Developing Dispositions of Preservice Teachers through Membership in Professional Organizations

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Dispositions are those character and personality traits that are considered necessary for a person to succeed as a teacher. The traits include areas of responsibility, dependability, creativity, empathy, professionalism, and more. Because NCATE has chosen to identify dispositions as a necessary component of teacher education programs, these programs must make accommodations for presenting these components to students. This article describes a study of the effects on pre-service teacher dispositions through membership and service in professional organizations. The effects were measured by interviews and questionnaires administered to the students and their clinical supervisors. The authors describe the perceptions and insights that pre-service teachers reported they gained through their involvement in professional organizations.

The mission of the initial level of many teacher education programs is to prepare future educators through sharing commonly held beliefs and values that are evident in the scope and sequence of the program (ASU Conceptual Frameworks, 2003). These beliefs and values may be placed into three categories: (1) those which relate to knowledge, such as expertise in content or pedagogical understanding; (2) those which relate to performance, as in the ability to use the knowledge in such a way that students are engaged in learning; and (3) those which relate to disposition, the readily apparent traits and attitudes that mark a successful teacher but which are elusive to assess and teach.

While teacher preparation colleges have indeed identified the dispositions deemed necessary to ensure teacher success and studied what differences these dispositions make in the success of the students in a teacher's charge, there is limited data on the possibility of teacher education programs actually teaching the pre-service teachers how to enhance their dispositions.

Teacher education programs list the dispositions they believe teachers must have. These may include traits relating to reflection, professionalism or empathy. Some programs require students entering the program to undergo testing and counseling to determine if they are truly suited to teach children. Entrance portfolios contain documentation that the students have been tested and are aware of the importance of dispositions in their success as a teacher. Therefore, identifying dispositions is key to a good match between teachers and the education of students.

Although all teacher education programs' lists of dispositions do not contain identical terminology, there is a commonality about the lists as a whole. Some educators disagree about the ranking of dispositions (Young, 1992), but terms such as respect, enthusiasm, efficacy, self-motivation and communication skills including listening and grammatical correctness appear on many lists.

The teacher education program at Arkansas State University Mountain Home is a branch of the Arkansas State University system, and as such must meet all the

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) requirements just as the main campus does. The campus is non-residential, with a large number of students working outside jobs and not engaged in campus life. Because this program is small, students may have multiple classes taught by the same instructors. A strength of the program has been that the instructors know the students well.

This paper describes how a teacher education faculty at a small branch campus identified resources available to enhance the area of dispositions understanding in its students. First we examined the demographics of the student population. Second, we explored options available to the students to enhance dispositions. Third, we attempted to supplement these options with additional opportunities by sponsoring student organizations. Fourth, we discuss some of the positive findings of our research and some of the limitations.

Literature Review

There has been much debate of NCATE's updated standards for teacher education programs that place more emphasis on dispositions. Teacher educators must know and understand the dispositions of effective teachers in order to facilitate education students' experiences. This knowledge should be evident in their own modeling of dispositions.

In the past, the term *dispositions* has had an implied meaning of "attitudes" (Katz, 1993). Katz (1993) defined dispositions as a term used to refer to intentional actions in particular contexts and at particular times. Neither NCATE nor the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) delineate a concise list of required dispositions but rather refer to dispositions as "standards for what all

beginning teachers should know, be like, and be able to do in order to practice responsibly, regardless of the subject matter or grade level being taught" (INTASC, 2005). Dispositions include a complex mix of lived experiences, social relations, values, attitudes, and beliefs (Crick, 2004).

Teachers need to possess cooperative dispositions themselves (Ngoh, 1997) as well as teach cooperative learning in their classrooms. Children need opportunities to work with others cooperatively, such as on meaningful projects (Eisner, 2003). Pre-service teachers must have, model and teach cooperative dispositions. Dispositions, necessary to develop productive learning environments, include motivating leadership, a developmental perspective, a cooperative disposition, and a reflective orientation (Ngoh, 1997; Benninga, 2003). The cooperative disposition refers to teaching children the skills of cooperation and having all children accept these as the norm.

In a survey conducted by NCATE (2004), 90% of the respondents, from initial and advanced teacher education programs, believed that dispositions can be changed. Different authors have touted various means by which dispositions can be changed. Just as children need opportunities to contribute to the larger community, so do pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers who participate in tutoring, volunteering, and professional organizations, demonstrate certain dispositions. Black (2002) indicated that extracurricular activities and academic performance are linked; thus, by participating in professional activities, pre-service teachers will not only have the opportunity to transform their dispositions, they may also improve academically by having more problem-solving experiences that extracurricular activities usually afford.

Powers (1999) suggested that pre-service teachers be placed in situations

where they interact with teachers exhibiting appropriate dispositions. For pre-service teachers to evolve into effective teachers, they must acquire teaching skills and be able to effect changes in students' lives. Professional service activities provide opportunities for problem solving, moral motivation and character development necessary to the development of teaching dispositions (Benninga, 2003).

The Program

Arkansas State University Mountain Home (ASUMH) is a two-year institution affiliated with the four-year university, Arkansas State University. On the Mountain Home campus, students take the general education classes as well as introduction to teaching and for early childhood majors, Survey of Early Childhood and Childhood Development prior to entering the degree program. During the current year, an Associate of Arts in Teaching degree in Middle Level Education has begun so that students entering the four-year teacher education program have usually completed all of the general education requirements and many of the major courses for the Middle Level degree.

At the completion of requirements, students apply for admission to Arkansas State University and undergo screening for the teacher education program. A screening requirement is students being tested and counseled regarding the selection of education as their major. Students are currently given the Kuder® Career Search with Person Match interest inventory (Kuder, 2005).The *Kuder® Career Planning System,* of which this is a part, is an innovative, Internet-based system combining research-based interest, skills, and work values assessments, originally developed by Dr. Frederick Kuder. Acceptance into the program places the student as a junior in a

designated cohort with whom they will take classes designed and arranged to help them complete the Bachelor of Science in Education degree in two years. Transfer students occasionally do not fit the arranged program offerings and receive individual attention.

A large proportion of ASUMH students and consequently students in the teacher education program are non-traditional. The average age of students at ASUMH is 27. Forty-four percent of our students are considered non-traditional Euro-Americans. In the ASU teacher education program at present, ages range from twenty through fifty-six. Bound by family circumstances, many of the students are able to attend the teacher education program only because it is geographically convenient. A large number of them have financial barriers to moving nearer a larger campus, the nearest ones over one hundred miles away.

Options Available to Students

At ASUMH, teacher education faculty is small and students have the same professors for more than one class. One way students can gain an understanding of acceptable and desirable dispositions is through the modeling of faculty members.

At present, the faculty consists of four full-time instructors and three to five adjunct instructors. The full-time faculty includes a mid-level specialist with a doctorate, an early childhood specialist with a master's degree and two generalists with master's degrees. The four instructors work together in one office and collegiality is imperative. During assemblies and seminars, faculty members share the responsibility for conducting meetings, thus modeling cooperation. Faculty members dress and behave professionally and are esteemed in the local network of public schools.

Faculty members are very conscious of the responsibility to model effective dispositions and strive to demonstrate appropriate behaviors to pre-service teachers through classroom interaction and advising. Adjunct faculty members come from varied backgrounds. One has a doctorate while the others hold master's degrees in education. One is a retired educator. All are members of professional organizations.

The education faculty also works closely with other ASUMH faculty, many skilled professionals, offering elective courses, and modeling dispositions related to the ways that good teachers interact.

During the first year in the teacher education program, there are several field experiences of limited duration that offer the pre-service teachers opportunities to observe classroom teachers. Students are encouraged to identify traits and attitudes they deem as markers of successful teachers. A number of the clinical supervisors have or are seeking National Board Certification, which requires the teacher to demonstrate a high level of 'knowledge, skills, dispositions and commitments (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2004). The modeling of these teachers strengthen the input regarding disposition importance.

In the senior year, first semester, students spend a large amount of time in the field. During actual teaching episodes, they receive formative and summative evaluations in the areas of knowledge, performance and dispositions from clinical supervisors (host teachers), university supervisors and peers. The evaluation criteria clearly give equal weight to the disposition portion. Students are informed about the relative importance of the disposition piece of the evaluation. On the evaluation forms, which are uniform across the program for fieldwork, students are rated according to criteria shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Rating scheme for evaluations

Symbol	Meaning
I	Independently working
MA	Modest assistance and practice needed
DA	Daily assistance and practice needed
MG	Major growth and extensive practice needed before being placed in charge of a classroom
NA	Not applicable

An example of an item used to evaluate a disposition is "creates a positive classroom atmosphere that is secure, inviting, and accepting of diverse ideas and opinions." Dispositions are again stressed during the internship that takes place during the second semester of the senior year. The disposition evaluation criteria for pre-service teachers in the program, selected by the education unit of the university, are listed below in Table 2.

Table 2. TEACHER DISPOSITIONS FROM ASU FRAMEWORKS

Educational Foundations: Understands the historical, philosophical, legal, political, cultural, and organizational foundations that shape education.
　　1D1　　Appreciates the role education plays in participatory democracy.
　　1D2　　Values the role that school/teachers/education has in society.
　　1D3　　Values the teacher's role in educating/socializing students.
　　1D4　　Respects local, state, and federal laws.
　　1D5　　Values the role of the teacher as a change agent.

Knowledge Base: Has content knowledge that includes a broad general education background and specific specialty area competencies.
　　2D1　　Appreciates interdisciplinary commonalities.
　　2D2　　Respects all specialty areas.

2D3   Appreciates a well-rounded general education.
2D4   Appreciates a variety of approaches to structuring knowledge.
2D5   Values technology as an asset to learning.

Learners and Learning: Understands learning processes and the developmental characteristics of learners.

3D1   Believes everyone can learn.
3D2   Values theory as a guide to moderating instruction.
3D3   Respects developmental differences in learners.
3D4   Appreciates the relationship between human development and human learning.

Educational Practice: Develops, implements, and evaluates curriculum and instruction according to best practices.

4D1   Values individual differences in the learning process.
4D2   Is open to multiple and novel options in teaching.
4D3   Values the benefits of technology for the teacher.
4D4   Values the importance of multiple assessment data.
4D5   Creates an environment of respect and rapport.

Diverse/Exceptional Learners: Adapts educational practice to ensure learning on the part of all students.

5D1   Recognizes that diversity is the norm.
5D2   Values the contributions that all children bring to the group.
5D3   Regards individualized educational experiences at the right of all children.
5D4   Values inclusive practices.

Communication Skills: Communicates effectively utilizing appropriate interpersonal and language skills.

6D1   Respects a variety of opinions.
6D2   Supports open lines of communication.
6D3   Is open to suggestions concerning oral and written communication.
6D4   Sensitive to cultural variations in verbal and nonverbal communications.
6D5   Respects students' primary languages.

Professionalism: Understands and acts according to appropriate standards of professional conduct.

7D1   Receptive to supervision from other professionals.
7D2   Open to receive and give feedback.
7D3   Appreciates the importance of ethical behavior.
7D4   Willing to share ideas/talents with colleagues.
7D5   Values the profession.
7D6   Respects confidentiality of students and colleagues.
7D7   Supports family involvement in the child's education and in the school.
7D8   Supports community involvement in the school.
7D9   Fosters a positive attitude toward community resources and support services.

Lifelong Learning: Continually invests in professional and personal development to increase value to students and colleagues.

8D1   Values continual personal and professional learning.
8D2   Values self-reflection.
8D3   Values professional participation.
8D4   Values action research as a method of inquiry.

Supplemental Opportunities

Students belong to numerous social and religious organizations that may enhance the development of general dispositions such as caring and nurturing. Participation in these activities may provide evidence of an individual's dispositions (St. Norbert, 2004). The areas that seem most lacking in opportunities to enhance dispositions are related to professionalism and diversity. A major concern emerging in the program is meeting the NCATE requirement that pre-service teachers experience diversity in their undergraduate work.

Experience with diversity is defined as having experience with a student population where at least twenty percent of the students are members of a racial minority. The population in the home community schools is less than 3% minority. Thus, several efforts have been considered to create a program to meet the NCATE requirement. For example, students were housed on the main campus for one week during which

they taught and observed in schools with acceptable percentages of minority populations. They also participated in seminars, study, and evening social groups led by minority professors. In an exit evaluation, students viewed the experience as valuable although perhaps superficial. Many of had lived in other areas before entering the teaching program and their previous experience with minority groups was, in their view, sufficient.

Another effort to introduce racial diversity to the pre-service teachers involved seminars on the Mountain Home campus conducted by a professor from the main campus. Teaching intern seminars on the Mountain Home campus regularly feature diverse speakers. The University at Mountain Home sponsors a month long diversity program each year. Measures are in place to offer opportunities for our students to interact with students, faculty, and peers of various races. Other issues of diversity such as gender and socio-economic status are effectively taught in the present program.

At this point, the teacher education faculty considered ideas whereby the dispositions in the professionalism arena might be enhanced. Darling-Hammond (1996) recommends teacher education programs be reinvented. Modeling by the teacher education faculty was identified as a readily available source. The faculty strives to look and act in a professional manner and to include lessons on what effects dress, behavior and dispositions have on teacher perceptions.

John Hattie (2003) says that teachers account for about thirty percent of the learning that takes place and that it is what teachers, "know, do, and care about" which is very powerful. The teacher education faculty agreed with this premise. All full-time faculty members are active members of professional education organizations. It was determined that one method that could be employed to enhance the students' professional dispositions was to offer opportunities for them to become active members of teacher organizations. Lampert (2000) believes teacher education should research "what kinds of abilities are learned in particular situations that can transfer to other situations."

Many faculty members belong to the local chapter of Phi Delta Kappa International located in the area. With the approval and assistance of this parent group, the Phi Delta Kappa Undergraduate Group was formed. The group has its own officers and its own projects while also enjoying the benefits of programs offered by the parent chapter where they come in contact with expert teachers who model affective attributes (Hattie, 2003). Undergraduate members have made vital networking connections leading to employment after graduation. They have lifelong learning models readily available and report growth in understanding the value of professional participation (Ngoh, 1997).

Over time, the undergraduate group has assumed an identity of its own on the campus and in the community. An example of the role of the group in building suitable dispositions for future teachers is the annual teacher recognition reception honoring the faculty at the college, clinical supervisors and administrators from area schools who have supported the teacher education program, and other educators who have given service to education. Over fifty local merchants enthusiastically support the student-driven event with donations.

Another student initiated effort placed teacher education reference material in the library at the University. Through group involvement, students invested time and effort to make a professional contribution to life long learning for themselves and future teachers. Students

also initiated a drive to collect school supplies for needy elementary students that was embraced by the local Wal-Mart as worthy of matching funds. Eisner (2004) states that schools should create conditions where students can contribute to the larger community. The student organization has become the springboard for the education students to contribute to both the education community and the social community in this area.

Another student involvement opportunity has been put in place by the formation of a local Reading Council which has both active classroom teachers and pre-service teachers as members. Previously, teachers wishing to belong to a Reading Council affiliated with the Arkansas Reading Association and the International Reading Association joined one located nearly fifty miles away. University student involvement in such a group was practically non-existent. With the local Reading Council in place, students have attended local meetings and developed networking opportunities, attended state meetings and assumed leadership roles. When asked whether the Reading Council had strengthened them as future teachers, the students reported a positive attitude about the benefits of collaborative projects and critical thinking skills related to their profession. Yeh (2002) says that "preservice teachers with a higher level of critical-thinking dispositions showed a better improvement in teacher behaviors."

Methodology and Results

To look at whether the belief that teacher education organizations would enhance pre-service teacher dispositions, a survey of students was conducted. All of the undergraduate teacher education students (N=60) were given a list of the dispositions from the Conceptual Frameworks of Arkansas State University. They were asked to identify what source might to able to "teach" those dispositions. Choices were: teacher education classes, student education organizations, clinical experiences, or other. Students were asked to rank the choices assigning a value of 4 to the source they felt most likely to teach the disposition and a value of 1 to the source they felt least likely to teach the disposition. Those areas where students identified student organizations as the best source or a good source are shown in Table 3, from the ASU Conceptual Framework.

Table 3. Dispositions identified by students as being addressed in professional organization activities

Disposition	Standard
Lifelong Learning	Continually invests in professional and personal development to increase value to students and colleagues.
Professionalism	Understands and acts according to appropriate standards of professional conduct.
Communication	Communicates effectively utilizing appropriate interpersonal and language skills.
Educational Foundations	Understands the historical, philosophical, legal, political, cultural, and organizational foundations that shape education.
Learners and Learning	Understands learning processes and the developmental characteristics of learners.
Educational Practice	Develops, implements, and evaluates curriculum and instruction according to best practices.

To probe further, all individuals participating in the survey were asked to respond to a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of broad open-ended questions about their experience in student education organizations. Students in the program believed that their experience in student education organizations would give them opportunity to build their confidence to function in the professional arena. They

appreciated the role modeling exhibited by members of the teaching profession in the organizations. They reported that they felt acceptance. A student remarked, "I felt I was part of the faculty at my field placement, because Ms. B. knew me from PDK and introduced me to everybody as a member." Another student related, "I had no idea that working at the Christmas fundraiser would get me included so quickly as a real teacher."

Students were encouraged to speak freely about the student organization's effect and offer suggestions about how that effect could be improved. Student respondents endorsed the idea of more interaction with the parent group. One student said, "I see the student group as part of a large network where I can become involved with my future profession and from here it looks like a win-win situation."

Interviews were conducted with ten teachers who were recent graduates of the teacher education program and also former members of student education organizations. Interviewees were asked about dispositions in general and the effect of student organizations specifically. On the subject of dispositions in general, the teachers supported the importance of dispositions in teaching. "I found out right away that how I feel and how I present myself to my class makes a vast difference in their reaction to me" related one interviewee. She continued, "If I am a good listener, that is as much a part of communication as being a good lecturer – maybe a more important part."

Regarding the effect of student organizations on the success in the field that those interviewed felt, several indicated that contacts made through the organizations had contributed to their acceptance and level of confidence. "I knew Ms. C. from PDK and she had told me to come ask her if I wondered about anything. I wondered about a lot! And she was always willing to listen

to me. I felt good that I was part of a caring profession." Another student related "The first day I walked in the teacher's work room, I felt so out of place and then I saw Mr. G. and he smiled and it was just O.K. I knew I would make it."

One of the dispositions identified by both present students and past students already in the teaching field as significantly related to participation in a professional organization was lifelong learning. Both groups recognized the need to stay in touch with professional issues and the need to experience personal growth. "It made me feel good to know that there were people who not only wanted to keep up with what was happening in education but they wanted to be part of it," said one student. A teacher stated "It is interesting to me that the people who are members of professional organizations just seem more 'with it' about what is going on in education, even though we are all in this together. If I wanted to find the teachers who were lifelong learners, I'd start with the membership list of PDK."

Limitations

The study is limited by the small size of the student population and small faculty. It may not be generalizable to a campus where students have access to many more organizations and opportunities. On a larger campus with professors who might not be involved with the students so closely, the results may not be comparable. Membership in professional organizations allows the teacher education faculty to maintain closer relationships to former students than may be possible in other settings

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study found that membership in professional organizations accomplished the intent of the faculty to enhance the opportunity to practice the disposition of professionalism.   Faculty   members

concluded that the time and effort associated with them was significant in the success of the program. In addition, they felt that their involvement with the student organizations had strengthened their own dispositions toward professionalism.

Teacher education programs seeking means to enhance professionalism should consider offering as many opportunities as possible to their students to practice professionalism. It is recommended that the sponsorship of student education organizations should become an integral part of the mission of the program.

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