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Abstract

The NCATE standards adopted in 2000 mandated the assessment of teacher dispositions. However, the lack of specificity of the construct has led to an environment where many institutions struggle to develop high-quality disposition assessments. The result is a hodgepodge of constructs and systems; some that work, some that do not. This quantitative study used a modified version of the Teacher Disposition Index to identify the extent to which first-year teachers self-reported exhibiting the dispositions and whether they perceived they were taught the dispositions by the teacher education programs from which they graduated.

First – Year Teachers’ Dispositions: Exhibited and Perception of Being Taught

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(Synopsis of Dissertation, 2012 ATE-K Dissertation Award, 2-12)

Abstract

The NCATE standards adopted in 2000 mandated the assessment of teacher dispositions. However, the lack of specificity of the construct has led to an environment where many institutions struggle to develop high-quality disposition assessments. The result is a hodgepodge of constructs and systems; some that work, some that do not. This quantitative study used a modified version of the Teacher Disposition Index to identify the extent to which first-year teachers self-reported exhibiting the dispositions and whether they perceived they were taught the dispositions by the teacher education programs from which they graduated.

Introduction and Purpose

In the late 1980’s the triad of knowledge, skills, and dispositions was added to the lexicon of teacher education. This triad has since become a guidepost for many teacher education programs. However, teacher education programs struggle to incorporate these elements into the curriculum and tend to focus more on knowledge and skills than dispositions (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993). This lack of attention does not mean that dispositions are seen as unimportant. Some scholars- such as Wilkerson and Lang (2007)- posit a hierarchal relationship among the triad of knowledge, skills, and dispositions with dispositions at the apex.

This study identifies the extent to which novice teachers’ self-reported dispositions differ according to size and/or religious affiliation of the college or university from which they graduated. Additionally, it identifies the extent to which the novice teachers feel they were taught these dispositions by the teacher education program from which they graduated.

Methodology

An online survey of 45 positive teacher dispositions was distributed. The survey, based on the Teacher Disposition Index (TDI) (Schulte, Edick, Edwards, & Mackiel, 2004), asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they felt they exhibited the dispositions on a five point Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” For each disposition they were also asked to indicate “yes” or “no” if they felt the teacher education program from which they graduated taught the disposition or not. In all, 258 usable surveys were collected out of the 648 sent to the first-year teachers. The response rate of usable data is 39.8%.

Results

The majority of the respondents were females (81%), 25 years old or younger (65%) from large universities (77%). These demographics generally mirror the teacher demographics of the state in which the study was conducted.

Question 1. *To what extent do novice teachers self-report that they exhibit positive teacher dispositions?* Overall, the first year teachers indicated they exhibited the listed dispositions. A cumulative review of all 45 dispositions shows 93.6% of responses were positive for “agree” or “strongly agree” that they exhibit the dispositions. The survey was divided into two subsets, as determined by the TDI; 25 student-centered dispositions and 20 professional/curriculum-centered dispositions. The percentage of those who agreed or strongly agreed that they exhibit the dispositions from the student-centered subset was 97.0%. Those agreeing or strongly agreeing that they exhibit the professional/curriculum-centered dispositions was 89.3%.

Question 2. *To what extent do novice teachers perceive they were taught these same dispositions?* In general, the respondents perceive the colleges or universities from which they graduated as having taught the selected dispositions. A cumulative review of all 45 dispositions shows that 88.51% of responses were positive for teaching the dispositions. The responses indicated a higher level agreement with the student-centered dispositions (91.31%) than the professional/curriculum-centered dispositions (85.02%).

Question 3. *Do graduates of small, private, church affiliated Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) display the assessed dispositions at the same rate as graduates of large, public, secular universities?* In addition to presenting this specific information, data comparing the sex and age of respondents is also reviewed.

Overall, there was no significant difference identified between the graduates of large, public universities and small, private colleges and universities. This is true of the exhibited dispositions and the perception of being taught the dispositions. In fact there were no significant differences found on any of the aggregated test including comparing sex and age. When drilling down to specific dispositions an occasional significant difference was identified. Where there are significant differences, they do not seem to cluster around any particular areas.

Observations and analysis

The number of statistically significant results is limited. However, some general observations can be drawn.

Frequency distribution of exhibited dispositions.

Three key findings are observable when reviewing the frequency distribution of the exhibited dispositions. First, the frequency of exhibited dispositions data are skewed to show high agreement with these dispositions. Second, the student-centered dispositions are ranked higher than the professional/curriculum-centered dispositions. Third, there does not appear to be any clusters of data that can be further analyzed.

Frequency distribution of perceived taught dispositions.

Based on the responses to this survey, respondents believe they are being taught dispositions. Just as with exhibited dispositions, the dispositions identified in the subset of student-centered are perceived to be taught more than the professional/curriculum-centered dispositions. However, participants indicated they were taught the dispositions at a lower rate than they exhibit the dispositions. It could be that they feel they exhibit some of the dispositions and were never taught them or that dispositions were innate parts of their personalities and thus did not need to be taught.

Comparison by IHE type.

Overall no significant difference was found between the respondents from the small, private colleges and universities and the respondents from the large, public universities for both exhibited dispositions and perception of taught dispositions in aggregate reviews of the 45 dispositions and in the two subsets. For that matter, only one significant difference was found in reviewing the specific exhibited dispositions. Reviewing the perceived taught dispositions identified significant differences on seven of the 45 dispositions. For these seven dispositions the respondents from large institutions indicated they were taught the dispositions at a higher rate than the respondents from the small institutions.

Comparison by sex of respondent.

The validation and reliability study of the TDI used as the basis for this study identified no significant differences between male and female respondents (Schulte, et al., 2004). However, the results of this study identified a number of significant differences between the responses of the males and females. In short, the females seem to exhibit the dispositions significantly more than the males; but, despite a lack of significant difference, the males seem to feel they were taught dispositions at a higher rate than the females.

Comparison by age of respondents.

Overall there was no real difference between respondents identified as 25 and younger (traditional age college students) and those identified as 26 and older (non-traditional age college students). Just as with the other comparison groups, aggregate reviews of all 45 dispositions and the two subsets identified no significant differences in exhibited or perceived instruction of dispositions. In fact, there were only four significant differences at the individual disposition level.

Recommendations

One area that appeared lower on the frequency distribution is that of communication skills. Therefore, it is recommended that colleges and universities teach more communication skills or possibly require an interpersonal communications course as part of the required curriculum.

A second issue identified in the findings and supported by Baldwin (2007) is that of the method of instructing dispositions. Graduates from the larger universities indicated they were taught the dispositions at a higher rate than those from the smaller institutions. Therefore, colleges and universities, especially at smaller institutions, could be more overt with the instruction of dispositions.

Another recommendation based on the findings of this study is to focus on the dispositions of male teachers and continue to support and encourage them as they enter the profession. This study identified more statistical differences in this comparison group than in any other group.

In conclusion, first-year teachers participating in this study believe they are taught the dispositions addressed by the TDI, they have learned them, and they are implementing them in their classrooms. While these findings are hopeful, they were not as definitive as hoped. To that end, three areas for continued study on dispositions are identified: more clearly defining the construct, further analyzing teaching methods of dispositions and triangulating data on dispositions.

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