

Professional Dispositions: What Are We Teaching Prospective Physical Education Teachers?

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Abstract

As part of the current educational reform movement, faculties in higher education are reviewing their curriculums. Professional dispositions are of particular interest since the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has begun to address dispositions within its accreditation process. If NCATE believes dispositions are an issue that teacher preparation programs need to address, then information is warranted on what PETE programs are currently doing regarding dispositions. The purpose of this study was for Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) faculty (N=47) to identify dispositions which were important for success in the teaching profession, and then indicate which of these dispositions were being taught and assessed within their programs. Ten dispositions were unanimously identified as essential for success in the work place with another 11 dispositions identified as essential by at least 90% of the participants. While faculty identified most dispositions as essential, many dispositions were not directly taught nor were students held accountable for demonstrating them. The findings suggest that PETE faculties need to review their program goals to both teach and assess for dispositions. If NCATE is expecting PETE programs to address the issue of dispositions, then faculty members need to re-evaluate the importance attached to dispositions and hold students accountable for demonstrating them.

Key Words: affective domain, dispositions, professional preparation

Changes in the workplace and America's economy have helped fuel the current educational reform movement (Bailey, 1997; Bailey & Smith Morest, 1998; Wise, 1996). The skills needed for successful employment have changed with the emergence of the technological revolution and the American educational system is being challenged to change the status quo. With the focus placed on student outcomes, there's a shift from testing information gleaned from "covering the curriculum" (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium [INTASC], 1992) to "what teachers should know and be able to do" (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2002). Thus, it is no longer sufficient for prospective teachers to have just the knowledge and skills of an academic subject; they are now expected to demonstrate the knowledge and skills as well as model dispositions that are expected of educators (Eltis, 1997; INTASC, 1992; NCATE, 2002; Wise & Leibbrand, 1996). These changes have led to increased emphasis on performance-based assessment of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (NCATE, 2002; Wise & Leibbrand, 1996).

According to Katz and Rath (1986) dispositions are "attributions which summarize a trend of a teacher's actions across similar contexts" (p. 3). For example, an individual who does not get upset easily or display one's emotions on a regular basis on "good" days as well as on "bad" days would be considered to have the disposition of emotional control. It is important to note that Katz and Rath's definition includes a summary of actions that can be

observed or documented through the use of behavioral observations.

Teacher education programs are being challenged to assess what in the past has been considered “unmentionables” or those items that teacher educators know are important but difficult to assess. The lack of emphasis on dispositions may be attributed to the difficulty in defining and then measuring them, the importance (and time) placed on the acquisition of the disposition in comparison to content-specific knowledge and performance, or the assumption that the disposition would be eventually assimilated. NCATE (2002) acknowledges that “dispositions are not usually assessed directly; instead they are assessed along with other performances in candidates’ work with students, families, and communities” (p. 19). The problem with this approach is that if certain behaviors are desired qualities of graduates, then they must be deliberately planned for and assessed (Goodlad, 2002; Wiggins, 1998).

The teacher education literature (Katz, 1993; Maylone, 2002; Mullin, 2003; Taylor & Wasicsko, 2000; Tjeerdsma, Metzler, Walker, & Mozen, 2000; Wasicsko, 2004; Wasicsko, Callahan, & Wirtz, n.d.; Yost, 1997) includes research on and articles about dispositions. Some of these papers sound warnings (Maylone) about broaching the area of dispositions while others (Mullin; Taylor & Wasicsko; Tjeerdsma et al.) share how dispositions are being assessed. Wasicsko et al. explained ways to integrate dispositions into the conceptual framework and information about using dispositions for evaluating potential employees during an interview. Despite warnings by some to proceed with caution, NCATE (2002) requires a unit to assess the dispositions of all candidates in Standard 1. The rubric for the acceptable level states, “Candidates are familiar with the dispositions expected of professionals. Their work with students, families, and communities reflects the dispositions delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards” (NCATE, p. 16).

Tjeerdsma et al. (2000) attempted to measure each of the disposition statements in the *National Standards for Beginning Physical Education Teachers* (NASPE, 1995). Various instruments as well as reflection tasks and class projects were used to evaluate the work of 23 students throughout their undergraduate experience including student teaching. In this study, students were lowest in their willingness to listen to student problems outside of class and being available to give students additional help outside of class.

The workforce development literature uses the corresponding term “employability skills” to denote “transferable core skill groups that represent essential functional and enabling knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by the 21st century workplace” (Overtoom, 2000, ¶4). Employability skill is a much broader term that encompasses the affective domain through the identification of attitudes deemed important in the work place. For the past decade, there has been a call to integrate employability skills (knowledge, skills and attitudes) into curricula across grade levels (see National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Poole & Zahn, 1993; Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991; Spille, 1994).

While their integration has been rather slow, the need to teach employability skills has gained worldwide credibility and recognition (Atkins, 1999; Fallows & Steven, 2000; Poole & Zahn, 1993; Spille, 1994; Taylor, 1998). Goodlad (2002) also addressed this issue when talking about the impact of testing on teacher quality:

...grades and test scores rank high in the selection of workers in many sectors of the marketplace. When high-test scores fail to deliver the desired qualities, employers beat the drum for tougher standards and tests. What these employers do not understand is that high test scores predict high test scores, but not much else: not problem-solving skills, not good work habits, not honesty, not depend-

ability, not loyalty, and not the dispositions and virtues embedded in our expectations for schooling. Research on cognition reveals that the transfer of learning from one domain of human behavior to another is low. Each domain must be taught directly. (p. 20)

Katz and Rath (1986) challenge one to reflect on program goals and objectives. Specifically they state, "goals that are not assessed are probably interpreted by teachers and their students as mere rhetoric, 'signifying nothing'. Thus, if dispositions are to be goals of a teacher education program, and as such, to focus the attention of faculty and students upon their attainment, they need to be assessable" (p. 12). Locke (2003) also challenged faculty of PETE programs to begin discussions about selective program retention based on student behaviors. He encouraged faculty to begin to discuss which behaviors were desirable of teacher candidates as well as which behaviors, if demonstrated by a teacher candidate, should be the basis for elimination from the program. "Our entire system—the state, the schools, the parents, and the education profession itself is founded on the assumption that teacher educators will not allow incompetents to graduate" (Locke, p. 12).

With the release of standards in 1992 by INTASC, there was recognition that all teachers, regardless of their specialty area, required generic knowledge and performances to be successful in the workplace. What has not been specifically identified is which of these dispositions are critical to being successful in the teaching profession.

The purpose of this study was to determine which dispositions Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) faculty felt were important for beginning physical education teachers to demonstrate in order to help students learn. A secondary purpose was to determine whether the dispositions that were currently being taught within their physical education curriculums were also being assessed.

Methods

Participants

The sample included 88 professionals representing 46 states who were identified from the AAHPERD directory (1999) as being affiliated with PETE programs. A research assistant completed an online search of departments' web pages for the email addresses of the identified participants. Eighty-eight email addresses were secured using this procedure. Initial requests to participate in the study resulted in a 44% return rate so a second request for participation was made. The final response rate was 53% ($N=47$).

Instrumentation

After reviewing the employability literature, other institutions' disposition rubrics, and letters of recommendation from several school districts, a survey was created which listed 25 dispositions. To establish content validity, the researchers compared the dispositions listed on the survey with those attitudes identified from Burton, Chavex, and Kokaska's (1987) research. Adequate test-retest reliability was established with 16 PETE faculty completing the survey twice over a one-week time period ($r = .83$).

To complete the survey, participants were asked to respond either "yes" or "no" to three questions about each of the 25 dispositions: 1) Was it an essential disposition which beginning teachers needed to demonstrate to be successful? 2) Was the disposition taught within the curriculum at their institution; 3) Were teacher candidates assessed on the disposition? Participants were also given the opportunity to suggest additional dispositions that had not been included in the survey.

Procedures

Upon the construction of the Teaching and Dispositions Survey, the researchers obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study. The survey was then downloaded onto the

Internet using the inQsit[®] software. Participants were contacted by email requesting their participation in the study. For participants completing the survey online, the link to the survey was embedded within the email correspondence. Upon opening the online survey document, participants answered the questions and then clicked on the 'submit' button to forward their responses into a database. Any individual who could not access the link to the survey or preferred a hardcopy of the survey was encouraged to contact the researchers. Twelve individuals requested a hard copy of the survey of which seven were returned to the researchers.

The researchers employed descriptive statistics to determine which dispositions were deemed essential and the frequency with which each disposition was taught and assessed. To determine if participants were consistent in their responses for teaching a disposition and then assessing students on the disposition—a Binomial Test was computed for each disposition. The Binomial Test compared the percentage of responses that were consistent across all three responses as well as comparing them against a given value. The ones that were statistically significant indicated there were fewer inconsistent responses than expected, and therefore demonstrated reliability (Siegel & Castellan, 1988).

Results

The primary purpose of the study focused on identifying dispositions PETE faculty felt were important for beginning teachers to be successful in the workplace. Of the 25 dispositions listed in the survey, 10 dispositions were identified by 100% of the participants as an essential skill for beginning teachers; of the remaining dispositions listed only four received less than 90% agreement by the participants as an essential skill. See Table 1 for a list of these dispositions.

The secondary purpose examined the consistency of participants' responses to the infusion of

the disposition into the curriculum and the assessment of the disposition by PETE faculty. To determine if internal consistency existed across each disposition, 25 Binomial Tests were computed (see Table 2). Twenty-three of the 25 dispositions identified on the survey were statistically significant ($p < .05$). The only two dispositions where participating PETE faculty were statistically inconsistent were "the ability to work under pressure or stress" and "leaves personal problems at home". According to the participants, several dispositions are being taught within PETE programs. The only disposition which is currently being taught in all of the participants' programs is regular attendance at class or meetings; however, another 10 dispositions (i.e., work without supervision, enthusiasm, taking initiative, communicating with others, sensitivity to individuals with differences, ability to cooperate with others, trustworthiness, prepared for class, seeks solutions to problems, dependability) were identified as being taught by the majority of the participants. In comparison, two dispositions (i.e., respect for authority and working under pressure or stress) were identified as being taught by less than two-thirds of the PETE programs and the ability to leave one's personal problems at home was addressed by only one-third of the participant's programs.

The participants reported that their programs did not hold their students accountable for the majority of the dispositions. Five dispositions were identified by 90% of the faculty as items for which they currently held students accountable. These five dispositions were: being prepared for class, following written and oral instructions/directions, regular attendance, participation in professional activities/organizations, and actively participating in class. Dedication, ability to work under pressure/stress, and ability to leave personal problems at home were assessed by the fewest of those participating in the study.

Table 1
Percentage of Respondents Who Reported the Disposition Was Essential, Taught, and Assessed

Disposition	Essential Skill for Teachers	Taught in Curriculum	Students Are Assessed on It
Prepared for class	100.0	97.9	97.8
Regular attendance at class or meetings	97.9	100.0	95.7
Meet deadlines	95.8	95.7	95.7
Follow written & oral instructions/ directions	95.8	95.7	91.3
Active participation within class	89.6	91.5	91.3
Dependability	100.0	91.5	82.6
Ability to cooperate with others	100.0	97.8	82.2
Participate in professional activities or organizations	93.8	95.7	80.4
Communicating with others	100.0	95.7	80.0
Seeks solutions to problems	100.0	89.4	78.3
Sensitivity to individuals with differences	100.0	97.9	73.9
Enthusiasm	100.0	89.1	63.0
Work without supervision	100.0	84.8	60.9
Good grooming	79.2	78.3	56.5
Flexibility	97.9	80.9	53.3
Respect for group rules and values	97.9	87.0	53.3
Control of emotions	95.8	70.2	52.2
Pride in one's work or job	97.8	86.7	50.0
Taking initiative	100.0	74.5	50.0
Respectful of authority	89.6	61.7	47.8
Trustworthiness	100.0	72.3	45.7
Role Model	93.8	78.7	43.5
Dedication	95.8	70.2	39.1
Work under pressure or stress	93.6	58.7	26.1
Ability to leave personal problems at home	81.3	32.6	15.6

Note. $N = 47$.

Table 2
Internal Consistency of Participants' Response for a Disposition Being Essential, Taught and Assessed in PETE Programs

Disposition / Affective Skill	Inconsistent		Consistent		Alpha
	<i>N</i>	Observed Prop.	<i>N</i>	Observed Prop.	
Prepared for class	02	.04	45	.96	.000
Regular attendance at class or meetings	03	.06	44	.94	.000
Meet deadlines	05	.11	42	.89	.000
Follow written and oral instructions/directions	04	.09	43	.91	.000
Active participation within class	05	.11	42	.89	.000
Dependability	10	.21	37	.79	.000
Ability to cooperate with others	07	.16	38	.84	.000
Participate in professional activities or organizations	09	.20	37	.80	.000
Communicating with others	10	.22	36	.78	.000
Seeks solutions to problems	11	.23	36	.77	.000
Sensitivity to individuals with differences	13	.28	34	.72	.000
Enthusiasm	18	.39	28	.61	.000
Work without supervision	18	.39	28	.61	.000
Good grooming	18	.39	28	.61	.000
Flexibility	21	.46	25	.54	.000
Respect for group rules and values	21	.48	23	.52	.000
Control of emotions	23	.49	24	.51	.000
Pride in one's work or job	22	.49	23	.51	.000
Taking initiative	23	.49	24	.51	.000
Respectful of authority	21	.45	26	.55	.000
Trustworthiness	27	.57	20	.43	.006
Role model	26	.55	21	.45	.003
Dedication	27	.57	20	.43	.006
Work under pressure or stress	34	.74	12	.26	.489
Ability to leave personal problems at home	31	.69	14	.31	.216
Pride in one's work or job	22	.49	23	.51	.000

Note. The observed proportions were tested against the null that .75 of the responses would be inconsistent with .25 consistent by chance.

Participants were encouraged to provide additional dispositions not included on the survey. A few additional items were identified such as “maintains confidentiality”, “is receptive to feedback or criticism”, and “treats others with equal respect, courtesy, and dignity”.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to have PETE faculty indicate dispositions that were essential for teacher candidates to demonstrate. All of the dispositions listed on the survey were identified in past research as important skills by employers (i.e., Burton et al., 1987; Spille, 1994); but the importance of these dispositions specifically to the teaching profession had not been addressed. Based on the participants' responses, these 25 dispositions appear to be applicable to the physical education teaching setting. A few additional items were identified in the comments section of the survey. The researchers concluded the 25 dispositions identified in the survey were essential skills but the list of 25 dispositions was not meant to be exclusive.

The secondary purpose of the study was to examine whether PETE faculty members were teaching and assessing these dispositions which they identified as being important. Participants were asked on the survey to indicate which dispositions were actually taught in the curriculum. Attendance was the only disposition taught by 100% of those responding with several other items identified as being taught by at least 95% of the respondents. Items such as preparedness for class, cooperation with others, respect for others, ability to follow directions, and communication with others tend to be important for a class to run smoothly but are also transferable to other life settings.

The assessment of important dispositions appears to be a challenge for PETE programs. Although every person responding to the survey listed several items as essential, many of these items were not being assessed. For the majority of the dispositions there was a discrepancy between the identification of the item's importance and

whether it is assessed in the curriculum. According to Doyle (1983), without accountability there is no task. As long as PETE faculties believe these items are important dispositions for young professionals to demonstrate, then ways to hold students accountable for achieving them must be part of the curriculum. In this study, the dispositions most likely to be assessed are fairly easy to define and/or observe. Items such as being prepared for class, regular attendance at class or meetings, meeting deadlines, following written and oral instructions or directions, and active participation within class were assessed by at least 90% of the participants responding to the survey.

On the other hand, items such as respect for authority, trustworthiness, being a role model, dedication, ability to work under pressure or stress, taking initiative, and taking pride in one's work, although indicated as important by 90% of the individuals, were assessed 50% of the time or less. These latter items are much more difficult to define with observable behaviors which may be the reason that they were not assessed. The first step in teaching and assessing these behaviors is for faculty to create definitions specifying “indicators of the construct” that fall on a continuum (Bloom, Madaus, & Hastings, 1981). Only after defining the dispositions in observable terms will a discussion among the faculty be possible to consider ways to teach and assess them.

Some PETE faculty members might be tempted to abandon attempts to measure some of these less observable dispositions; this practice is not an option. When reviewing reference forms used by school districts to screen teacher candidates, one finds such items as attendance, punctuality, and participation in school and community activities on several of the forms. Other items found on these reference forms include the dispositions of dependability, acceptance of constructive supervision, support for school policies, attitude toward work, and enthusiasm toward teaching; all of these are affective skills that teacher education programs indicated as important but were less likely to assess. To be able to respond with

confidence on the reference forms, faculty in teacher education programs must find ways to integrate these skills into the program of study as well as convey to teacher candidates their significance. In addition, faculty must determine whether candidates demonstrate these skills, and then document this evidence for school districts. By holding teacher candidates accountable for these items, it conveys to teacher candidates that these traits are important and desirable to demonstrate.

Addressing this dilemma requires that PETE faculty seek new instruction and assessment practices to attend to those dispositions that are difficult to teach and assess. Because some of the dispositions identified occur so infrequently, waiting for the “teachable moment” is not an option. Case study teaching can help make teacher candidates aware of some of the dispositions that are harder to teach and provide the opportunity to discuss the issues and plan a course of action should the need arise. Several universities are developing assessment plans for teacher candidates where criteria for behavior are stated in a rubric and faculty members are asked to evaluate students at the end of the semester (Wayda & Lund, 2005).

Dispositions are increasingly becoming an important consideration in the employability literature (Atkins, 1999; Harrison, n.d.; Saterfiel & McLarty, n.d.). NCATE has begun addressing dispositions in its accreditation process. This study identified dispositions that PETE professionals felt were important for beginning teachers. There appears to be consensus on the dispositions identified as essential for beginning teachers to demonstrate but some inconsistencies exist in their inclusion in the curriculum or accountability for teacher candidates to exhibit them.

Further research is needed to see how other institutions are addressing the assessment of dispositions for NCATE. Are they taking this as a real challenge to improve the quality of teacher candidates or merely giving the matter lip service to avoid sanctions from NCATE? Research is

also needed to determine which dispositions the K-12 settings deem critical for future employers. Do differences of opinion exist between the perceptions of college faculty and administrators and school administrators about which dispositions are most important? Yet another area of study might question whether all dispositions are of equal importance or if a hierarchy exists. Can some dispositions be identified as prerequisites for admission into teacher education while others are taught to candidates as they progress through their programs?

Implications

The teacher educators who participated in this survey indicated that these items are important for beginning professionals; the challenge appears to lie in how to teach and assess these traits. The following suggestions are offered to help teacher education programs address this dilemma. First, teacher educators need to define what beginning professionals need to know and be able to do regarding dispositions. Since some of the terms are not clearly grounded in observable and/or discrete behaviors, they must be defined and clearly communicated to teacher candidates. The list of dispositions should be comprehensive and thorough without being unwieldy. Dispositions identified should be in line with behaviors that K-12 schools need and expect their teachers to demonstrate. These expectations should be standardized across all members of the teacher education faculty within a PETE program so that students get a consistent message about which behaviors are important.

Second, teacher candidates must be informed about expectations regarding dispositions awaiting them in the schools. These dispositions must be identified and taught in teacher preparation programs. Although not every class will provide the opportunity for teaching and assessing every disposition, over the completion of a teacher preparation program, all dispositions should be addressed. A matrix to indicate which dispositions are most likely to be taught in a given class would be a helpful way to organize this process and

ensure that all dispositions are addressed. Teacher education programs must determine how to assess these dispositions to ensure that students are held accountable for demonstrating them. Some of these assessments could be course-based while others could be demonstrated through required professional development activities.

Finally, teacher educators must develop a system for screening out those students who display undesirable behaviors or behaviors that “represent irremedial incompetence” (Locke, 2003, p. 12). In his closing remarks to the 2003 National PETE Conference, Locke noted that most teacher educators could identify students whom they would not want teaching their children. It is a challenge for PETE faculty to find ways to screen these “undesirables” out of the profession in a manner that works within the legal parameters at their respective institutions. Teacher educators have the responsibility to honor a public trust of not allowing incompetent individuals to become teachers and develop a system for ensuring that this will happen.

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