

The Efficacy of Dispositional Checklists
for Evaluating the
Performance of Preservice Teachers

By

Michael L. Slavkin & Jeff A. Thomas

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to initiate preliminary analyses that would identify the effectiveness of a dispositional system in tracking and mediating problem behaviors with undergraduate teacher education students. Predictors were restricted to a limited set of exploratory variables; including age, sex, years in school, grade point average, major, and credit hours. It was expected that individual characteristics like those above, when reviewed in conjunction with course variables and placement in the program, would show differences in the efficacy of the dispositional system. The results of this study suggest that disposition checklists do provide students and faculty with information that assists them in remediating negative or maladaptive behaviors that inhibit their performance as educational professionals. Disposition checklists also appear to remediate these behaviors within a relatively small amount of time (average of one semester). The strength of this method in relation to NCATE review and UAS systems also is discussed.

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The Department of Teacher Education at the University of Southern Indiana offers undergraduate majors in elementary education, Master of Science degree programs in elementary and secondary education, and the Associate of Science degree program in Early Childhood Education. The department offers the required professional education component of all teacher education programs – elementary, secondary and all grades.

Undergraduate teacher education offerings include the following programs: (1) majors in elementary education and physical education; (2) professional education for elementary, secondary, and all grade majors; (3) minors in health and safety education, physical education, reading, special education, and language arts; (4) junior high/middle school endorsements; and (5) endorsements in kindergarten and computers.

Four courses are involved in the exploration phase of the USI Teacher Education program: Education 198 (Introduction to Education), Education 201/202 (Educational Psychology for Elementary/Secondary Education), Education 214 (Technology in Education), and Education 294 (Foundations of Education). Three of these classes (Education 198, 201, and 294) include mandatory assignments that are part of the admission requirements for the program. Students will be required to complete all of the coursework for these exploration classes and receive a C or better in order to gain admission to the program as an elementary or secondary education major. Elementary program admission also requires that an admission packet be completed, which includes (1) Praxis I scores, (2) grade verification for overall and specific course performances, (4) speech and hearing evaluation, (5) acceptable field experience reports from exploration coursework, (6) exploration phase artifacts for each of the three required courses, a recommendation from the department, and finally (8) acceptable dispositional evaluations from exploration coursework (Department of Teacher Education, 2000; Assessment Meeting Notes, November 14, 2000). Secondary program admission

requirements differ based on the expectations of the major department, but include (1) Praxis I scores, (2) grade verification for overall and specific course performances, (4) speech and hearing evaluation, (5) acceptable field experience reports from exploration coursework, (6) exploration phase artifacts for each of the three required courses, a recommendation from the department, and finally (8) acceptable dispositional evaluations from exploration coursework.

As part of the University of Southern Indiana's effort to align its curriculum with both state and national standards regarding preservice teacher education, the department implemented the use of dispositional statements as one criterion for use in the admission to teacher education process. This decision was made based on the current trends in teacher education to enhance preservice teachers' knowledge, skills, and awareness of both state and national standards. Of greater importance in initiating this program was the feedback received by department stakeholders, like those teachers and administrators who participate with Teacher Education students in field experience and student teaching placements. These stakeholders challenged that students involved in these experiences seemed to have strength in their awareness of the information required to be teachers, and that most had strength in the affective requirements of being a teacher. However, stakeholders suggested that dispositional statements be implemented to ensure that all students were aware early in their programming of the necessary affective and emotional requirements of becoming a successful teacher.

Dispositional Statements

A number of institutions of higher education have been utilizing dispositional statements as a practice to improving preservice teachers' knowledge of field standards (Mok, 1999; Stout-Harris, Hasler, & Coughlin, 2000). As expectations placed on American teachers continues to diversity, so do the students and communities that they service (Weiss, 1999). In order for preservice teachers to fulfill the needs of today's American schools, they must begin to reflect upon their own educations and its implications for who they are as individuals, community members, and professionals.

In addition to knowledge about the INTASC and IPSB standards, it is believed that using dispositional statements during teacher education programs can assist teacher educators in identifying, exploring, and remediating student issues. Often, preservice teacher programs require that students take responsibility for their own educations and professional growth, with the understanding that such involvement improves academic performance and increases awareness of interpersonal behaviors (Stout-Harris, Hasler, & Coughlin, 2000).

Moreover, educators have become increasingly frustrated with standard and normative evaluation practices, which are typically used to identify teacher abilities and effectiveness (Weiss & Weiss, 1997). As performance-based and mastery-oriented approaches to assessment have become more familiar in our schools, so are they too becoming the norm in our teacher education programs.

Similar trends also can be seen as the performance-based licensing standards for new teachers have been accepted by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) (Weiss & Weiss, 1993). Familiarizing preservice teachers with the standards that will be used to assess them as professionals is sound practice, and programs like the Teacher Education program at the University of Southern Indiana are working to incorporate such standards with their program models. The current zeitgeist surrounding professional development in education suggests that performance-based standards for evaluation, peer evaluation, and dispositional statements will become the norm in improving preservice teacher practice and teacher preparation (Saye, 1998).

Dispositional statements can be used as a form of dialogue between faculty and students that can guide teachers' identification of issues in their practice. These interactions can assist preservice teachers in not only understanding their own behaviors, but also recognizing the importance of reflective practice in the field of education (Palmer, 1998). Reflection, dialogue, and inquiry were found to facilitate faculty and preservice teachers' efforts to resolve concerning behaviors and beliefs regarding the profession (Palmer, 1998). Other studies have found similar support for the use of dispositional statements to improve preservice teacher professional development (Palmer and Sherman, 1996), affective development (Kauffman & Burbach, 1997), and communication skills (Harris and others, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The current study sought to examine the efficacy of performance-based assessment in the preparation of teachers. Specifically, the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Southern Indiana initiated preliminary analyses that would identify the effectiveness of a dispositional system in tracking and mediating problem behaviors with undergraduate teacher education students. Predictors were restricted to a limited set of exploratory variables; including age, sex, years in school, grade point average, major, and credit hours. It was expected that individual characteristics like those above, when reviewed in conjunction with course variables and placement in the program, would show differences in the efficacy of the dispositional system in identifying and remediating student issues.

Methods

Data Collection

Data collection took place during the fall of 2000. Participants included those students in exploration phase courses, which are primarily taken during the Sophomore and Junior years of programming. All students of interest were elementary and secondary teacher education students enrolled in sections of Introduction to Education (Education 198 – 6 sections), Introduction to Educational Psychology (Education 201 – 5 sections; Education 202 – 2 sections), and Foundations of Education (Education 294 – 2 sections). 557 students participated in the present study.

Each data record of the dispositional database includes demographic information, the nature of the student's problematic classroom/course behaviors, the dispositional incident, and whether or not the behaviors of the individual were remedied following the dispositional intervention. Four primary pieces of information were included in each data record: (a) narrative information taken from the dispositional interview between the course instructor and the student, (b) the Dispositional Checklist performed at the midsemester (University of Southern Indiana, 2000a), (c) the Dispositional Checklist performed at the end of the semester (University of Southern Indiana, 2000b), and (d) demographic information on the student.

Measures

Demographic Factors

Demographic information was obtained from the university's Student Information System (SIS, University of Southern Indiana, 2000), which accumulates information on students during their coursework at the university. Information obtained included students' age, sex, level of education, major, grade point average, and credit hours. Of the 1263 undergraduate students who could have participated in the present analysis, students of interest were those in the exploration courses during the fall of 2000 semester ($n = 557$).

Age. Age was classified by the student's records upon entering as a university student.

Sex. Sex of the student was classified as being either male or female.

Level of education. Level of education was identified from information taken from the Student Information System (SIS, University of Southern Indiana, 2000). Level of education

was divided based on the following 4 types: (1) First year student, (2) Sophomore student, (3) Junior student, (4) Senior student.

Major. The students' major was identified from information taken from the Student Information System (SIS, University of Southern Indiana, 2000). Major of choice was divided based on the following types: (1) elementary education, (2) art teaching, (3) business teaching, (4) biological teaching, (5) chemistry teaching, (6) dental hygiene education, (7) early childhood education, (8) English teaching, (9) earth space science teaching, (10) Spanish teaching, (11) German teaching, (12) general science teaching, (13) math teaching, (14) pre-dental hygiene education, (15) physical education teaching, (16) physics teaching, (17) radio/television teaching, (18) science teaching, (19) speech/communications/theatre teaching, (20) social science teaching, and (21) visual arts teaching.

Grade point average. Grade point average was identified from information taken from the Student Information System (SIS, University of Southern Indiana, 2000). The student's grade point average included all coursework taken at the university prior to the fall of 2000 semester.

Credit hours. Students' credit hours were identified from information taken from the Student Information System (SIS, University of Southern Indiana, 2000). The student's credit hours included all coursework taken at the university and hours transferred into the university prior to the fall of 2000 semester.

Participants

Records from 557 undergraduate teacher education students were analyzed for the present study. 42 of these 557 students were given unfavorable dispositional statements during their participation with coursework during the fall of 2000. As the majority of the university's teacher education students are elementary education majors ($n = 792$), the sampling of students in programs other than elementary education are believed to be limited. However, because the review for the present study is exploratory in nature, the entire dispositional database was used. Students in the dispositional database ranged from 19 years old to 32 years old, with a median age of 20 years old. It was expected that there were a greater preponderance of younger college students, as a result of sampling from the exploration phase of the program.

Correlation

Strong correlations were obtained between developmental variables (age and year in school $r = .52$, $\text{sig} = .00$; age and credit hours obtained $r = .71$, $\text{sig} = .00$). Strong correlations were also discovered between credit hours obtained and grade point average ($r = .52$, $\text{sig} = .00$), with students with higher hours earned showing higher grade point averages. If students received dispositional checklists with concerns more than once in the semester, correlations existed between the reasons given at each time during the semester ($r = .62$, $\text{sig} = .00$). Finally, a student's major was correlated with their grade point average ($r = -.45$, $\text{sig} = .01$, with elementary educators showing higher grade points than all secondary educators combined).

Preliminary Analyses Regarding the Use of Dispositional Checklists

Preliminary analyses were performed to examine information on the sample of teacher education students. 19 males and 23 females were analyzed from the dispositional records for the present study. Preliminary analyses using the chi-square statistic were performed between the reason for the dispositional checklist and the student's age, gender, level of education, and major.

Age. Significant differences were identified between the age of the student and the identified reason for the dispositional review ($\text{Chi-square} (4) = 98.00$, $\text{sig} = .00$). Frequencies

for dispositional reviews were higher in younger students (ages 18 years – 20 years) than for other students (ages 21 years - 23 years) in school. 50% of all dispositions written were performed for students younger than 20 years of age. Frequencies for professional development dispositions (e.g., poor participation with coursework, sleeping during class, attendance issues, tardiness) were greater in younger students, while affective development (e.g., trouble accepting constructive criticism) were higher in older students (students age 21 years and above).

Sex. Significant differences were not identified between the sex of the student and the identified reason for the dispositional review ($\chi^2(1) = 8.49, sig = .54$). Frequencies for male and female students characterized as having difficulty with attendance were very similar. However, subtle differences did exist between the sexes. Males were much more likely to be considered to have difficulty with taking personal responsibility for actions, having poor writing skills, and having poor organization of writing. Females were more likely to be identified as having difficulty with turning in assignments late, and having limited reflective ability.

Level of education. Significant differences were identified between the student’s level of education and the identified reason for the dispositional review ($\chi^2(4) = 32.74, sig = .00$). Frequencies for dispositional reviews were higher in first and second semester sophomore students than for other students in school. 50% of all dispositions written were performed for students with less than 48 hours or less. Frequencies for professional development dispositions (e.g., poor participation with coursework, sleeping during class, attendance issues, tardiness) were greater in younger students, while affective development (e.g., trouble accepting constructive criticism) were higher in older students (students age 21 years and above) (see Table 1).

Table 1
Frequency of Dispositional Checklists Based on Students’ Year in School

Year In School	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
2 nd Semester Freshman	5 students	11.1	11.9
1 st Semester Sophomore	8 students	17.8	31.0
2 nd Semester Sophomore	8 students	17.8	50.0
1 st Semester Junior	5 students	11.1	61.9
2 nd Semester Junior	6 students	13.3	76.2
1 st Semester Senior	5 students	11.1	88.1
Second Semester Senior	5 students	11.1	100

Major. Significant differences were identified between the major of the student and the identified reason for the dispositional review ($\chi^2(1) = 61.20, sig = .00$). Frequencies for elementary education students and secondary education students were not similar. This may have been the result of sampling an greater preponderance of elementary education majors. However, in examining the reasons given for the dispositional checklist, physical education students were more likely to have problems with communication skills (specifically with poor writing skills), secondary education students were more likely to have problems with affective development (specifically trouble accepting constructive criticism), and elementary students were more likely than others to be identified as having a professional development complication (specifically trouble with attendance).

STUDY TWO

Efficacy of the Dispositional System in Tracking and Mediating Problem Behaviors

The hypothesis examined in the present study was whether a dispositional system in tracking and mediating problem behaviors with undergraduate teacher education students would effectively assist in remediating students. Data collection took place during the fall and spring of 2000. Participants included those students who had been identified during the fall semester as having problems with a dispositional area during an exploration phase course. All students of interest were elementary and secondary teacher education students enrolled in sections of Introduction to Education (Education 198 – 6 sections), Introduction to Educational Psychology (Education 201 – 5 sections, Education 202 – 2 sections), and Foundations of Education (Education 294 – 2 sections). 557 students participated in the present study.

Each data record of the dispositional database includes demographic information, the nature of the student's problematic classroom/course behaviors, the dispositional incident, whether or not the behaviors of the individual were remedied following the dispositional intervention, and whether similar concerns were in evidence during coursework the following semester.

In order to perform the longitudinal component of the present study, 221 letters were sent out to the professors of students who had been identified during the fall semester to have dispositional concerns. 215 letters were returned. Of the 215 letters 15 raised concerns about 11 students.

Consistency between semesters. A strength of the dispositional statements was found in their ability to show dispositional concerns across semesters as well as across instructors. Of the 15 problematic student dispositional reviews, other instructors had identified all 15 during the fall semester for similar dispositional concerns. Efficacy of remediation during fall semester. Out of the 42 students identified during the fall semester, only 11 continued to have concerns during the spring, a reduction of 73%. During the fall semester, the only remediation performed was that instructors were expected to meet with identified students, discuss dispositional concerns, and create a dispositional plan for remediation of concerns. Each of the 18 instructors involved indicated that they had met with students and had created a dispositional plan at the midterm. 69% of the dispositional concerns were remedied by the end of the semester. Of those 31% (n = 11 of 41 students) of students who had been identified by their fall instructors as continuing to have dispositional concerns, all but two continued to show the same dispositional concerns in the spring. Thus, it would seem that without remediation being shown by the end of the semester in which the dispositional concern is identified, the student would continue to display this behavior in future semesters.

Efficacy of remediation during spring semester. Out of the 11 students who were identified as continuing to have dispositional concerns at the end of the fall semester, only 3 continued to have concerns following the spring semester, again a reduction of 73%. The same remediation scenario that was completed in the fall also was used during the spring. Each of the 8 instructors involved indicated that they had met with students and had created a dispositional plan at the midterm.

Only 25% of the dispositional concerns were remedied by the end of the semester. However, the concerns that were not remedied were those that would require a longer period of time than one semester (e.g. – poor writing skills, limited reflective ability, poor penmanship). The instructors who participated in remediation with these students suggested that more needed to be done with these students than just meeting with them and identifying a plan for remediation. One instructor suggested:

The level of difficulty that this student had was significant. To simply meet with him over a 30-minute period and expect that the problem would be rectified is not adequate. This student was absent a total of 3 out of the first 7 weeks of my class. This is a problem that isn't going to change after I sit down with him and give him a stern lecture. I think it will take this student failing my class and needing to have some "tough love" before he understands that his behavior is neither professional nor acceptable in this department (Professor X, individual interview, 2001).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to initiate preliminary analyses that would identify the effectiveness of a dispositional system in tracking and mediating problem behaviors with undergraduate teacher education students. The results of this study suggest that disposition checklists do provide students and faculty with information that assists them in remediating negative or maladaptive behaviors that inhibit their performance as educational professionals. Disposition checklists also appeared to remediate these behaviors within a relatively small amount of time (average of one semester). It would appear advantageous for the Department of Teacher Education to continue to utilize a dispositional system and continue to track those students who have concerns with professional development, affective development, or communication skills.

The strength of this method in relation to IPSB and INTASC review is evident. In working with the dispositional system, the Department of Teacher Education was able to identify 41 students who had concerns in a variety of professional areas and successfully rectify concerns with 4 out of 5 of these students within 1 semester. Within 1 year of detection of the problems using the dispositional forms, the department reached nearly perfect remediation of these concerns.

It would appear that the only limitation in using dispositional checklists occurred when students did not see the seriousness of their behaviors. In those instances where student behaviors were not rectified within 1 semester, alternative approaches may be deemed necessary at the end of the semester. Suggestions for future use of dispositional concerns would be to inform students at the time of the first dispositional meeting that future instructors might be notified of their dispositional difficulties if they are unable to remedy them within the span of that semester.

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Appendix A

Reflective Teacher Model and Objectives for Exploration Coursework

CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE OF SELF

Exploration coursework will support candidates' reflection upon their belief systems. By the end of exploration coursework, the candidate will:

1. Recognize that the field of education requires professional commitment and responsibility.
2. Identify that teachers actively seek out opportunities to grow professionally.

3. Present herself professionally, in keeping with the school environment and the standards of the community.
4. Understand that teachers are reflective practitioners who continually evaluate the effects of their choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community)
5. Express herself clearly and correctly in speech and writing.
6. Identify (social, emotional, physical, and cognitive) developmental aspects of students.
7. Communicate effectively with students from diverse backgrounds.

CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE OF STUDENTS

Exploration coursework will support the construction of candidates' understanding about the importance of development, prior experiences, cultural diversity, learning theories, values, classroom management, traditional and nontraditional forms of evaluation, and the use of technology. By the end of exploration coursework, the candidate will:

1. Describe how children learn and develop.
2. Identify the importance of adapting instructions for individual needs.
3. Identify how students differ in their approaches to learning.
4. Understand how educators should provide learning opportunities that support students' intellectual, social, and personal development.

CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE OF SCHOOLS

Exploration coursework will support candidates' development of positive, professional relationships with children and adolescents, peers, parents, administrators, and the community. By the end of exploration coursework, the candidate will:

1. Identify characteristic features of the institution of school in the United States.
2. Describe features of the ways in which school (and teaching) have evolved in the United States.
3. Articulate multiple functions of school in its interactions with families and the community.
4. Recognize that effective teachers create instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.
5. Recognize that effective teachers use individual and group motivation to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.