

## **Teacher Perception of Attributes Related to Teaching Effectiveness In Urban Schools**

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers possess certain attributes, beliefs, or mindsets that make them uniquely suited for working urban, high-needs schools. Recruiting teachers who are likely to be effective and retained in their positions is a key piece of solving the urban teacher shortage problem. There continue to be a proportionally larger number of teacher vacancies in urban, high need schools as compared to their suburban counterparts (Haberman, 1986). More recently, in a survey of 40 urban school districts serving 6.5 million students, nearly 100% of the districts reported an immediate need to fill teaching positions (Urban Teacher Collaborative, 2000). This trend is especially problematic considering that qualified, expert teachers are more likely to increase student achievement (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges, 2004; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, and Hindmen, 2008). Current research reports that students in urban districts are twice as likely to have inexperienced or uncertified teachers (Au & Blake, 2003; Burstein, Czech, Kretschmer, Lombardi, and Smith, 2012; Murnane and Steele, 2007; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003) For example, in California, one out of five teachers is under-qualified, with the highest-poverty schools having so many unprepared teachers as to make those schools dysfunctional (Esch et al., 2005; Ingersoll, 2001). Filling urban teaching vacancies is likely to become increasingly difficult as the top teacher-producing states in the U.S., California, New York, Texas, and North Carolina are all reporting sharp declines in enrollment in teacher preparation programs. Nationally, the United States Department of Education reports 90 000 fewer teachers in training in 2012 as compared to 2008.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In an effort to assist school districts and administrators in identifying potential hires who hold beliefs and have attributes that are predictive of success in urban schools, several commercially available instruments have been created and have been widely used for several decades (Gordon, 1999; Haberman, 1995, 1996). Two of the most commonly used instruments, the Urban Teacher Perceiver Interview (UTPI) and the STAR Teacher Selection Interview have identified shortcomings. The UTPI surveys only affective domains but neglects other domains that are viewed as valuable by principals such as work ethic, being a group player in a bureaucracy, and absenteeism (Gordon, 1999; Metzger and Wu, 2008). While the STAR tool incorporates some of these professionalism domains, no empirical data has been released for independent analysis to determine the nature of correlation between affective and professionalism domains. A shortcoming of both instruments is that they were developed using only observations of "highly effective" or "moderately effective" teachers, and these observations were external to the teachers themselves, based on external researcher observation or principal and student perceptions (Metzger and Wu, 2008). This study aims to build on previous research related to attributes of effective urban teachers while also filling in gaps in currently available interview tools used to identify potential hires who may have those attributes. One area that has not been sufficiently explored the inclusion of urban teachers' self-assessment of attributes that they believe most impact teacher effectiveness in an urban setting. Teachers ultimately make the choice to teach in an urban setting and to stay in an urban setting, therefore, it is important to include their voice in a conversation regarding urban teacher recruitment and retention. It is also unclear if teachers' perceptions of these attributes differs across key teacher demographics. To address this space in the research, this study asks the following questions:

- Can latent constructs be identified in a survey of potential attributes affecting teacher effectiveness in urban schools when teachers self-assess the impact of these attributes? How do these latent constructs compare to domains in commercially available teacher interview protocols?
- Does teacher career stage, grade level, type of certification, and number of teacher success indicators affect self-assessment of the impact of teacher attributes on teaching effectiveness in urban schools?

## METHODS

A survey instrument was created based on dimensions identified through a qualitative study using a grounded theory methodology. A theory representing the dimensions identified by participants as critical to teacher effectiveness in urban school settings is shown in Appendix A (Author Citation). The qualitative dimensions were translated into survey items using the exploratory sequential design model (Creswell, 2015; Conrad and Kreuter, 2014). Additional professional teacher practice dimensions identified by participants as necessary regardless of school setting were also included in the instrument. Participation in the survey was solicited from a large, urban district based on National Center for Education Statistics definitions. The district serves approximately 46,000 students, 89.6% of whom qualify for free and/or reduced lunch benefits. The district is classified as high-needs according to standards set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). The email was received by 2,415 potential participants, of these, 145 participants completed the survey (Appendix B).

Latent teacher attribute constructs were identified by exploratory factor analysis followed by confirmatory factor analysis. Further, CFA produced coefficients that demonstrate the extent of the relationship among the latent constructs. Following EFA and CFA analysis multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to determine if perception of these constructs differed among teachers in different career stages, grade levels, type of teaching certification, and numbers of teacher success indicators.

## RESULTS

The results of the EFA and CFA showed that teachers perceive three main constructs of attributes necessary for effective teaching in urban schools: Growth and Adaptability, Professional Teaching Skills, and Relationships with Students. CFA additionally revealed that Growth and Adaptability and Relationships with students are highly related to each other (Appendix C). Growth and Adaptability represented the ability to be flexible within the classroom and the school bureaucracy and the commitment to growth through professional development. The actions captured in this construct are similar to previously identified dimensions of effective urban teachers including Persistence, Surviving in a Bureaucracy, and Fallibility described by Haberman (1993, 1995, 1996) and Input as described in the Gallup Urban Teacher Perceiver Interviewer and Innovation, and Objectivity as described in the Gallup Teacher Perceiver Interviewer (Gordon, 1999; Metzger and Wu, 2008). However, the actions in this study's hypothetical construct cut across these dimensions as well, hinting at an underlying attribute of being able to bend without breaking in a variety of school contexts. The construct Relationships with Students reaffirms previous research that classroom management practices are correlated with teacher-student relationships, and that, particularly in urban, high-needs schools with diverse student populations, these relationships should be based on cultural awareness and acceptance (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Murray, 2009; Murray and Zvoch, 2011; Pianta, 2006; Towns, D. P., Cole-Henderson, B., & Serpell, Z., 2001). It was expected that

classroom management would load into a factor containing other teacher skills such as, teacher content knowledge, the action of lesson planning, and completion of a formal teacher education program. However, the loading of classroom management with other items related to student relationships does correlate with the qualitative model of successful urban teachers upon which the survey instrument was built (Author Citation). An examination of total means for each of the composite variables, suggests a ranking of importance of these variables to effective teaching in an urban school as perceived by these teachers. The Relationships with Students scored highest among all variables across all teacher demographic groups. This is congruent with previous research demonstrating that effective classroom management is based on the nature of teacher-student relationships and that effective classroom management is critical to achieving overall student growth and preventing teacher burnout (Richards, 2012; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

Multivariate analysis of variance revealed significant differences between teachers in different career stages and between traditionally prepared and alternatively certified teachers. Teachers with greater than 11 years of experience indicated that completion of a formal teacher preparation program has a significantly higher impact on teacher effectiveness compared to less experienced teachers. Teachers who are traditionally certified report the same difference compared to alternatively certified teachers. This result could also indicate the presence of an underlying negative perception of alternatively certified teachers held by traditionally certified teachers. While the overall conclusions regarding the actual effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers is mixed (Flores, Desjean-Perrota, & Steinmetz, 2004; Consuegra, Engels, & Struyven, 2014; Uriegas, Kupczynski, & Mundy; 2014), several dissertations have reported that principals perceive alternatively certified teachers to be less effective. The same principals report that they would prefer to hire a traditionally certified teacher if they were available (Newblom, 2013; Nusbaum, 2002). These perceptions could have school climate and organizational implications in urban sites where faculty represent diverse career stages and certification routes.

### **SIGNIFICANCE AND CONNECTION TO CONFERENCE THEME**

Urban, high-needs schools are complex contexts. The majority of students in these settings are from traditionally under-served groups who also, to a large extent, come from a culture of poverty. In contrast, the majority of teachers in these schools are from white, suburban to affluent backgrounds. Within this complexity it becomes necessary to search for commonalities in beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets of teachers who are currently successfully navigating this teaching space. It is critical for school leaders to understand how these attributes may differ across their faculty. Ultimately it is critical to use this information in a productive way to locate those individuals who are called to teach in and are uniquely suited for success in urban schools, ultimately revitalizing the possibility of a stable, high-quality teaching force for our students in the most need of one.

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**APPENDIX A**

Grounded theory based model of attributes of effective urban teachers (Author Citation) used to develop survey items according to the methods of Creswell (2014).



**Appendix B**

Demographics of study participants.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<i>Grade Level Taught</i>		
Elementary (PK-5)	72	52.9
Middle (6-8)	27	19.9
High School (9-12)	37	27.2
<i>Years Teaching*</i>		
1-3 Years	31	22.6
4-6 Years	20	14.6
7-10 Years	15	10.9
11-15 Years	15	10.9
> 15 Years	56	40.9
<i>Route to Teaching**</i>		
Traditional Certification	97	71.3
Alternative Certification	39	28.7
<i>Number of Teacher Success and Leadership Indicators***</i>		
Zero Indicators	42	29.0
1 to 3 Indicators	69	47.6
4 or more Indicators	34	23.4

Table 1: Demographic factors used in analysis. \* Ranges for years of teaching were determined using the criteria of Huberman (1989). \*\*Traditional certification is defined as completion of a standard college course of teacher preparation leading to a teaching certificate. Alternative certification is defined as any alternate route to teacher certification and may include a state-approved alternative certification program, Troops to Teachers, or Teach for America. \*\*\* Teacher success indicators include: teacher of the year at any level, National Board Certification or any other recognized national certification, leadership positions at site, district, or state level.

**APPENDIX C**

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Attributes of Effective Urban Teachers**

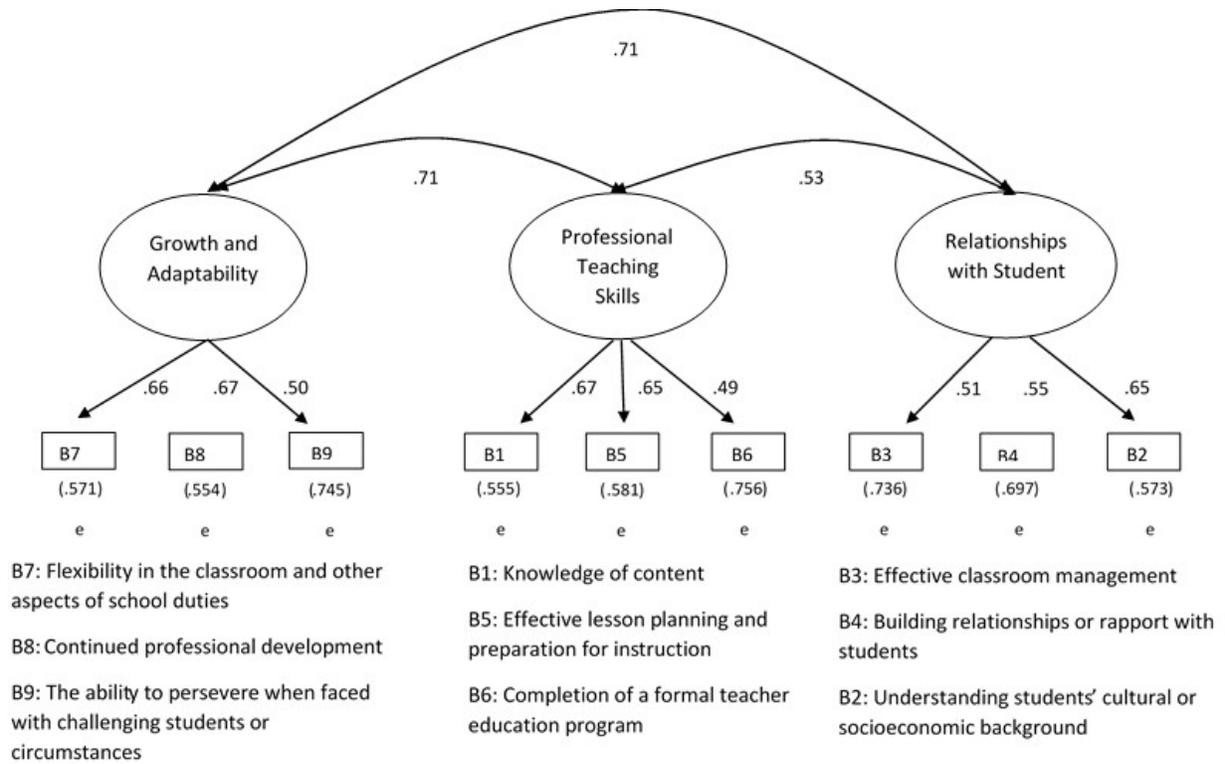


Figure 2: Confirmatory factor analysis of latent constructs of attributes of effective urban teachers. All standardized coefficients at  $p < .001$ . Overall fit measures: CFI = .930, RMSEA = .067.