetic means to support teaching and learning. Keith's own learning style, one that benefits from the use of visuals, was revealed in his instructional practices.

Classroom observations also revealed how personal interests - like traveling and literature - influence the discursive practices of study participants. Multiple pictures of forests lined Jennifer’s classroom walls. When asked about the extensive amount of photos, Jennifer stated, "I don't know how many kids in the room have been to forests. It's a privilege to go to different forests. That is why I brought in these pictures.” Jennifer’s love of forests also led her to expand her student’s knowledge of forests by taking her class on a field trip to an arboretum. While discussing the field trip, Jennifer stated, “The kids were absolutely mesmerized! That was one of the best moments of the
school year for me."

The findings suggest that study participants use myriad multi-media tools and non-traditional texts to engage students in the learning process. Study participants used videos, computers, tape recorders, compact disc players, overheads, pictures, posters and manipulatives as instructional materials. Progressive educators often use such texts and tools to make accessible certain information that children might not be exposed to in more traditional, textbook-based, curricula.

Several participants' own love of literature was also readily apparent in their classrooms. Suzanne spoke about her second job at a bookstore and self-professed "love of books" during an interview. Accordingly, her classroom contained an extensive children's literature collection that was clearly a source of pride. Jennifer, who also claimed to love books, commented:

I feel like I have a pretty nice library for a first year teacher. I spent a lot of my own money on it. But I've also been given a lot of books. It's important to me to be able to match the kids with what they enjoy [and] to get them more interested in reading. I have one young man that I just can't reach at all. Out of nowhere once in the middle of class one day he said, "What are stars made of?" And I said, "You know what? I'm pretty sure they're made out of hot fiery gases, but you're going to be our star expert. So I went out and got a book about stars and he's been looking at it ever since.

Haberman (1995) argued that effective urban teachers participate in life activities that engender a sense of well-being and use such activities as a means to promote learning. In Haberman's words,

It might be philately, Russian Opera, a Save the Whales Club, composing music with computers, travel or some other avocation from which they derive meaning as well as pleasure. Inevitably, they bring these activities and interests into their classrooms and use them as ways of involving their students in learning. (p. 779)
Jennifer's love of literature appears to enhance student interest in learning. Her story, and other participants' stories, demonstrate how study participants bring personal interests into classroom settings. This practice, according to Haberman, is a hallmark of successful urban teachers.

**Teacher Quality**

When you first start teaching, it is the same problems with the same parents, with the same students. So you say, this is my reality. I can't change my reality but I can have an impact upon it. If I know a child is going to show up at school wearing flip-flops when it's 45 degrees, I can go talk to the guidance counselor, I can get her some socks, I can find out her shoe size and have shoes waiting for her.

- Jim, First Grade Teacher

This section explores the research question: What can be said about the "quality" of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers as evidenced by their life experiences and discursive practices? As this study investigated indicators of quality beyond academic degrees and performance on aptitude tests, the researcher reviewed the data for intangible signs of quality (i.e., life experience, discursive practices).

The findings from this research question are partially grounded in work by Haberman (1995) who identified functions (e.g., persistence, response to bureaucracy, fallibility) of exemplary urban teachers, whom he referred to as "star teachers."

According to Haberman, "These functions . . . represent chunks of teaching behavior that encompass a number of interrelated actions and simultaneously represent beliefs or
commitments that predispose these teachers to act” (p. 778). The current findings suggest that participants’ habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), predisposed ways of being - influence discursive practices resulting in certain behaviors that are reflective of - but move beyond - Haberman’s “star” teachers. As mentioned earlier, the research participants are not only able to give themselves latitude within the traditional curriculum like Haberman’s ‘star’ teachers, but they do so while engaging in discursive teaching practices that maintain their progressive theoretical orientation.

**Dedicated Individuals**

Prior research on alternative certification programs indicates that such programs attract individuals who are dedicated to urban school settings (Haberman, 1995; Stoddert, 1993). Suzanne chose to enter the profession after her experience in higher education revealed a paucity of African-American college applicants at the university where she was employed.

When I worked at the university, I was a bit disheartened because I worked in the recruitment office in admissions. There weren’t very many African-American applicants and I was wondering why that was. I found out that the pool wasn’t there to support admitting the number that I thought we needed. I was disheartened and thought, how can I get involved with it. By nature I am a good test taker, so I thought I should get involved with helping high school age kids get to the point where they can be admitted to my university. So I did some volunteering at my church and got involved in Kaplan. But I soon realized by the time they got to high school it was too late. So when I found out about this program [alternative teacher certification program for elementary school teachers], I applied.

A seminal event for Jennifer was a personal encounter she had with a young child. Through this experience, Jennifer recognized a calling to abandon financial security of
her previous profession to make a difference in the lives of children.

I was really trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I went to visit a friend in Chicago. I was there for a conference, and I was hanging out with his daughter who was five at the time, and a brilliant five, of course. She said that when she grows up, she wants to be a zookeeper during the week and a rock star on weekends. And I thought, I just need to think like she does and not have any restrictions about what I want to do. Just think like a five-year-old. What is it going to take in terms of additional schooling? So that was half of it. The other half was saying, I want to hang out with people like her all day. That experience really got me thinking about teaching. I decided that I needed to be creative and not worry about my mortgage.

Alternatively prepared teachers like Suzanne and Jennifer appear not only willing to make sacrifices to enter the profession, but also eager to handle challenges associated with teaching in urban school settings. They are willing to take action and effect change in some way. Prior research demonstrates that alternatively prepared teachers express a greater preference for teaching in urban school settings (Haberman, 1995), and they tend to use more culturally sensitive material, and bring more positive dispositions toward teaching in urban school settings than traditionally prepared teachers (Stoddert, 1993). Current study findings bolster results of these studies.

Findings support Stoddert’s (1993) claim that alternatively prepared teachers use culturally sensitive materials. Observations reveal that many participants utilize a variety of materials that indicate knowledge and understanding of student diversity. For example, during one observation, Suzanne, whose entire student population was African-American, taught a language arts lesson about famous African-American authors including Alex Haley, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou. Lynn, whose entire student population was also African-American, provided students with access to a
multitude of books featuring African-American main characters. Moreover, study participants seem to recognize when material is *not* culturally sensitive. Kim, commenting on books that she is expected to use, stated:

The books that we use sometimes are so inappropriate. Not even necessarily for the community that I work in, but for today’s society. I mean there’s one [book] about families. The book says families have moms and dads. It’s just not how a lot of families are today.

Kim, a Caucasian teacher who grew up in the suburbs, also discussed how her own interest in books as a child was not that much different from her students’ current interests.

We usually read books that are more diverse. They love reading – my school is 100% African American but they love reading books about Latinos and so we’ll read books with some Spanish words. They love that. We do different things. Their taste – it’s funny, to see the similarities. I grew up in the suburbs, and their tastes are the same as my tastes were when I was six. There are so many things that aren’t that different because kids are kids.

The discourse used by Kim and Suzanne is part of the discursive practices associated with a critical literacy curriculum. However, without taking away from the important work that these teachers have accomplished and without diminishing the value of their work on cultural sensitivity, it is worth noting that in order to truly address issues of diversity, teachers also need to address issues of domination (whose voices are dominant and therefore whose voices are marginalized), access (for whom is access available and for whom is access denied) and re-design (what are some ways to change inequity) (Janks, 2000). According to Janks, a curriculum that addresses one of these elements without the others fails to effect real change. A question emerges in this regard.
What are teacher training programs doing to help beginning teachers learn to develop a curriculum that critically addresses issues of diversity? This must be a priority given the intent of alternative certification programs to train quality teachers to teach in urban settings.

Further evidence of the commitment that study participants appear to have to urban schools can be found in quantitative data obtained through the follow-up questionnaire. Findings indicate that, of those participants who plan to remain teaching after completing their two-year program, 65% plan to continue teaching in an urban school setting. This finding takes on added significance when compared to findings on the preferences of traditionally prepared counterparts. In Natriello and Zumwalt's (1993) study of teacher preparation programs in New Jersey, researchers found that among traditional college-prepared elementary school teachers, only 8.3% expressed a preference to teach in urban areas. Given the unrelenting need for urban school teachers and the lack of traditionally prepared teachers who choose to teach in urban areas, the study participants' preference to teach in urban settings is critical.

**Persistent Practitioners**

Haberman (1995) argued that exemplary urban teachers protect learners and learning and frequently involve their students in learning that transcends the curricula, textbooks, and achievement tests. The findings indicate that study participants aim to do just that. For example, Lisa "transcended the curricula" by taking her students on an
environmentally-based field trip and Lynn invited a volcanologist into her classroom for a hands-on demonstration of a volcano eruption. However, although participants seek to broaden the boundaries in which they work, they do so with varying degrees of success. Observations and individual interviews reveal that participants may not “transcend the curricula” as much as they would like because of constraints placed on them connected to the current standards and accountability movement. In an era of standards based reform and student accountability, teachers in this study – and across the nation – find themselves struggling with designing and redesigning curricula in order to address standards and testing requirements.

The results indicate that study participants aim to implement lessons that address mandated district-based standards. Interviews and observations suggest that teachers predominately address standards through standard-specific lessons and subject- (as well as standard) specific bulletin boards. Several participants commented on the challenges of addressing standards during interviews. Jennifer stated:

There are so many things that these children need that are not considered important. We're often told you need your standards posted on the wall. Then you need to have the skill that the child is learning must be up to. That is not for the children... it is in case someone from downtown visits our school. Here you are taking up wall space with standards for math, English, science and art. There is no room left over for anything that you would use to teach with. This is simply window dressing for people that would be coming from downtown.

Participants noted that in addition to problems inherent in addressing standards, meeting federal testing requirements is also a challenge. Data obtained from the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs provide insight into why study participants have
concerns over testing. One survey question asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: “Since life is competitive, students should be evaluated on standardized tests according to how they compare with others in most subjects.” Findings reveal that 74% of study participants either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

Given this finding, it was not surprising to hear teachers’ concerns over mandated testing requirements. Participants reported difficulty preparing students for federally mandated tests, commenting specifically on the influence test preparation has had on their practices. Jennifer remarked, “We are in test-prep overdrive... we are doing the Reading and Math test prep. I literally have no time for Social Studies or Science, which is so frustrating because I love Science.” Jim, who switched from one school to another halfway through the school year, discussed how mandated tests influence his classroom practices.

At my first school, I used to take groups of three or four students and have them come and have lunch with me. We used to eat off my mom's china. We would just talk. I would just sit there and listen to them talk to one another. I don’t do that anymore because she [Jim’s principal] would not understand how that fits into the curriculum. If it doesn't fit into the Stanford 10, she doesn't want it. She recommends that you teach to the test and for the test.

In addition to addressing the impact of tests on practices, Jim also discussed his frustration over the content of test questions, stating:

The test only assesses two kinds of intelligence - reading and math. These tests are built upon white suburban comprehension and how you look at the world through white suburbia. So, whether you like it or not, we need to expose children to things outside of this city. This test was not designed by people living in this city.
Participants’ frustrations are similar to those expressed by beginning teachers in White, Sturtevant and Dunlap’s (2003) study. In their study, researchers explored perceptions of the influence of high stakes tests on preservice and beginning teachers’ literacy-related beliefs and decisions. Researchers found that many teachers sacrificed instruction that they felt would benefit students in order to give time for test preparation. Current study findings bolster the results of this study.

Perhaps, for some participants, the tension over standards and testing is connected to the struggle that appears to exist between the ways in which they want to teach and the ways in which they are required to teach. As findings indicate, many participants lean towards a progressive teaching approach. Such an approach may be difficult to employ in inner city schools that, according to Dyson (2002), can be highly monitored places, with children and teachers under stricter guidelines. Creating spaces for student-directed activities may be difficult for participants to make in highly structured, standards-based environments.

Haberman (1995) stated that “star” teachers often find themselves in day-to-day struggles to broaden the boundaries within which they work. In Haberman’s words,

One reason that they [star teachers] so often find themselves at odds with the bureaucracy of urban schools is that they persist in searching for ways to engage their students actively in learning. Indeed, their view that this is their primary function stands in stark contrast to the views of teachers who see their primary function as covering the curriculum. (p. 779)

Teachers from the current study experience similar struggles. While participants may not completely fit Haberman’s definition of “star” teacher as determined through
performance on his star teacher interview that measures the presence of behaviors and ideologies consistent with “star” urban teachers, findings suggest that focal participants possess traits - rooted in personal habiti and life experiences - characteristic of “star” teachers. More specifically, the findings reveal that many of them appear to be persistent, organized, knowledgeable of bureaucratic constraints and responsive to adverse situations - all functions of “star” teachers.

**Insights Gained**

I would not have gone into teaching unless there was a program for alternatively certifying teachers. If it wasn’t for alternative certification, as much as I loved teaching, I never would have made the crossover.

– Keith, Fourth Grade Teacher

This section explores the question: What insights can be gained into the capacity of alternative certification programs to prepare a new cadre of elementary school urban teachers? Three major insights emerged while researching this question. First, the findings suggest that teaching in a collegial atmosphere and having access to an effective mentor (or experienced teacher) are key elements to a successful first year of teaching. Second, results indicate that the provision of coursework applicable to participants’ teaching assignments and the opportunity to complete the program as a cohort are beneficial components of alternative certification programs. And third, while alternative certification programs recruit individuals into the profession, the data does not suggest that programs offer a long-term solution to staffing shortages.
Supportive Environments

Dyson (1997) suggested that teachers “desire time and space for the sort of collegial interaction that keeps institutional structures flexible, that both fosters and is fostered by a sense of connection that extends beyond the classroom to the school” (p. 22). In her study of urban area elementary school teachers, Dyson found that when collegial relationships exist within school environments, teachers are more able to address the needs of the school’s children. Like teachers in Dyson’s study, present study participants find success in and yearn for supportive school environments that foster high levels of collegiality between teachers and administrators.

Marlow, Inman and Betancourt-Smith (1997) commented, “Teachers without the support of colleagues and administrators are likely to feel isolated and even ridiculed when their ideas are not supported by the individuals within their school” (p. 212). Kim, who experienced feelings of frustration and isolation when she first started teaching, humanizes this point.

My experience was very difficult at my first school. I ended up leaving that school. The culture of the school did not fit me at all. It was not very supportive and I felt like it was very hard to get advice... I felt like I had gone into teaching with all this confidence, and I came into this. I had this “I can do anything” attitude and in four weeks I was totally this broken down person. I didn’t want to go to work. I didn’t want to do anything. That was really, really hard.

Confidence levels of beginning teachers - like Kim - dissipate quickly, as they are thrown into the proverbial deep end and challenged to sink or swim (Danielson, 1999). Determined not to “sink,” Kim transferred to a new school.

I came to my new school because of a woman I’d met who was involved with Urban Teachers Project. She was an advisor over the summer. She just said, “They saw
something in you and they chose you for this program. I know you can do this.” So I came to this school, and she teaches right next door to me and has helped me out so much. I felt such a shift in my confidence just by being in my new classroom and school.

When asked what is different about her second school, Kim’s comments reveal the presence of a strong sense of collegiality within the school setting.

I work closely with two first grade teachers who have taught for a really long time. One's been at this school for eleven years, and one's been at this school for fourteen years, so they know this school culture. And they know the school, and they're great. The first month they picked up the homework for me, and said this is what you should send home. This is what you should do. So it's just been a lot of hand-holding and I love it. That's been great for me. It's also been great for me because I get to observe these two veteran teachers teach. We've always got each other’s backs. I'm so lucky. I'm so blessed.

Kim’s feeling “blessed” by the presence of seasoned coworkers provides insight into the merit of guidance from experienced colleagues. Comments from many study participants validate the critical role that supportive colleagues, especially mentor teachers, play in the lives of first-year teachers. On the follow-up questionnaire, participants were asked to describe factors that helped ease their transition into the teaching profession. Sean stated, “Mentors have been the most consistent level of support. Alicia wrote, “My mentor has supported me in a couple of ways. She encouraged me when I was having difficulty and provided me with a variety of material.” While Max noted, “The mentors I have been matched with have given me valuable feedback.”

Suzanne spoke specifically about the benefit of having a mentor teacher at one's own school.

I think you have to encourage new teachers themselves to seek a mentor. I think every
new teacher needs an ally within the school and you give them the tools to find that person who is a peer or somebody else. I think that is so much more helpful for them. I think that is more helpful than paying someone from outside to come help. Really what you need is someone who can help you traverse the politics of the school. Someone from outside doesn't know what those are.

For Suzanne, effective support networks emerge from within the confines of school walls. Lisa’s comments provide further insight into the importance of school-based support.

Somebody in the building, that's really what you need. You really can't go through it alone. I don't care how tough you are, for any first year teacher you need somebody holding your hand because it's just so hard. I think this is especially true for alternatively certified teachers. I mean I didn't feel that well prepared.

While the preponderance of comments regarding mentors were positive, it is crucial to delineate problems identified with the mentoring process. Suzanne commented,

It is a relatively new phenomenon to give [new teachers] mentors and I think it is a wonderful thing. The problem is that you have feast or famine. There were no mentors before and now I feel like new teachers are inundated with mentors. It becomes difficult dealing with so many people. It becomes another level of being overwhelmed.

Feelings of mentor inundation were juxtaposed with feelings of mentor absence. Jennifer stated, “I have a formal mentor, but she’s never observed me.” Although minor problems with the mentoring process were raised, no participants stated that they would not want a mentor. In fact, the overwhelming majority of participants expressed positive comments about the feedback, support and guidance received from mentor teachers.

Study findings indicate that alternatively prepared teachers benefit from teaching in supportive, collegial school environments. These findings are consistent with those of
Marlow, Inman and Betancourt-Smith (1997) who found that beginning teachers who share ideas, make plans and solve problems with colleagues, feel less isolated and develop a greater sense of self-esteem. Moreover, the current findings bolster prior research conclusions validating the efficacy of mentoring programs for beginning teachers (Danielson, 1999; Fairbanks, Freedman & Kahn, 2000; Holloway, 2001).

Content of Programs

The findings indicate that alternatively prepared teachers benefit not only from collegial school environments and access to mentor teachers, but also from the abilities to progress through programs in cohorts and to complete graduate level coursework in education applicable to their teaching assignments and teaching interests (e.g., critical literacy for teaching culturally sensitive curricula). Feistritzer (2002) argued that these characteristics (i.e., mentoring, cohorts and university-based coursework) are among the essential elements of effective alternative certification programs.

Findings reveal that progressing through their program as a cohort is, as one participant called it, “therapeutic.” The cohort becomes what Gee (2003) refers to as an affinity group, a group that coalesces around shared interests. The ability to converse with classmates about their experiences as beginning teachers appears extremely beneficial. Mary commented, “Sharing my experiences with classmates has provided advice and therapy.” Steven wrote, “It was helpful to have another teacher from my program placed at my school.” During a follow-up interview, Lynn expressed the desire
to teach in the same school as a classmate who has also become a friend and supporter.

Several participants also commented on the usefulness of graduate classes. One teacher remarked, “I think it is good coursework in that it really ties into the classroom, and they [course instructors] try to be very realistic and [teach us] what can you actually do in classrooms.” During an interview, Keith described his transfer of theory discussed in graduate classes into practice in his classroom setting as “amazing.”

Putting into practice what I’m learning in my graduate classes at the same time is amazing. I just read this textbook last night in our Teaching Math class that made the link for me in terms of what I need to do with the publisher’s standard textbook. I learned how to use the textbook as a resource and not as a bible. It was so nice to see someone put the how-to of it in print - go over the big ideas in the book and then find interesting ways to teach those ideas. It was really refreshing and made to order. Learning things and then implementing them the next day is great. For me, it’s an ideal situation.

However, not all participants felt that courses adequately prepared them for their teaching positions. Some felt that courses did not successfully address the unique needs of urban school settings. Jill’s comments illustrate this critique.

We have had all these courses that show us how you are supposed to do group work and they show us videos of angelic looking children working in a group. The room is carpeted and painted all these colors and they have supplies. I don't have math books. So, I get a little frustrated in classes because of that.

Expressing similar sentiments, Jim stated:

I find my courses interesting. But you look at the films and the pictures in books, and hear the teacher talking, they are not talking about the kinds of classes that we have. A part of it is sheer exhaustion that you feel ... you would love to do something like that but tomorrow you end up just trying to get through the day. You are learning all these things but to have the energy to try them out is difficult. You are just in survival mode. You are not in the mode when you can start incorporating new and exciting ideas. You try but a lot of times we just sit there. There will be a professor that is so happy and talking about how much children love to learn. You sit there and think where did she teach?
Although the researcher did not observe the participants’ graduate classes, insight into strategies for strengthening the efficacy of coursework can be gleaned through Jill and Jim’s comments. Both expressed frustration over learning about strategies that were not appropriate for their classroom settings and the students with whom they work. Perhaps greater levels of communication between alternatively prepared teachers and their university professors would help ease feelings of frustration expressed over graduate classes. Dyson (2002) argued that “the degree to which university scholars . . . and teachers are communicating with each other can be gauged by the degree to which they borrow from each other’s stories” (p. 19). Enhanced “exchanging and borrowing” of stories could prove to be quite beneficial for all involved.

Jim’s comments raise another interesting point: alternatively prepared teachers may be unable to reflect on their practices and implement new strategies with the preferred level of depth and breadth. As Jim points out, he was not unwilling, but rather unable to implement new strategies. This theme was likewise evident in Lynn’s comments. “I’m not really reflective at this point in terms of education and theory. I do not really question what they are telling me.” Another teacher proffered, “The coursework has been helpful, but I am in the survival stage. I have not put most of those strategies to their fullest use just yet.”

The previous comments raise a crucial point regarding the relationship between theory and practice. In a study that examined the role that theory and practice play in the preparation of new teachers in a traditional program, Harste, Leland, Schmidt, Vasquez
and Ociepka (2004) discovered that "a new teacher's understanding of the relationship between theory and practice influences the way [the teacher] positions [her/himself] as a professional, the stance [she/he] takes in developing curriculum, and whether [the teacher] sees her/himself as a change agent who can make a difference in the lives of children" (p. 1). They concluded that "education is theory all the way down, and that teacher educators have a particular obligation to address theoretical issues in their work with future teachers" (p. 1).

The data on experiences in the university classroom reveal that participants view the content delivered as "practice all the way down." More specifically, this practice is at times ineffective with the students with whom they work. This could mean that the alternative certification program courses are practice driven which accounts for the pragmatic discourse used by participants. It could also mean that, given the truncated program, participants have yet to learn how to both identify and articulate the theoretical tools they use to construct their curriculum and negotiate their way through teaching. Even though their discursive practices orient them toward progressive and constructivist ideals, it does not necessarily follow that they have internalized progressive or constructivist theoretical understandings. If they have internalized their theoretical orientation, they may not have the tools to make those explicit.

Entering the Profession

While participants express some concern over specific components of alternative certification programs, on the whole they view programs favorably because such
programs enable them to enter the teaching profession. Jim specifically discussed the added import of the program being offered in a city amenable to differing ideologies.

It [becoming a teacher] was something I always pondered. But in my home state the restrictions placed upon a teacher are so onerous. If a teacher says anything positive about a gay person they are breaking the law. If you try to celebrate Black History Month, people will think you are insane. There was no possible way I could have taught there.

Comments by Keith illustrate how the existence of his program allowed him to pursue a lifelong goal of becoming a classroom teacher.

I would not have gone into teaching unless there was a program for alternatively certifying teachers. It's just a situation in my life where I could not have gone to graduate school – I mean taken off a year or two and gone back and gotten a degree. So I was very excited there's this program. I thought, this is great. I'll get to do what I always wanted to do, and be educated at the same time. If it wasn't for alternative certification, as much as I loved teaching, I never would have made the crossover.

The above findings are consistent with those of Crow et al. (1990) who found that many of the “career changers” in their study always had an interest in teaching, but were unable to pursue this interest because of social attitudes, market forces and financial obligations. For Jim and Keith, and for “career changers” in Crow et al’s study, entering the profession represented a psychological homecoming.

Teacher Retention

Crucially, while study participants chose to enter the teaching profession, study findings reveal that many participants do not intend to remain classroom teachers. Data from the follow-up questionnaire indicate that of the 16 (76%) participants who plan to
remain teaching after completing their program (5 intend to leave immediately after completing the program), 11 (69%) plan to remain in the profession for at least 5 years, while only 3 (19%) plan to remain classroom teachers for the remainder of their career (see Table 3). In other words, only 3 out of 21 (14%) study participants completing the follow-up questionnaire, intend to remain classroom teachers for the remainder of their professional careers. These findings are disheartening given that alternative certification programs are being offered as a solution to present and future urban teacher shortages.

Although programs may not prove a long-term solution to urban staffing shortages, findings suggest that they do attract individuals who plan to remain in the field of education – just not as classroom teachers. Sixty-percent of the participants who plan to leave their teaching positions intend to remain in field of education. In other words, although many study participants plan to leave the classroom, they do not plan to leave the field. Other related interests delineated on the follow-up questionnaire include: the desire to conduct educational research, an interest in combining education and former field in a new position, and positions in educational administration.

Qualitative comments gathered through follow-up questionnaire questions and interview transcripts provide further insight into the future plans of study participants. Although quantitative data obtained from closed-response follow-up questionnaire questions suggest that participants know what future plans hold in terms of staying or leaving teaching positions, qualitative comments made during interviews reveal that participants might not be so sure.
Table 3. Future Plans: Findings from the Follow-Up Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you plan to remain a classroom teacher immediately after you complete your program?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. For those who answered “yes” to question #1, do you plan to continue teaching in an urban public school after you complete your program?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. For those who answered “yes” to question #1, do you plan to remain a classroom teacher for at least five years?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. For those who answered “yes” to question #1, do you plan to remain a classroom teacher for the rest of your career?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. For those who answered “no” to questions #1 or #4, do you plan to take another position in the field of education after leaving your position as a classroom teacher?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=21
During an interview, Jim was asked if he plans to remain a classroom teacher after he completes the program. He remarked, "Anybody that you interview will give you one answer today, another answer on Thursday and another answer on Friday."

During interviews, several participants expressed doubt over whether they want to continue teaching in an urban area. Jennifer, who plans to remain a classroom teacher but not necessarily in the same urban district, stated:

Honestly, at this point, I plan to go to another school system. I don't need to teach wealthy privileged kids in a suburb, but I think I need something a little bit less intense, where I'm not doing the parenting and the socialization. It's not like I'm looking to be with more privileged kids — I just want to be able to get the teaching piece more as opposed to the management piece.

Kim's comments further illustrate this point.

Many people say, "This is terrible. After two years I'm going to suburbs." That's what everybody says because it's just really, really hard - especially if you're in a school with no support...and has a high dropout rate with teachers. It's hard to imagine staying there permanently.

Suzanne and Keith foresee slightly different plans for the future. They both discussed other opportunities to work on current issues in the field of education. Suzanne commented, "If I wanted to take what I've done in other professions and here I would actually start doing something with test prep. I'm seeing how important standardized testing has become. What I might start doing is tutoring students or tutoring teachers to take the Praxis." Keith, like Suzanne, desires a career in education, but not necessarily as a classroom teacher.

One of the things that I'm learning now that I'm on the inside is all the options in the field. I can see myself doing lots of things...working for publishers or getting involved in home schooling like William Bennett's K12.com company. I just see there are a lot of options here. I'll never leave the field.
Although this study did not aim to explore reasons why alternatively prepared teachers might leave the field, some insight was gained in this regard. Prior research on traditionally prepared beginning teachers indicates that most teachers enter the profession with a certain amount of idealism (Gold, 1996), which often dissipates in a teacher's first year in the classroom. As beginning teachers are often placed in difficult classrooms (Gold), they face undue hardships, stress and feelings of defeat that precipitate their leaving the profession (Schmidt & Knowles, 1995). Current study findings reveal that alternatively prepared teachers face challenges similar to those encountered by traditionally prepared beginning classroom teachers.

Comments pertaining to health risks and challenges inherent for beginning teachers were revealed through data obtained on the follow-up questionnaire question: What would be your primary reason(s) be for leaving your position as classroom teacher? Samantha wrote, “The stress, frustration, etc. particularly with the system but more so with the day-to-day heartache/heartburn of teaching and teaching especially in a school environment as difficult as mine.” Kyle commented, “I would probably leave due to stress. I find all of the responsibilities of a classroom teacher to be daunting.”

The above findings only touch the surface of causes for alternatively prepared teacher attrition. However, failure to include these insights would be negligent because the number of qualified teachers programs recruit is inconsequential if those teachers do not remain.

The findings in the concluding section, as well as other chapter sections, suggest
that the differences of alternatively prepared teachers matter. Differing life, personal and educational experiences influence the discursive practices of alternatively prepared teachers. Such differing experiences appear to help study participants address the diverse needs of their students. This attribute is critical given the powerful influence teachers have on children.

The opening vignette of this chapter offered important insight into the profound and lasting effect teachers have on students' lives. In the vignette, Jim recalled an incident in which he was admonished by his fourth grade teacher for failing to comply with expected norms and expectations. For choosing to "think outside the box," Jim's teacher ridiculed and scolded him. Although this was a traumatic event for Jim, he has been able to use it in a constructive manner. Unlike his fourth grade teacher who scolded him for his individuality, Jim celebrates the diversity that students bring to the classroom setting. This anecdote, in concert with many others offered by study participants, engenders hope for the future of the teaching profession.
CHAPTER 5
Conclusions, Recommendations & Implications

General Conclusions

Life experiences matter. In this study, the impact of personal, professional and educational experiences on the discursive practices of a group of teachers participating in an alternative certification program in an urban setting was of particular importance. Analysis of the interview data and classroom observations revealed complimentary discursive practices used by participants when they talked about their personal experiences and their professional (initial career) experiences. These complimentary discourses were grounded in progressive and constructivist theoretical orientations toward teaching. Significantly, participants enter the teaching workforce with particular orientations toward teaching. These are the same orientations they had when beginning their alternative certification programs. This is significant because the discourse one uses has a legitimizing effect (Gee, 1996; Lankshear, 1997; Luke & Freebody, 1997) and shapes educational beliefs and teaching pedagogy. Therefore, the discourses to which one is exposed and subsequently uses make a difference.

The following general conclusions emerged from the study. Consistent with the preceding chapter, conclusions are organized by areas explored in the research questions.
Demographic Characteristics & Educational Beliefs

Study findings, consonant with other research exploring demographic variables of alternatively prepared teachers (Chizhik, 2003; Houston et al., 1993; Sleeter, 2001; Zimphur & Ashburn, 1992), indicate that alternative teacher certification programs attract more teachers of color, older individuals and men into the profession than traditional teacher preparation programs. Moreover, the findings suggest that alternative certification programs draw individuals with prior teaching experience to the profession. In fact, this was true of 56% of the study participants. Study participants reported that such non-traditional teaching experiences (e.g., after-school program tutor, SAT instructor, and religious education teacher) facilitate recognition and understanding of students’ wide-ranging developmental levels and learning needs.

As for educational beliefs, the findings suggest that study participants gravitate toward progressive (student-centered), rather than transmissive (teacher-centered), principles. Initial findings from the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs indicated that a majority of participants held eclectic beliefs (meaning that one’s beliefs are grounded in both progressive and transmissive frameworks), tending toward the progressive side. When initial findings were layered with analysis of data obtained during interviews and observations, the findings further revealed that participants held predominantly progressive tendencies.

Although the data suggest that participants held predominately progressive based beliefs, theoretical orientations underpinning such beliefs appeared unstable. Evidence of
this instability was uncovered through response patterns on Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs and difficulty reported by participants in grounding their teaching “practice” in “theory.”

**Personal Experiences & Professional Backgrounds**

Alternatively prepared teachers bring valuable personal and professional experiences to the teaching profession. Study findings suggest that personal experiences associated with familial relationships, ethnicity and age help to raise their level of awareness and understanding of life challenges, urban school settings and student diversity. As to the influence of prior education experiences, the findings revealed one striking similarity between alternatively and traditionally prepared teachers. Both groups seem to draw from and reflect upon their own experiences as primary school students when constructing belief systems and subsequent teaching practices.

The data also suggest that alternatively prepared teachers enter the profession with career experiences from many different fields ranging from business to health care. Unearthed in this study was the value of skills applicable to teaching that were honed in these prior work environments. Skills such as time-management, multi-tasking and public speaking all appear to assist teachers in grappling with the day-to-day struggles of classroom teaching.
Beliefs into Practice

Classroom observations provided examples of participants translating their espoused beliefs into practice. This translation was not always smooth, primarily due to administrative constraints and restrictive mandates associated with testing and standards. The findings suggest that the transfer of “theory” into “practice” may also be hindered by participants’ limited understanding of the theoretical orientations undergirding their practices, giving rise to a disconnect between espoused beliefs and classroom based practices. At times, this disconnect appeared to cause participants to shy away from their progressive beliefs and embrace a pragmatic teaching orientation as a way to “survive the classroom.” On several occasions, participants admitted ceasing particular practices when they were unable to articulate how those practices were grounded in theory. For example, when Lynn’s principal asked her to stop doing group work, she did so because it was easier than trying to explain the theory behind the use of reading groups.

In Harste et al.’s study (2004) examining the role that theory and practice play in the preparation of new teachers in traditional teacher education, researchers concluded that “education is theory all the way down” (p1). Interview data from the current study regarding participants’ experiences in the university classroom reveal that some participants perceive the content of their coursework in their program as “practice all the way down” and that some of this “practice” is inapplicable to their teaching assignments. Therefore, it was unsurprising to find participants using pragmatic discourses that were not theoretically grounded.
Teacher Quality

The quality of alternatively prepared teachers was analyzed by focusing on two intangible indicators of teacher quality: life experiences and discursive practices. The findings suggest that these intangible indicators offer insight into the quality of individuals prepared through alternative certification programs.

Results indicate that many of the focal participants possess discursive ways of being rooted in personal habitus and life experiences characteristic of Haberman’s (1995) “star” urban teachers. More specifically, they were cognizant of bureaucratic constraints, responsive to adverse situations, predisposed to engage in coaching rather than directive teaching, persistent practitioners and organized professionals.

Another critical finding is the participants’ ability to identify and validate the importance of racial and cultural diversity. According to Style (2000), traditionally, American education has been more comfortable focusing on similarities.

Despite our democratic rhetoric, differences have made us uncomfortable. In fact, there are still American educators who pride themselves on being “colorblind;” thinking that ignoring “accidental” differences of race or gender or region or class creates the best classroom climate. Promoting such partial seeing is highly problematic for the creation of a curriculum that will serve all students adequately. (p. 79)

Fortunately, teachers in this study were not “colorblind” and recognized that knowledge of both self and others is essential.

Furthermore, analysis of the data indicated that alternatively prepared teachers are able to maintain a progressive theoretical orientation, while simultaneously addressing the “traditional” curriculum. Although this was not always easy, participants sought and
often found ways to personalize the curricula without straying far from required mandates.

Insights Gained

Insights into key elements of alternative teacher preparation programs and the long-term capacity of programs to combat urban staffing shortages were gleaned through this study. Factors identified as important considerations within the elementary school settings in which alternatively prepared teachers are assigned include: (1) the placement of teachers in a collegial environment and (2) the assistance and support of an effective mentor or experienced colleague. The opportunity to teach in a collegial school atmosphere in which new teachers receive support from principals and colleagues was deemed highly advantageous by study participants.

Kim's story humanizes this critical finding. When Kim started teaching, she was assigned to a school where she received very little support from administrators or colleagues. The impact of this negative experience almost caused Kim to leave the profession. As Kim put it, "I felt like I had gone into teaching with all this confidence, and I came into this. I had this 'I can do anything' attitude and in four weeks I was totally this broken down person. I didn't want to go to work. I didn't want to do anything." Fortunately, Kim transferred to a new school where she received the encouragement and support of her colleagues. Describing her second school, Kim stated, "I think just my whole school experience now is so much more positive because of the
staff I work with, the community I work in and the parents. Everything is totally
different.” Current findings bolster prior research conclusions emphasizing the
importance of supportive school environments and mentoring programs for beginning
teachers (Brock & Grady, 1998; Danielson, 1999; Fairbanks et al. 2000).

The findings also suggest the import of university coursework applicable to urban
school settings, taught by professors cognizant of the needs of urban teachers. This set of
data was produced when participants talked about the relationship between the content of
university courses and the realities of the classroom settings. Some participants were
dismayed by the disconnect between what they were instructed to do by university
professors and what they could actually do in their classroom settings. Although this data
reflect participants’ perceptions of university coursework and are not validated by
observations of university-based lessons, the data does suggest that alternatively prepared
teachers benefit from university-based instruction that addresses their particular urban
school teaching assignments.

Data further revealed the advantage of having participants progress through
alternative certification programs in cohorts or affinity groups (Gee, 2003). In the current
study, the opportunity to engage in dialogue with cohort members provided participants
with a much needed form of support. Jackie commented that support from members of
her cohort has been “extremely helpful.” Many study participants expressed similar
sentiments.

Another key finding pertains to the attrition rate of alternatively prepared
teachers. Research on beginning teacher attrition indicates that the attrition rate of new teachers is significantly high—approximately 50% of new teachers leave within the first three to five years (Hudson, 2001). Like other research on beginning teacher attrition, current findings reveal that a significant number of teachers plan to leave the position of classroom teacher. Findings indicate that 43% of the sample population intend to remain classroom teachers for at least five years, while a mere 14% intend to remain classroom teachers for the remainder of their professional careers. Although the data does not suggest that programs offer a long-term solution to urban staffing shortages, results do indicate that programs recruit individuals committed to the field of education. Of the study participants who do not plan to remain classroom teachers, 60% plan to remain in the field of education.

**Recommendations**

Findings from this study prompt a number of methodological and substantive recommendations. As to process, if the current study were to be replicated, it is recommended that a broader-cross section of individuals, including principals, supervisors and university professors, be interviewed. These interviews would yield a greater breadth of insight into the discursive practices of alternatively prepared teachers and enhance the study’s validity by providing an additional means of confirming participants’ espoused beliefs and practices.

One particular population that might benefit from replication of the current study
is alternatively prepared secondary school teachers. Such research would provide insight into similarities and differences between the life experiences and discursive practices of alternatively prepared secondary school and alternatively prepared elementary school teachers. Also, this study would offer opportunities for comparisons to be made between alternatively prepared and traditionally prepared secondary school teachers.

As to substance, at the outset, it is recommended that the varied life experiences of alternatively prepared teachers be systematically recognized by the certification programs in which they are enrolled and communities in which they are employed. This is important given findings from this study suggesting that life experience is a good indicator of "quality." Accordingly, it is recommended that life experience factor into the evaluation of one's qualifications for teaching and efficacy as a classroom teacher.

Further, findings reveal that when teachers go beyond a "colorblind" approach to student diversity, they can create cultural boundaries (neutral spaces that are accessible to members of diverse socio-cultural groups) within classroom settings. When the basic right of all children to be educated in inclusionary learning environments is coupled with the ongoing diversification of American public schools, it becomes clear that beginning teachers - whether alternatively or traditionally prepared - should be taught to create cultural boundaries, rather than borders, within classroom settings (see Erickson 1999).

One way to assist teachers in creating cultural boundaries is the implementation of university-based coursework that helps the new teacher to develop and establish a culturally sensitive curriculum that critically address issues of diversity. The coursework,
at a “macro” level, should encourage new teachers to address issues of domination (whose voices are dominant and therefore whose voices are marginalized), access (for whom is access available and for whom is access denied) and re-design (what are some ways to change inequity) within the curricula.

Consideration for the content and structure of alternative teacher certification programs also emerged from this study. First, participants indicated that it is advantageous for individuals to progress through alternative certification programs in cohorts or affinity groups (Gee, 2003) so they can collaboratively grow together as teachers. Moreover, analysis of the data established the advantage of teaching in collegial work environments with supportive principals and access to mentoring programs. Participants advocated that administrators and mentors work more closely with them as they negotiated their new roles as classroom teachers. Lastly, the data revealed that the place of theory in alternative certification programs should be revisited. Current study findings indicate that teaching “practice” without concurrently teaching “theory” may result in unstable practice. It is recommended that alternative certification program participants be provided with multiple opportunities to consider and reflect on the nexus that exist between practice and theory.

**Further Research**

The value of qualitative research is that it is generative, in that it generates areas for further study. Additional areas for future research generated from this study center on
teacher recruitment and retention. In terms of recruitment, research into the
disproportionately low number of men in elementary school teaching positions and
recruitment strategies specifically targeting male elementary school teachers would be
invaluable.

As for retention, this study provokes questions regarding the long-term retention
of alternatively prepared teachers. Researching factors leading to the success (e.g.,
effective mentor, small class size) of alternatively prepared teachers could help identify
strategies that would increase their length of tenure. Also, causes for the attrition of
alternatively prepared teachers should be explored. Possible research questions include,
“Is the attrition rate of alternatively prepared teachers influenced by the location of their
teaching assignments?” and “Are alternatively prepared teachers more likely to remain
classroom teachers if they teach in suburban schools as opposed to urban, inner city
schools?”

Second, further evaluation of the potential for alternative certification programs to
diversify the teaching force in light of the high attrition rate is warranted. How will the
high attrition rate of alternatively prepared teachers impact the potential of programs to
diversify the teaching populace? Because many teachers prepared through programs do
not remain classroom teachers, programs may not offer a viable means for diversifying
the teaching force.

The current study also generates questions regarding alternatively prepared
teachers’ theoretical orientations. How do alternatively prepared teachers’ theoretical
orientations change over time? As participants complete more university coursework and gain experience in classroom settings, their theoretical orientations become more crystallized. To explore this phenomenon, a longitudinal study that follows teachers over time is recommended.

Additionally, comparisons between theoretical orientations of traditionally prepared teachers and alternatively prepared teachers should be explored in the research. What are the similarities and differences between alternatively and traditionally prepared beginning teachers' theoretical orientations? Because traditionally prepared teachers typically complete more coursework over a longer period of time prior to assuming the role of classroom teacher, they may have the greater opportunities to anchor their practices in theory. Further research on the topic is necessary.

In sum, study findings indicate that our life experiences make a difference. Participants' stories revealed how both personal and professional experiences influence their discursive practices in myriad ways. Although the types of life experiences that participants brought to the profession varied widely, the findings suggest that such experiences help participants to enter the profession with a certain comfort level and assist in negotiating their roles as classroom teachers.
APPENDIX A

Methodology Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs &amp; Follow-Up Questionnaire</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are demographic characteristics and educational beliefs of a group of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers?</td>
<td>• Forced choice Likert-scale survey responses (Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs)</td>
<td>• Framing set of questions*</td>
<td>• Field notes*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the personal experiences and professional backgrounds of a group of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school teachers?</td>
<td>• Demographic questions and open-ended responses* (Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs)</td>
<td>• Framing set of questions* • Follow-up questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do the professional backgrounds and personal experiences of a group of alternatively prepared beginning elementary school urban teachers influence their educational beliefs and, therefore, their teaching pedagogies?</td>
<td>• Open-ended responses (Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs)</td>
<td>• Framing set of questions* • Follow-up questions</td>
<td>• Field notes* • Artifacts collected during observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What can be said about the &quot;quality&quot; of alternatively prepared elementary school urban teachers as evidenced by their life experiences and discursive practices?</td>
<td>• Likert-scale and open-ended responses (Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs &amp; Follow-Up Questionnaire)</td>
<td>• Framing set of questions* • Follow-up questions</td>
<td>• Field notes* • Artifacts collected during observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What insights can be gained into the capacity of alternative certification programs to prepare a new cadre of elementary school urban teachers?</td>
<td>• Forced-choice questions and open-ended responses (Follow-Up Questionnaire)*</td>
<td>• Follow-up questions – examine emerging patterns • Follow-up questions*</td>
<td>• Field notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Asterisk indicates the tool yielding the most significant amount of information relative to the research question.
APPENDIX B
Modified Version of the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs

Directions: Identify your level of agreement with each statement: strongly agree SA; agree A; undecided U; disagree D; strongly disagree SD. To respond, please place an X in the appropriate box. Indicate your response in the box located directly below the question.

1.) The basic purpose of formal education is to assist in the complete development of the total personality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2.) The focus at the elementary school level should be on the acquisition of well-defined skills and subject content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3.) Elementary school teachers have the moral obligation to teach about sensitive issues despite community opposition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4.) Vocational education and the study of liberal arts are equally important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5.) Promotion to the next grade level should be based on content knowledge and skill ability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

126
6.) The school's major societal function is to teach youth to read, write, and compute well at all grade levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7.) Reading is an educational activity without equal at any level of schooling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8.) "Truth" is changeable and depends upon the situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9.) Effective teachers dispense content knowledge in a sequenced, systematic, and efficient manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10.) Since life is competitive, students should be evaluated on standardized tests according to how they compare with others in most subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

11.) The teacher should be the determiner and evaluator of all action in the classroom since she or he is morally expected to be such.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

12.) The relevance of subject matter is determined chiefly by present social problems or by the interests of the students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
13.) Experiences in the student's life inside the school must be closely related to experiences outside the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

14.) Student mastery of academic content is imperative if the young are to mature into intellectually well-balanced adults.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

15.) Moral and ethical standards grow out of mutually shared experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

16.) There is no "ideal" sequence for subject presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

17.) The teaching of new areas of study, like the prevention of substance abuse or AIDS, is important even though it may take valuable time away from the teaching of basic subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

18.) The usefulness of formal study need not be realized for years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

19.) If a teacher and student reach an impasse on what should be learned in an independent study project, the teacher's will must prevail because of his or her greater experience and knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
20.) The value of knowledge can be measured primarily by its usefulness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

21.) No matter how much support vocational subjects receive, they should never have the same prestige associated with them as with mathematics and the sciences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

22.) Personalized instruction should be a primary educational goal at all grade levels from elementary through senior high school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

23.) The teaching of morals should not be affected by contemporary issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

24.) Evaluation and understanding of material, as opposed to memorization of facts, should dominate the approach in textbooks in the elementary school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

25.) Classroom rules should be jointly determined by teacher and students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

26.) Since both the definition and measurement of the "whole" child are vague, it is a meaningless concept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
27.) The role of the teacher includes project director, learning consultant and, in a sense, psychological counselor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

28.) School is a place where children come to learn what they need to know—both intellectually and morally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

29.) Generally speaking, interest begets effort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

30.) The school should not significantly focus on social problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

31.) Ability grouping is vital to provide students with as much challenge as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

32.) The elementary school program should allow students to explore a wide variety of academic and social interests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

33.) There are many roads to the acquisition of knowledge; reading is certainly one important avenue among others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
34.) Report cards should reflect growth from many viewpoints: academic, social, emotional, and physical.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

35.) If an elementary school student matures socially and emotionally but fails to make significant academic progress, the teacher can still believe he or she has had a successful year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

36.) Since there is a constant danger of the teacher losing a professional image with students, it is best he or she remains emotionally distant from them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

37.) Promotion to the next grade level is as much a matter of social maturity as it is academic progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

38.) Generally speaking, effort begets interest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

39.) Schools should provide instruction and training in stable, fundamental knowledge rather than in social and political matters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

40.) "Truth" can be found through the study of systematically, organized subject-matter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**Demographic Questions**

**Directions:** Please place an X next to the appropriate response.

41.) What is your gender?
- Female:
- Male:

42.) What grade do you currently teach?
- Kindergarten:
- First grade:
- Second grade:
- Third grade:
- Fourth grade:
- Fifth grade:
- Mulitage, please specify grade levels:

43.) How would you describe the high school you attended?
- Urban:
- Rural:
- Suburban:

44.) Which of the following best describes you?
- White, non-Hispanic:
- Black, non-Hispanic
- Hispanic:
- Asian/Pacific Islander:
- Alaskan Native or Native American, not Hispanic:
- Other, please specify:

45.) Which of the following best describes you?
- Under 30:
- 30-39:
- 40-49:
- 50-59:
- 60 and over:

44.) Do you teach in a school with a prescribed curriculum like Success for All?
- Yes:
- If yes, please state the prescribed curriculum you follow.
- No:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>45.) Do you have any other teaching experience? If yes, please describe in the box below.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>46.) What type of work did you do prior to becoming a teacher? Please describe below.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>47.) Describe how professional experiences helped to shape your beliefs about education and/or teaching practices.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
48. Describe how personal experiences helped to shape your beliefs about education and/or teaching practices.

Are willing to be contacted for individual interviews and classroom observations?
(Please place an X next to your response.)

Yes:  
No:  

If yes, please provide me with the following information:
Name: ___________________________ Phone number: ___________________________
Email: ___________________________

What is the best way for me to contact you? ___ phone ___ email

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!
December 10, 2003

Karen DiGiovanni
2800 Quebec St. Apt. 612 NW
Washington, DC 20008-1232

Dear Karen,

This letter grants you permission to use the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs for the purpose of the research study outlined in your letter of request and previous emails and grants you permission to make minor modifications as needed. Because the survey is a copyrighted document, we do ask that you respect our copyright privileges and acknowledge the source of the survey in your research and that you were granted permission by the authors to use the instrument.

Best of luck in your research endeavor.

Sincerely,

Ann E. Witcher, Ed.D., Professor
Dept. of Middle/Secondary Education
& Instructional Technologies
University of Central Arkansas
Conway, AR 72035

Paul Travers, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus
University of Missouri--St. Louis
St. Louis, MO 63121
APPENDIX D

Consent Form for Study Participation

January 27, 2004

Dear Teacher:

My name is Karen DiGiovanni and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at American University. I am conducting a study about professional backgrounds, personal experiences, educational beliefs and classroom practices of alternatively prepared urban teachers.

I am writing to request your participation in my study. At the minimum, your participation in the study will include completion of the attached twenty-minute survey about educational beliefs. It might also include tape-recorded interviews and classroom observations by the researcher. Confidentiality will be ensured through the use of pseudonyms to protect your anonymity and the maintenance of study documents in a secure, locked location. As this study will require you to answer personal questions, you have the right to withdraw at any point.

I recognize that as a classroom teacher you have an extremely busy schedule. In order to accommodate your needs, individual interviews and observations will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you.

Your participation in this study will provide me with the ability to explore the influence that personal and professional experiences of alternatively prepared teachers have on educational beliefs and classroom practices. Study findings will be used to help professionals responsible for the preparation of alternately prepared teachers create programs that recognize and validate the unique experiences of their participants.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete the attached survey and return it to me. If you only want to complete the survey and do not wish to be contacted for interviews or observations, please indicate that to me on your completed survey. If you express a willingness to participate in other facets of the study (i.e. interviews and observations), I will contact you about doing so.

Please feel free to contact me at 202-460-1345 or karen9363@aol.com if you have any questions about the study. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen DiGiovanni, M.S.
### APPENDIX E

**Framing Set of Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Professional</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What type of work did you do prior to becoming a teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe how tools and skills honed in your previous profession influence your educational beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe how tools and skills used in other environments influence your teaching practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What are some challenges you face as a teacher that differ from those faced in other jobs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Personal</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• When did you decide to become a teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe some personal events, both good and bad, that influenced your decision to enter the teaching profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How have you changed since entering the profession?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did you have any “other teaching experience” before entering the profession? If so, please describe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe how personal experiences influence your educational beliefs (i.e., family relationships, children, parents)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe how personal experiences influence your teaching practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Education</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Describe your own education experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have previous educational experiences influenced your educational beliefs? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have previous educational experiences influenced your teaching practices? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Classroom**
- What role do you see yourself as playing in the learning process?
- What types of activities do you plan for your students?
- What types of materials do you use to support your teaching?
- How do you assess your students?
- How is your classroom organized?

**Other**
- If you were interviewing other alternatively trained teachers, what additional questions would you ask of them?
- Would you have entered the profession without the program?
- Do you plan to stay in the profession?
# APPENDIX F

Observation Protocol

## DISCURSIVE PRACTICES
WHAT DO TEACHERS SAY AND DO?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do instructional strategies reflect espoused beliefs and practices?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching style:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class assignments:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material used to support teaching:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the classroom environment reflect espoused beliefs and practices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall setup:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX G

### "Beliefs into Practice" Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progressive</th>
<th>Transmissive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on total personality</td>
<td>• Focus on skills &amp; subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasis on teaching “new” subjects</td>
<td>• Math and science are more important than vocational education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge measured by usefulness</td>
<td>• The “whole child” is a meaningless concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lots of personalized instruction</td>
<td>• Teachers role is to transfer knowledge to child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rules are jointly made</td>
<td>• Teaching and learning are skill based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Child is an active participant in the learning process</td>
<td>• Teaching and learning are product centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching and learning are student-centered</td>
<td>• Teacher is viewed as authoritative figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher is a facilitator or guide</td>
<td>• Fact-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience-based</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What do they say and do (i.e., discursive practices)?
- Offer choices to students
- Create learning centers
- Make real world connections
- Emphasize construction of knowledge
- Design projects and cooperative group activities
- Emphasize all subject areas
- Mainly use performance based and authentic assessment
- Post work completed by all students
- Organize desks in a manner that promotes student interactions

### What do they say and do (i.e., discursive practices)?
- Use lots of direct teacher instruction
- Emphasize prerequisite skills
- Emphasize repetitive practice of skills
- Use lots of textbooks
- Emphasize “core” subject areas.
- Mainly use multiple choice “formal” assessment
- Post teacher-created materials and the “best” work
- Organize desks in a manner that does not allow for extensive student interaction

### Material used to support practices
- Teacher and student constructed materials
- Visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning tools
- Textbooks
- Teacher guides
- Workbooks
APPENDIX H

Follow-Up Questionnaire

1. Do you plan to remain a classroom teacher immediately after you complete your program?
   ____ Yes
   ____ No (If no, please skip to question #5.)

2. Do you plan to continue teaching in an urban public school after you complete your program?
   ____ Yes
   ____ No

3. Do you plan to remain a classroom teacher for at least five years?
   ____ Yes
   ____ No
   ____ Undecided

4. Do you plan to remain a classroom teacher for the rest of your career?
   ____ Yes (please skip to question #7.)
   ____ No (please proceed to question #5.)
   ____ Undecided (please skip to question #7.)

5. If no, do you plan to take another position in the field of education after leaving your position as a classroom teacher?
   ____ Yes (educational publishing, consulting, etc.)
   ____ No
   ____ I plan to find a job that allows me to combine previous and current work experience.
   ____ Undecided

6. Do you plan to return to your previous profession after leaving the teaching profession?
   ____ Yes
   ____ No
   ____ Undecided
7. What factors (e.g., coursework, mentor) helped to ease your transition into the teaching profession?


8. What would your primary reason(s) be for leaving your position as a classroom teacher?


Other comments:


Thank You!
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