Value-Added Measures of Teacher Candidates' Dispositions

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This article describes how a teacher preparation program can positively impact professional dispositions. Pre and post essays from a sample of sixty candidates were qualitatively analyzed to determine the value-added growth of their professional dispositions.

Accreditation Standards

According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008) and the newly formed Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, 2012), teacher preparation units must establish a shared vision to prepare educators to work in P-12 schools. These shared visions – or conceptual frameworks - provide the basis which describes the units' "intellectual philosophy that distinguishes its graduates and completers from one institution to those of another" (NCATE, 2008, p. 14). Embedded within these conceptual frameworks are explicit descriptions of the units' professional dispositions defined as "professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities" (NCATE, 2008, p. 90).

Since units must have assessment systems to evaluate candidates at multiple benchmarks, including admissions, dispositions are evaluated prior to the acceptance into the teacher preparation programs. But how do the units measure and monitor dispositions? And just as important, how do they know that their candidates' dispositions actually develop and improve as a result of matriculating through their programs? This article will explore the assessment system that Gainesville State College (GSC) has implemented to identify pre-candidates' dispositions which are aligned to its conceptual framework, monitor the progressive development of their dispositions, and ultimately, determine the value-added measures of dispositions at the final program completion benchmark. Inherent in this research is the unit's theoretical belief that candidates bring their own innate philosophical values into the program; however, these grow and mature because the unit provides a set of scaffolds during all course and field experiences. Evidence from field and clinical experience observations, journal writing, and professional portfolio artifacts support Freeman's (2007) assertion that the development of dispositions are "comprised of three interrelated elements: valuing, strategy, and intention" (p. 126). Furthermore, the belief that dispositions evolve through experiencing different educational contexts, the GSC clinically-based programs afford all the candidates a variety of experiences in a minimum of four settings (Diez, 2007). As Carroll (2012. p. 38)) succinctly posits

"dispositions are the engine of performance in teaching, linking inner values, and commitments with action in the context of practice"

GSC Conceptual Framework and Dispositions

The 30 member teacher education advisory council is evenly divided between representatives including P-12 teachers and administrators, community leaders, and GSC faculty and support staff. The Council established a shared vision which provides direction for the unit's programs, courses, teaching, candidates' performance, scholarship, service, and accountability (NCATE, 2008, p. 14). This vision – or conceptual framework - reflects the unit's goals and values that support the candidates' dispositions.

Gainesville State College Teacher Education Preparation Unit's candidates are caring and reflective decision makers who are committed to maximizing all students' development as contributing citizens in a diverse and democratic society. They balance professional dispositions and content knowledge with pedagogical skills as they collaboratively interact with students, families, educators, and the community.

Knowledge-Based

Extant knowledge bases, including theories, research, the wisdom of practice, and education policies support the following explicit outcomes which are dynamic, overlapping, and integrated throughout all course and field/clinical experiences. These outcomes synergistically interact to define candidates' dispositions.

Caring - In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) challenged the United States to ensure that every child has competent, caring, and qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1996). "To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most

deeply and intimately begin" (Hooks, 1994, p. 519).

Reflecting – As educators, we must intentionally select strategies and materials and, consequently, reflect on these decisions to ultimately enhance P-12 students' development. Expanding on Dewey's (1933) premises, Zeichner and Liston (1996) wrote, "reflective teaching entails a recognition, examination, and rumination over the implications of one's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and values as well as the opportunities and constraints provided by the social conditions in which the teacher works" (p. 33).

Decision Making – It is not enough to merely reflect upon one's own practices. "Decision making may be the single most important function of teachers" (Morrison, 2009, p. 17). Purposeful decisions must be made to implement the results of reflective considerations (Click, & Parker, 2006; Danielson, 2008; Friedman, & Schoen, 2009; Whittaker, & van Garderen, 2009).

Maximizing Student Development – "The conclusion that individual teachers can have a profound impact on student learning was first noticed in the 1970s when we began to examine effective teaching practices" (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001, p. 3). Indeed, Sander's research determined that effective teachers maximize all students' learning "regardless of the heterogeneity in their classrooms" (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997, p. 63).

Contributing Citizens – Besides achieving personal success, students need preparation to become productive contributing citizens in our democracy (Dewey, 1916; Glickman, 1993; Goodlad, 1994). Indeed, "public education is the only institution designated and funded as the agent of the larger society in protecting the core value of its citizens' democracy" (Glickman, 1993, p. 8). Larrivee (2002, p. 77) expanded,

As a microcosm of society, the classroom should instill a set of democratic values founded on the principles of tolerance, acceptance, respect and compassion. In the democratic learning community, the teacher's role is to help students internalize these values and learn that freedom is tied to responsibility.

Preparing for a Diverse and Democratic Society – Pritchey-Smith (1998) and Martin (2008) wrote that teaching for a democratic citizenship is aligned with culturally responsive pedagogy when teachers are sensitive to other cultures, seek out knowledge about other cultures, and combine this knowledge with the content they teach.

Balancing Professional and Content Knowledge - Professional dispositions and content knowledge need to be balanced for teachers to truly maximize their students' development.

> A more complex, knowledge-based, and multicultural society creates new expectations for teaching. To help diverse learners master more challenging content, teachers must go far beyond dispensing information, giving a test, and giving a grade. They must themselves know their subject matter deeply, and they must understand how students think, if they are to create experiences that actually work to produce learning. (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 319)

Using Pedagogical Skills – The knowledge of teaching in itself is not adequate because it must skillfully be employed in the classroom to reach praxis. As Goodlad (1994) so eloquently wrote, "it is a setting that brings together and blends harmoniously and coherently the three essential ingredients of a teacher's education: general, liberal education; the study of educational practices; and the guided exercise of

the art, science, and skill of teaching" (p. 2). Thus, professional dispositions, combined with content knowledge and executed through appropriate pedagogical skills, support, engage, and lead students to deeper levels of learning (Schlechty, 2002).

Collaborating with Students, Families, Educators, and the Community – Educating all students does not occur in a vacuum within the bricks and mortar of school buildings but also within homes and communities. Collaboration and interaction are circular rather than linear and reaches back into the school buildings, too (Melin & Walker, 2009). "Reflection needs to focus not only within the classroom but on the contexts in which teaching and schooling are embedded. Recognizing those contexts leads to an understanding that decisions and deliberation about purposes leads to the inclusion of other members of the school community" (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 22).

In order to determine if the education programs here at GSC have positively impacted the dispositions of its teacher candidates, it has been paramount to learn where these students were before entering the programs and where they were as they exited. The question became, "How will the Teacher Education Preparation Unit 'know' when candidates have the appropriate disposition?"

**Pre-Assessment of Dispositions –
Admissions Benchmark**

As part of the requirements for admission to GSC teacher preparation program applicants write essays to describe their disposition towards teaching based on the following prompt: "What in your life experiences and education, thus far, leads you to appreciate and believe that you can be part of a team that can help actualize the GSC Conceptual Framework?" As the Admissions Committee, comprised of Education faculty, staff and faculty from outside the Education

Department, representatives from the area schools, and representatives from the greater community at-large, examines these essays, they especially look for evidence that demonstrates the candidates' dispositions in the following areas: caring, reflective decision-makers, committed to maximizing all students' development, balancing of professional dispositions and content knowledge with pedagogical skills, and collaboratively interacting with colleagues, families, and the community.

Formative Assessments - Scaffolding Opportunities

As teacher candidates matriculate through the program, the elements of the conceptual framework named above are embedded into all of their coursework. Part of the lesson plan format required in all field experiences includes writing a personal reflection after teaching the lesson. These reflections include the following: How did this lesson maximize all the students' development as contributing citizens in a diverse and democratic society? Did all the students master the objective(s)? How do you know if they did or did not? If not, what will you do to ensure that the students learn the objective(s)? How will you use the assessment(s) to modify this lesson in the future? These questions encourage the teacher candidates to be reflective decision-makers responding to the needs of all children.

In addition, throughout every field experience, the teacher candidates keep journals that address the conceptual framework. They are also evaluated on six standards that align the program to the Georgia Framework for Teaching which assesses the candidates' knowledge of the following: (A) Content and Curriculum, (B) Knowledge of Students and Their Learning, (C) Learning Environment, (D) Assessment, (E) Planning and Instruction, and (F) Professionalism. While the matter of disposition is inherent in all of the standards as teacher candidates work with children, it is specifically noted in the sixth

standard, Professionalism. Standard six includes evaluation of all teacher candidates' consistent demonstration of the following dispositions: conscientious, committed, and motivated; punctual and dependable; professional in dress and manner; organized yet flexible; appropriate oral and written communication; respect to all students, families, colleagues, administrators, and supervisors; honors confidentiality; solves problems appropriately; and ethically uses technology.

Prior to the capstone clinical experience, teacher candidates submit pre-clinical portfolios where they select artifacts that they have actually used in classrooms to demonstrate their competencies of the same six standards. Besides making choices to submit appropriate artifacts, they reflect and provide rationales for including their examples which address the conceptual framework.

Summative Assessment - Developmental Growth

During the capstone clinical experience, teacher candidates further demonstrate their competencies of the six standards which are aligned to the conceptual framework. The Clinical Experience Performance Observation Instrument (POI) is used by the college supervisors as well as the clinical classroom teachers to evaluate the teacher candidates. At this point there are an increased number of indicators for demonstrated proficiency of each standard. In addition, during this semester, the teacher candidates submit professional clinical portfolios which again includes artifacts for each standard accompanied by brief reflective paragraphs that justifies their selections of the specific examples and its impact on students' learning.

Finally, to close the teacher disposition loop, teacher candidates include essays in their Professional Clinical Portfolios where they discuss how they implement and demonstrate

the components of the conceptual framework. From applying to the program with their written disposition essays to their final essays that focus on the implementation of the conceptual framework, the teacher disposition loop is complete. By comparing the pre-essays with the post-essays, GSC education faculty determine the value-added measure for teacher candidates' dispositions.

In examining the data from the teacher candidates who began in July, 2008 and graduated in December, 2010 (N=30), there are striking differences between the pre and post-essays. For example, the average number of pages for the pre-essays was 2.25, and for the post-essays it was 4.5. The average number of words for the pre-essays was 650, and for the post-essays, it was 1350. An excerpt from a typical pre-essay and post-essay response is as follows:

> July, 2008 – pre-essay: "I hope to become a part of GSC's teacher education program. I am someone who truly cares for others. I want to exceed expectations of others and provide a foundation of learning for students."

> December, 2010 – post-essay: "Throughout my capstone experience, I have been able to reflect often on my teaching. After reflecting and reviewing some of my teaching through self-critique,criticism from my mentor teacher, and video-taping myself during the school day, I have learned many things about myself as a teacher.I have shown that I am a caring individual in my mannerisms and expressions, as well as my tone of voice with the students. It is very apparent that I respect and care for my students. None of my actions or comments to the students, even when correcting inappropriate behaviors, show   any discontent. Specifically during my video-taped lesson, after

correcting the morning work, I invited the students to join me on the rug for the Morning Message. There were a few stragglers who took more time than the rest of the students to come to the rug. I complimented the rest of the class while I waited patiently and I also encouraged my stragglers by saying, "Come join us,friends." This is a term of endearment that I use when speaking of or to my students. I hope that it makes them feel that they are truly important in their life – because they are…"

In examining data from another cohort of students who began in July, 2009 and completed the program in May, 2011 (N=30), there are similar difference in quantity and quality in their essays. The average number of pages for the pre-essays was 2.08 and for the post-essays, it was 4.19. The average number of words for the pre-essays was 626, and for the post-essays, it was 1258. An excerpt from a typical pre-essay and post-essay response is as follows:

> July, 2009 – pre-essay: "As a teacher, I will help children find their direction and guide them to the kind of person they want to be. To care for a child is easy, but to help them make the most of their potential is difficult."

> May, 2011 – post-essay: "All teachers must be caring and reflecting to be exceptional. I've always been a caring person,but I've changed to be caring in a way that benefits each student. I've learned that to be a successful teacher I have to do what's best for the children, even if my actions don't seem to be caring in their eyes. I've had to tell crying students to dry their tears and try their assignments, not just cry because they can't do it. I've challenged the students who pretend they can't do things so I'll help them. I do these things, as well

as accepting numerous hugs, asking students what's wrong when they're sad, and listening to them excitedly tell me about their pet dog. Every morning I see their little faces come in with a smile and a 'good morning,' I know that I couldn't care for them more."

It is important to note the highlighted words in the post-essay excerpts from the typical responses for both cohorts above indicate that students internalized the crucial concepts of the Conceptual Framework and demonstrated that they now live the dispositional attributes that reflect the GSC teacher preparation program's goals and values.

Summary and Recommendations

As a result of monitoring, collecting, and analyzing candidates pre and post essays, the authors were able to determine that candidates' did indeed develop more fully their dispositions for teaching as a result of matriculating through the teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, the authors recommend the following suggestions for other teacher preparation programs that would like to consider their teacher candidates' dispositions prior to entering their program and continually follow their progression throughout their program:

1. Identify dispositions that are aligned with the conceptual framework.
2. Define the components within the unit's disposition description.
3. Create a mechanism to measure candidates' dispositions at the admissions benchmark through a pre-essay.
4. Ensure that evaluations of dispositions are embedded in all course and field experiences to provide formative feedback to the candidates.
5. Provide summative evaluation instruments of candidates' dispositions during the capstone clinical experiences as well as

final professional portfolios, (including a post essay) that may be compared to the admissions data for the purposes of determining value-added growth.

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