Promising Practices for Improving At-Risk Pre-service Teachers’ Professional Dispositions

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Background to the Problem

- At-risk student teachers were:
  - surprised by the complexities of the student teaching experience and by the rigorous nature of practicum requirements.
  - experiencing problems understanding and developing professional dispositions in a number of areas, such as collaborating with their master teacher or university supervisor.
Evaluating student teachers’ professional dispositions was problematic for university supervisors due to:

- broadly defined concepts.
- perceived by students as intangible and subjective.
- issues became personalized and problems were shifted to external factors, such as the children, master teacher, or university supervisor not liking them.
- a variety of additional data sources were needed to share with at-risk student teachers—there was no direct assessment of values in relation to beliefs, attitudes, etc.—observations were not always sufficient.
What does the Research Tell us?

- Students’ attitudes were considerably important in teacher education programs between the early 1950’s and 1970’s, but were not well researched in the professional literature.

- The literature on preservice teachers suggests that professional dispositions challenge individual’s long-held beliefs and attitudes.
Research Questions

- What are the characteristics of at-risk student teachers?
- Which professional dispositions pose problems for at-risk student teachers?
- How can university supervisors use survey data to better understand the developmental level of student teachers’ professional dispositions.
- How can university supervisors use assessment data (i.e., surveys and action plans) to improve their mentoring practices for at-risk students?
Data Sources

- What are the characteristics of eight at-risk student teachers?
  - GPA-undergraduate, graduate, MSCP methods courses
  - Letters of Recommendation
  - Philosophy Statement
  - Previous experiences working with children
  - Age and gender
  - Type of teacher credential program (MSCP, ITEP, BCLAD, ABCLAD, Intern)

- What professional dispositions pose problems for at-risk student teachers?
  - Pre-survey data
  - Formative Assessments

- How can university supervisors use survey data to better understand the developmental level of at-risk student teachers’ professional dispositions?
  - Pre- and Post-surveys

- How can university supervisors use assessment data to improve their mentoring process for at-risk student teachers?
  - Pre and post-surveys
  - Action Plans
What are the Characteristics of the At-Risk Student Teacher?

- The at-risk student teacher showed great promise for successfully completing their teacher education program.
  - GPAs were 3.0 and above at the baccalaureate level and in methods courses.
  - Letters of recommendation and philosophy statements were satisfactory.
  - Previous experience working with children were sufficient and successful.

- However, they experienced problems in the application phase of the student teaching process.
  - Problems occurred at the mid-point of student teaching assignments and were noted in formative evaluations by university supervisors. Problems were related to lesson plans, instructional delivery, and/or collaboration.
What professional dispositions pose problems for at-risk student teachers?

Survey

Previous characteristics of at-risk student teachers in our teacher education program were used to design a questionnaire for identifying strengths and weakness in collaboration.
Survey Questions (1-8)
(Language was adjusted for use as pre and post surveys)

1. I feel confident when I taught without planning or with an incomplete lesson plan. (TPE 12-1)
   (always)  (sometimes)  (no opinion)  (never)

2. I communicated effectively when I spoke and wrote.  (TPE 13-4)
   (always)  (sometimes)  (no opinion)  (never)

3. Implementing suggestions from my Master Teacher and University Supervisor helped me become a better teacher. (TPE 13-4)
   (always)  (sometimes)  (no opinion)  (never)  (TPE 13-2, 13-5)

4. I am confident that I maintained a positive attitude and was enthusiastic when I taught the children. (TPE 12-6)
   (always)  (sometimes)  (no opinion)  (never)

5. Adherence to standards of professional ethics was a priority for me during my student teaching. (TPE 12-9)
   (always)  (sometimes)  (no opinion)  (never)

6. Collaborating with my Master Teacher and University Supervisor improved my teaching and was effortless for me. (TPE 13-2, 13-5)
   (always)  (sometimes)  (no opinion)  (never)

7. I was comfortable with receiving feedback. (TPE 13-2, 13-5)
   (always)  (sometimes)  (no opinion)  (never)

8. I believe family and community resources positively affected student learning. (TPE 12-8)
   (always)  (sometimes)  (no opinion)  (never)
9. It was necessary for me to use a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of my students. (TPE 12-5; TPE 13-1)
   (always) (sometimes) (no opinion) (never)

10. If I experienced difficulties during my student teaching assignment I thought it was due to external factors beyond my control. (TPE 12-1)
    (always) (sometimes) (no opinion) (never)

11. I was comfortable with volunteering for additional tasks and going over and above what was expected of me during my student teaching assignment. (TPE 12-1)
    (always) (sometimes) (no opinion) (never)

12. I expected that I would ask for help from my Master teacher and/or University Supervisor. (TPE 13-2)
    (always) (sometimes) (no opinion) (never)

13. It was easy for me to follow time schedules, adhere to deadlines for assignments, and to be punctual during my student teaching. (TPE 12-4)
    (always) (sometimes) (no opinion) (never)

14. I was flexible and adapted to new attitudes, practices, policies, and procedures during my student teaching assignment. (TPE 12-2; 12-3)
    (always) (sometimes) (no opinion) (never)

15. Reflecting on my student teaching performance was necessary for my professional growth. (TPE 13-4; 13-5)
    (always) (sometimes) (no opinion) (never)
Preliminary Data Analysis

- The results are a subset of 100 students drawn from a larger set of 271 students.

- The subset was selected because the students completed both pre and post surveys before and after their student teaching practicum.

- Based on a preliminary review of the data, five questions were selected for analyzing positive and negative dispositions.
**Preliminary Target Questions (5 items)**

**Positive Dispositions:**
- **Question 2 (TPE 12, 1)**
  I communicated effectively when I spoke and wrote.
- **Question 6 (TPE 13, 2 & 5)**
  Collaborating with my Master Teacher and University Supervisor helped me become a better teacher.
- **Questions 12 (TPE 13, 2)**
  I expected that I would ask for help from my Master teacher and/or University Supervisor.

**Negative Dispositions:**
- **Question 1 (TPE 12, 1)**
  I feel confident when I taught without planning or with an incomplete lesson plan.
- **Question 10 (TPE 12, 1)**
  If I experienced difficulties during my student teaching assignment I thought it was due to external factors beyond my control.
A review of the five target questions revealed that collaboration was an area of concern--difficult for even the successful students!

Currently re-examining the survey for reliability using mixed methods:

- Qualitative analysis-focus groups with university supervisors to review question items which may be under or over represented in the areas of lesson planning, instructional delivery, collaboration.
- Quantitative analysis
Action Plan

**Needs Assessment:** (cite evidence pertaining to the need for improvement; i.e., observations, incomplete assignments, absences, unprofessionalism, etc.)

**Goal:** (To identify improvement objectives for ensuring successful completion of program requirements)

**Improvement Objectives** (select 3-4 improvement objectives):

1. 
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3. 
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Activity

- Alignment of TPEs with Survey
- Case studies and Action Plan
Teacher Performance Expectation 12: Professional, Legal and Ethical Obligations

1. Take responsibility for student academic learning.
2. Are aware of their own personal values and biases and recognize the ways in which these affect the teaching and learning of students.
3. Resist racism and acts of intolerance.
4. Manage their professional time.
5. Understand important elements of state and federal laws and procedures pertaining to the education of English learners, gifted students, and individuals with disabilities, including implications for their placement in classrooms.
6. Candidates can identify suspected cases of child abuse, neglect, or sexual harassment. They maintain a non-hostile classroom environment. They carry out laws and district guidelines for reporting such cases.
7. They understand and implement school and district policies and state and federal law in responding to inappropriate or violent student behavior.
8. Candidates understand and honor legal and professional obligations to protect the privacy, health, and safety of students, families, and other school professionals.
9. They are aware if act in accordance with ethical considerations and they model ethical behaviors for students.
10. Candidates understand and honor all laws relating to professional misconduct and moral fitness.

Teaching Performance Expectation 13: Professional Growth

1. Candidates evaluate their own teaching practices and subject matter knowledge in light of information about state adopted academic standards for students and student learning.
2. They improve their teaching practices by soliciting feedback and engaging in cycles of planning, teaching, reflecting, discerning problems, and applying new strategies.
3. Candidates use reflection and feedback to formulate and prioritize goals for increasing their subject matter knowledge and teaching effectiveness.
4. They develop appropriate plans for professional growth in subject matter knowledge and pedagogy.
5. Candidates access resources such as feedback from professionals, professional organizations, and research describing teaching, learning, and public education.
Adam is in his 40’s. He is very intense when he is talking, but makes little or no eye contact. When seeking information or asking questions, he expects immediate and direct answers. For example, he asked how many hours he would need to spend on a specific task. The answer was not concrete (as long as it takes- usually 30 minutes), and he would ask again how long I need to know. At the beginning of the year opening faculty meeting, the principal asked the student teachers to stand and say their names. The others did so and sat down. Adam gave a long introduction of himself- unaware of the unrest by the principal and others. Later in the same meeting, they were talking about a new curriculum adoption and when the materials would be dispersed and Adam stood up and told them of a better way to distribute the books. He also gave feedback on the program.

When the teachers left the meeting to go to their classrooms, Adam was asked to help cut out laminated name plates and the teacher asked him to leave a strip of lamination around the nametag and to cut at a specific table because of the clean up. His response was that he knew how to cut with scissors. As they were cutting and getting the room ready, the teacher talked about the class, school and explained about the report cards they were using for the first time this year. Adam replied that he was not going to be doing her report cards, he was going to be teaching and he did not need to look at the teachers guide she was showing him as he had used that series previously.
Conclusion

- The survey data provides specific information about at-risk student teacher’s professional dispositions for improving the mentoring process. Such information would otherwise be unavailable.

- In mentoring student teachers, and particularly at-risk student teachers, professional dispositions need to be carefully considered along a developmental continuum before and during the student teaching practicum and not perceived as static phenomena.

- THERE ARE NO QUICK FIXES!
Educational Significance

- This investigation contributes to:
  - a clearer understanding of the issues related to at-risk preservice teachers’ transitioning from college students to emerging members of a professional class.
  - promoting a high quality teacher education program that is sensitive and systematic to variation which is often missing in other routes to licensure (Darling-Hammond, 2000).