

Using Walkthrough Observations to Document Dispositional Actions

Angela Danley, University of Central Missouri
Deb Theiss, University of Central Missouri

ABSTRACT: Faculty from a Midwestern university implemented walkthrough observations in a Professional Development Schools (PDS) field experience with elementary and early childhood majors. The instructors/researchers used walkthrough observation forms to track, evaluate, and monitor teacher candidate dispositions. The data were collected electronically and then compiled to present a picture of the developing skills and expertise of the pre-service teacher. Teacher candidates reflected on the data and used the information to set goals for continued development of teacher dispositions. The faculty used the observable data to better evidence the teacher candidate dispositions through their actions and interactions with children in the classroom.

NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #1/ A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; #4/ A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; #5/ Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; #8/ Work by college/university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings

Background

Considering teacher candidate dispositions as a means to predict future teacher effectiveness has been a recurring topic in teacher education preparation programs (Brewer, Lindquist, & Altemuller, 2011; Schussler, Stocksberry, & Bercaw, 2010; Dottin, 2009; Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2007; Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Mullin, 2003). Though the research on teacher dispositions remains inconsistent, the impact of dispositions on teaching cannot be ignored (Thornton, 2013). Teacher education programs must select learning experiences that grow and develop these dispositional skills through coursework and field experiences (Cummins & Asempapa, 2013). Evidencing the developing teacher candidate dispositions through designed instruments, assessments, or processes continues to be a challenge (Almerico, Johnston, Henriott, & Shapiro 2001; Welch, Pitts, Tenini, Kuenlen, & Wood 2010; Anderson & Brydges 2010).

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2002) has defined professional dispositions as “professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities; these positive behaviors support student learning and development.” (p. 89). NCATE expects educational programs to ensure that candidates “demonstrate dispositions that value fairness and learning by all students” (Standard 4). “Unlike desire, dispositions are accompanied by behavior and thus assume the requisite ability to carry out that behavior” (Ritchart, 2001, p. 5). Dispositions are a critical component of teacher education programs.

Disposition assessments in the classroom and in the field provide teacher educators with a more holistic profile of a given candidate (Almerico, Johnston, Henriott, & Shapiro, 2011). Knowledge, skills and dispositions are embraced by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the NCATE standards as essential elements of teacher preparation and teacher quality, yet dispositions remain a neglected part of teacher education program (Thornton, 2006).

While the conceptual and empirical literature on teacher candidates’ dispositions is sparse, considerable work has been done since the early 1980s on prospective teachers’ beliefs (Villegas, 2007). Therefore, this action research added to the existing literature and most importantly guided the instructors in developing ways to observe and offer feedback to teacher candidates prior to entering student teaching.

Using Walkthrough Observations

Walkthrough observations are commonly used in public schools by principals, instructional coaches or collegial groups of teachers as one instrument among a variety of measures to assess teacher skills, identify areas for teacher professional growth, or evaluate the implementation of curriculum (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Hollis, 2010; Kachur, Edwards, & Stout, 2013; Milanowski, 2011; Walsh, 2014). Walkthrough observations can provide a snapshot of teacher behaviors and overtime patterns may emerge that can guide improvement of teaching (Marzano et al, 2011).

Faculty from a Midwestern university in the United States implemented walkthrough observations in a Professional

Development School (PDS) field experience with elementary and early childhood majors. Walkthrough observations were part of the expectation for teacher evaluation at this PDS site with the principal conducting walkthroughs focused on evidencing student engagement and effective teaching practices. The design of the instrument used in this study to measure dispositions was shared with the principal and instructional coach for feedback and suggestions. In a meeting to launch the partnership, the principal and the instructional coach met with the teacher candidates and discussed dispositional actions important to the success of work at the elementary school. At mid-semester and again at the conclusion of the field experience, the principal and instructional coach met with the teacher candidates and university instructors in an open forum to discuss growth in dispositional actions and to provide an opportunity for two-way communication that encouraged all participants (teacher candidates, principal and instructional coach, and university faculty) to provide input and suggestions for building a stronger partnership with processes that would support professional growth.

In an orientation session at the PDS site, classroom teachers learned about dispositions and were urged to engage in conversations about dispositional actions to support teacher candidate growth. The researchers also shared the walkthrough observation form with the host teachers encouraging their input. The classroom teachers did not conduct the walkthrough observations but provided ongoing daily feedback to the teacher candidate and a detailed critique when the pre-service teacher implemented a whole group lesson in literacy. Both the classroom teacher and the instructors met with the teacher candidate following lesson implementation to coach and set goals for future work in the classroom. Classroom teachers were also encouraged to discuss dispositions with a teacher candidate or faculty member whenever issues or concerns arose. The instructors were in host classrooms daily during the field experience and communication about dispositional actions of teacher candidates was ongoing and part of the established culture of the partnership.

The instructors/researchers used the walkthrough observation forms to track, evaluate, and monitor teacher candidate dispositions. Observations for walkthroughs can typically range from three to five minutes (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011) to up to ten to fifteen minutes based on observation tools that capture a snapshot of teaching (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013). The researchers established a time period of three to seven minutes to collect data on the observation form. The data were collected electronically and then compiled to present a picture of the developing skills and expertise of the pre-service teacher. Teacher candidates reflected on the data and used the information to set goals for continued development of teacher dispositions. The faculty used the observable data to better evidence the teacher candidate dispositions through their actions and interactions with children in the classroom as well as guide in mentoring and coaching the pre-service teacher.

Teacher Candidate Reflection

Teacher candidates were given the observation tool so they would have an understanding of what the university supervisors were observing. The teacher candidates were given opportunity to use the tool in the role of observer by viewing movie clips of teacher heroes and recording dispositional actions that were evident. This provided the teacher candidates a hands-on experience with the tool and a better understanding of how dispositions are translated into observable actions. Following this instruction in dispositional actions, it was evident in one-on-one conferences with teacher candidates that they were consciously making decisions to “try out” dispositional actions that were identified on the walkthrough form. One teacher candidate who did not show much enthusiasm for teaching and rarely smiled shared the following comment after teaching a lesson, “*I smiled throughout the lesson and showed a lot of energy. My cooperating teacher said I looked like I was having fun!*” Additionally, the teacher candidates completed the university disposition form, which allowed them to reflect on their teaching practices. The teacher candidates brought the completed forms to a post-conference with the university supervisors. During this post-conference, teacher candidates were asked to identify and discuss which dispositions they felt were well-developed and which needed improvement for the student teaching semester. In addition, goals were identified and put into place for teacher candidates being recommended to student teach with reservations.

Data Collection

The researchers were interested in exploring walkthroughs and the information that they would provide about teacher candidate dispositions. Three questions guided the research:

1. Can we validate a teacher candidate disposition walkthrough observation tool?
2. What teacher candidate dispositions are prevalent in a pre-service field experience the semester prior to student teaching?
3. What patterns based on dispositions in action can we identify?
 - If we were to rate a teacher candidate low in readiness to teach based on dispositional actions, what are the common patterns identified?
 - If we were to rate a teacher candidate high in readiness to teach based on dispositional actions, what are the common patterns identified?

Walkthrough Observation Form

The *Walkthrough Observation Form* (see Appendix) was developed using the College of Education (COE) *Teacher Candidate Dispositions Assessment Form* as a basis for choosing dispositional actions. The COE *Teacher Candidate Dispositions Assessment Form*

Table 1. Dispositions from the *Teacher Candidate Dispositions Assessment Form*

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- **Disposition 1:** Commits to high expectations for all students, and values the ability/capacity for each student to learn.
 - **Disposition 2:** Values student ability to apply concepts learned to performance activities.
 - **Disposition 3:** Commits to the development of critical thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, analysis, etc.)
 - **Disposition 4:** Commits to seeking out, developing, and continually refining teaching practices that generate more learning for students
 - **Disposition 5:** Commits to development of lessons that are interesting and engaging through a variety of instructional strategies to accommodate all learners, including those from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and cultures (e.g., use of technology, grouping, motivating materials).
 - **Disposition 6:** Commits to making appropriate adaptations and accommodations for students with diverse needs (e.g., use of technology).
 - **Disposition 7:** Appreciates and promotes acceptance of self-discipline, responsibility, and self-esteem.
 - **Disposition 8:** Commits to a positive and enthusiastic attitude for teaching and learning to inspire self and others.
 - **Disposition 9:** Believes students and colleagues should be treated and should treat other with kindness, fairness, patience, dignity, and respect.
 - **Disposition 10:** Commits to relationships with school colleagues, parents, and educational partners in the larger community to support student learning and well-being.
 - **Disposition 11:** Assesses the effects of choices and actions on others and actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally in order to promote learner outcomes.
 - **Disposition 12:** Fulfills professional responsibilities consistent with building and district expectations and policies concerning appearance, punctuality, attendance, and timely and accurate paperwork completion.
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is a required document as part of recommendations for placement in student teaching. The specific “look-for actions” were identified for each of the twelve dispositions (See Table 1). Researchers recorded the observation data in an electronic version of the walkthrough form online.

Twenty teacher candidates placed in PDS field placements across third through fifth grades in a rural school district participated in this study. Faculty spent 3-7 minutes documenting the observable actions on the walkthrough form, making sure that teacher candidates were observed by different faculty as a minimum every other time during the field placement. Teacher candidates spent one day per week for ten weeks, 7:15-11:15 a.m., in the field site.

Results

Table 2 shows the percentage of times actions within a disposition were observed or not observed. Disposition 1 (commits to high expectations for all students) had the highest

percentage of observable actions among all 12 recorded dispositions. Table 3 shows the percentages for Disposition 1 across the subcategories. *Treating students respectfully* had the highest percentage of observed dispositional action with 85%. *Listens to students* (64%) and *shows enthusiasm* (64%) were also observed often.

For each of the dispositional areas (1-12), the researchers analyzed the data for the most common observable dispositional actions and those that were not as easy to observe. Researchers decided that if the action was observed 60% or more, then it was a dispositional action that could be commonly observed in walkthrough observations. The list of the dispositional actions observed frequently in Dispositions 1-12 can be seen in Table 4. Table 5 reports the dispositional actions observed less frequently across Dispositions 1-12.

Can We Validate Teacher Candidate Dispositions Using a Walkthrough Observation Tool?

Twenty-one of the 34 items on the *Walkthrough Observation Form* were observed 60%-85% of the time by the researchers. This would indicate that these actions could be observable through brief walkthroughs in the classroom and would also give insight into what kinds of dispositional actions could be observed and documented in pre-service teachers prior to their student teaching experience.

Twelve of the 34 items were observed with less than 60% frequency by the faculty doing the walkthroughs. A closer look at these twelve items would reveal that some of the actions were areas the teacher candidate had not yet learned, explored, or practiced in course work associated with the PDS field experience (effective feedback and questioning, use of collaborative strategies, using wait time, etc.). This was eye-opening for the instructors/researchers as it showed clearly the connection of course work to application in the field and needed areas to increase opportunity for instruction and applied learning. One example is the use of *wait time*. University students in this PDS field experience took two courses as co-requisites for the ten-week placement (Classroom Management and Literacy). Once the teacher candidates had been introduced to the concept of *wait time* or *think time* and understood its relevancy to increasing student engagement, there was an immediate application of the use of wait time in the classroom. In one-on-one conferences, teacher candidates began to reflect on their use of wait time or lack of its use and set goals for themselves in future work.

The use of collaborative strategies (rarely noted in the observational data) is another example of how coursework learning can impact dispositional actions that had previously shown little evidence of use by the teacher candidate. The university students had not been introduced to collaborative strategies to work with children. After two full class periods of strategies to engage and help students collaborate with high engagement, teacher candidates were “trying out” the strategies in the field placement during the last sessions within their classrooms, as well as planning in their lessons for collaborative strategies.

Table 2. Percentage of Actions within a Disposition Observed or Not Observed

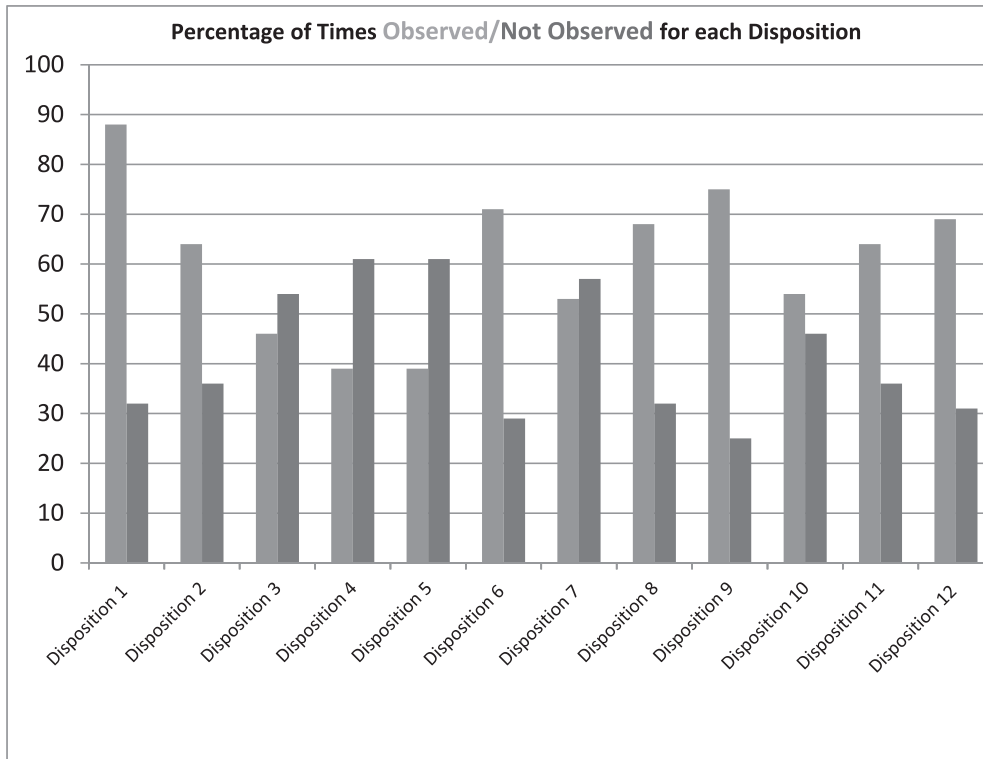


Table 3. Percentages Observed Across the Subcategories for Disposition # 1

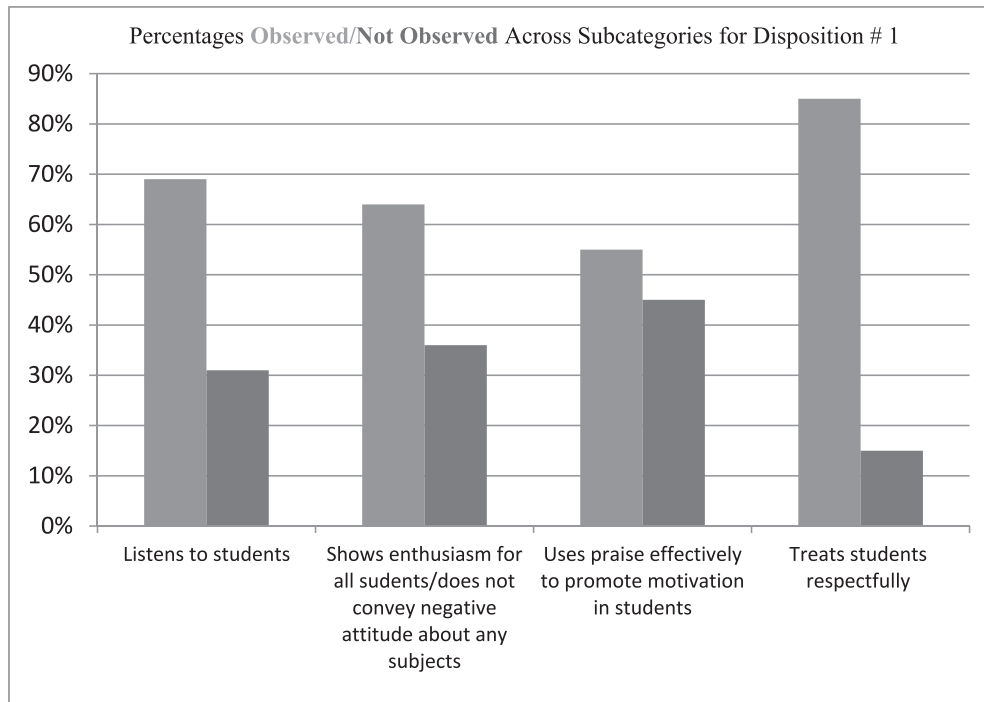


Table 4. List of Dispositional Actions Observed Frequently in Dispositions 1-12

Disposition # 1: Treats students respectfully, 85%; Listens to students, 64%; Shows enthusiasm, 64%

Disposition # 2: Uses Effective Communication Strategies, 64%

Disposition #6: Seeks to become acquainted with students as individuals, 60%; Interacts in a respectful and supportive way with students, 81%; Uses verbal and non-verbal communication to engage students, 71%

Disposition # 8: Appears to be involved throughout class period (discussion & activities), 73%; Provides feedback that creates a positive atmosphere, 76%; Is actively involved with all students when teaching, 68%; Talks individually with students when appropriate, 67%; Demonstrates enthusiasm, stamina, perseverance, self-confidence, 63%

Disposition #9: Interacts appropriately with peers, 88%; Encourages and supports others with words & actions, 63%

Disposition # 10: Demonstrates professional behavior, 62%

Disposition # 11: Shows positive attitude toward learning, 64%

Disposition # 12: Arrives at school promptly, 98%; Avoids manners that detract, 73%; Is prepared & is organized, 64%; Maintains professional appearance, 94%; Demonstrates standard English, 68%

There were additional items on the walkthrough form that were not frequently observed. To understand why these areas were not frequently observed by the instructors, a focus group discussion was held with the twenty teacher candidates to ask about these areas. When students were interviewed about these areas it was clear that they may be doing these actions (keeps all school dealings confidential, interacts with the cooperating teacher, etc.), but that it would be difficult to “catch” them in the act. Many of these actions occurred before school, during planning time, or at a lunch period. The observer most likely is not observing these actions because they would not be evident in the midst of the teaching and interacting with children. The instructors tried to avoid these times of the days in the classroom as they were not times that the researchers would optimally collect evidence about teacher/student interactions. Marzano’s Instructional Framework: Non-observables and Behaviors (Marzano et al, 2011) documents actions of teachers by evidencing artifacts that may come from dispositional actions that may not be as easy to observe. Notes taken for lesson designs when meeting with the cooperating teacher, minutes from a grade level meeting, or surveys or interviews with the cooperating teacher may be able to document some of these dispositional actions that were not as evident when a walkthrough was conducted.

What Teacher Candidate Dispositions Are Prevalent in a Pre-Service Field Experience?

There were many dispositional actions that could be considered common among the teacher candidates. Grouping the dispositional actions into categories helps to understand what kinds of dispositions are prevalent at this developmental level of teacher

Table 5. List of Dispositional Actions Observed Less Frequently in Dispositions 1-12

Disposition # 1: Uses Praise effectively to promote motivation in students, 55%

Disposition # 3: Uses effective questioning, 59%; Uses wait time effectively, 33%

Disposition # 4: Response to feedback, 18%

Disposition # 5: Treats students fairly, 49%; Tries new strategies, 40%; Uses collaborative learning, 26%

Disposition # 7: Keeps all school dealings confidential, 10%

Disposition # 10: Plans jointly with cooperating teacher, 45%

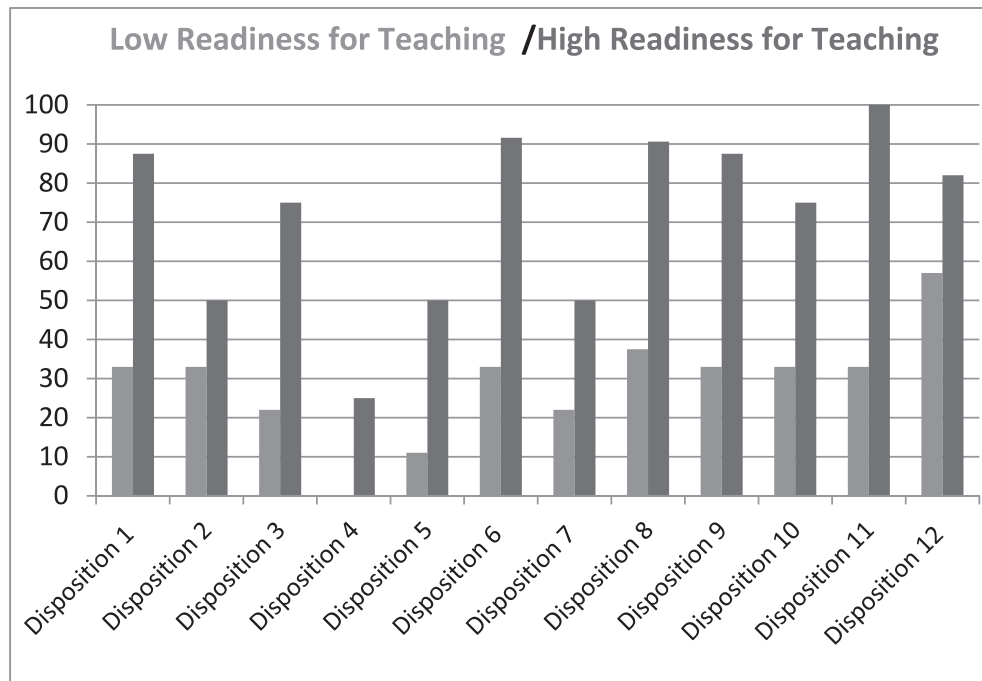
Disposition # 12: Follows safety & procedural policies, 41%; Interacts with cooperating teacher, 46%

candidate. One category is the *relationship and interactions with children and others*. The pre-service teacher at this level can exhibit teacher behaviors that show caring relationships with students, positive interactions with students, peers, and cooperating teachers. *Effective communication* is a second category that includes the use of Standard English and using verbal and non-verbal communication. *Professionalism* is exhibited by punctuality, professional dress, and avoiding mannerisms that detract from learning. *Initiative and enthusiasm* is the last category which includes dispositional actions that show energy, a positive attitude, involvement throughout the class period, and exhibiting self-confidence.

What Patterns Based on Dispositions in Action Can We Identify?

The researchers wanted to know if it was possible to observe dispositional actions in order to identify teacher candidates that may have low readiness to teach and/or high readiness to teach. If using a walkthrough form for dispositions could identify the low readiness and high readiness student, then it would also offer opportunities for coaching and mentoring for the improvement of dispositional actions. Table 6 compares the dispositional actions observed of a low readiness teacher candidate compared to a high readiness teacher candidate. The high readiness pre-service teacher had percentages of observable dispositional actions more than twice the percentage of the low readiness pre-service teacher. The contrast between the two pre-service teachers clearly differentiates the developmental levels of the teacher candidates. The differences were also documented well by additional information gained from cooperating teacher and instructor lesson implementation evaluations, informal comments and observations made by the principal to the instructors when visiting the classrooms, and self-evaluations (Dispositional Form) that each of the teacher candidates completed. The teacher candidate at this Midwestern university is expected to be at mastery or above in all dispositions on the university form by the end of the student teaching semester. This is a “gate keeper” to certification for some teacher candidates, preventing them from gaining their certification. It

Table 6. Percentage of Observed Dispositional Actions: High and Low Readiness for Teaching



becomes a high stakes situation and needs to be addressed earlier in the field experiences of the teacher candidate. The walkthrough observations may provide a way to document the level of observed dispositional actions that contribute to effective teaching in the classroom and provide a guide for specific areas to coach and mentor.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

The *Walkthrough Observation Form* will need revisions and the researchers intend to use the observation form for additional semesters to increase reliability measures and to correlate validation measures to other measurements of teacher readiness and dispositional attitudes and actions for successful teaching (i.e., lesson implementation evaluations, cooperating teacher feedback and evaluation, artifacts from non-observables, etc.). Some of the items on the observational form need to be removed and others need to be more specific as there was some overlap in some actions across dispositions (enthusiasm). Additionally, faculty from the department have been asked to participate in using and further developing the walkthrough form in future semesters. This will help to create a solid observation tool and allow for it to be tested in different contexts and content across early childhood and elementary field placements. Once the walkthrough observation form is finalized it will provide an ongoing evaluation and documentation of the growth and development of dispositional actions across field experiences.

The instructors learned that teaching explicitly what the dispositional actions were, as well as providing a safe

environment to practice the dispositional actions, was essential to helping the teacher candidates translate their learning into action within the field placement. It also gives credence to the idea that dispositions can be learned and are not necessarily innate to the teacher candidate. The role of faculty/instructor as mentor and coach becomes critical as they identify specifically the dispositional actions that a teacher candidate needs help in developing and applying to their work with children.

Using the observation form as a means for coaching and mentoring will be explored more fully. Conferring with candidates, making goals for future teaching in the classroom and then follow-up conferences to help teacher candidates self-evaluate their progress will be systematized with scheduled mid-semester conferences and end of semester conferences prior to the student teaching semester. This will help to encourage *reflection-on-teaching* (Mills & Satterthwait, 2000; Smith, 2011) and to help the pre-service teacher use concrete evidence as a means for decision-making. Partnering with the school site to engage the cooperating teacher in providing observational data for the teacher candidate will also add a wider dimension in capturing the dispositional actions of the pre-service teacher.

Conclusion

The research project examined the usefulness of walkthrough observations in documenting dispositional actions. It also provided insights on how observational data can help faculty identify areas of need for instruction and course work that will foster a stronger application of knowledge to the field

experience. Additionally, the results from the *Walkthrough Observation Form* can serve as concrete evidence of dispositional actions. The record of documented dispositional actions can help identify teacher candidates with *low readiness for teaching*, providing opportunity for mentoring and coaching for more successful teaching experiences. ^{SUP}

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Angela Danley is an assistant professor at the University of Central Missouri in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education. She teaches undergraduate and graduate level courses in the College of Education.

Deb Theiss is an associate professor at the University of Central Missouri in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education. She teaches undergraduate and graduate level courses in the College of Education.