



Developing and Nurturing Professional Teaching Dispositions for First Year Students in the Bahrain Teachers College

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Abstract: Other than content and the pedagogical knowledge and skills, many successful teacher education programs around the world have identified professional dispositions as essential in assessing the effectiveness of their teacher candidates. Best practices in teacher education demand that teacher candidates must acquire a set of positive professional dispositions before being licensed. Moreover, demonstrating evidence to address professional teaching dispositions in teacher preparation programs has become a requirement for accreditation. For example, the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) in the USA requires that in-service teachers obtain positive dispositions along with content and pedagogical knowledge. Ample research in the field of teacher education concluded that effective teachers and teacher candidates need to develop positive professional teaching dispositions. This study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of an intensive mentoring program on developing and nurturing dispositions for teacher candidates at Bahrain Teachers College. Twenty-four students who participated in the study were divided into two groups; experimental and control group. A paired t-test revealed significant improvement in dispositions between the pre-, and post-test results for the experiment group. The study also concluded that dispositions can be developed through coursework. This study offers suggestions and recommendations of useful strategies that help teacher candidates to cultivate positive professional teaching dispositions.

Keywords: Disposition, teacher education, pre-service teachers.

Introduction

Teacher education programs have identified the following essential areas to assess the competency of teacher candidates: (1) content knowledge of the disciplines in which they are teaching and (2) knowledge and skills of the pedagogical aspects of the teaching profession. In addition to these knowledge and skills, researchers in teacher education strongly argue that effective teachers and teacher candidates must acquire professional teaching dispositions.

Diez (2007), pointed out that Kate and Rath (1985) addressed the issue of dispositions in response to a teacher who punishes a student by refusing to re-explain a concept to him because he wasn't paying attention. They wrote:

Whether or not he used the skill of explaining would not change the fact that he has mastery of it, but whether or not he used the skill would affect the disposition attributed to him. If, on the other hand, on most occasions of such request, the teacher is helpful and encouraging,



providing clarification and assistance, then the teacher can be said to possess not only the requisite skills for teaching, but also the disposition to use these skills. (p. 301)

Along the same lines of thought, Talbert-Johnson, C. (2006) says “it is essential that candidates possess more than pedagogical knowledge but also the essential dispositions to affirm and embrace all students.”

What are teaching dispositions?

Teaching dispositions are attitudes, behaviors and beliefs that are grounded in moral values and manifested in caring, fair-mindedness, honesty and social justice. Over the years professional teaching dispositions have been defined in a number of ways. A recognized description is attributed to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). In its online “Glossary Additions and Edits” dated March 2006, NCATE provided the following definition:

Professional Dispositions: The behaviors demonstrated as educators interact with students, families, colleagues and communities, which are expected of professionals and support student learning and development. NCATE expects candidates to demonstrate classroom behaviors that are consistent with the ideas of fairness and the belief that all students can learn. Based on their mission, professional education units may determine additional professional dispositions they want candidates to develop. NCATE expects institutions to assess professional dispositions based on observable behavior in educational settings. (NCATE, 2006)

For teachers and teacher candidates’ dispositions to be at their appropriate levels, the NCATE argues that the following conditions must exist:

“[1] Candidates work with students, families, colleagues, and communities in ways that reflect professional dispositions as delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards. [2] Candidates demonstrate classroom behaviors that create

a caring, supportive learning environment and encourage students’ self-learning. Candidates recognize when their own professional dispositions must be adjusted and which plans must be developed.” (NCATE, 2008)

While the interest in assessing teacher dispositions is not new, Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) argued that as the result of “the national spotlight on teacher quality and increasing pressures from political and business concerns, it appears that dispositions of effective teachers will become of even greater interest.” In her famous work to enhance professional practice, “The Framework for Teaching”, Danielson (2007) addressed the issue of dispositions. Likewise, in the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, Marzano (2011) identified and explained significant dispositions attributes. Dispositions have also received special attention from the Council of Chief State School Officers in its Standards of Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC, 2013). “..... A key component of these standards is the reference to teachers’ responsibilities to promote equitable practices for all students, regardless of their ethnicity, race, language, socioeconomic status, and/or functioning level” (Irvine, 2003). Reflecting on how teachers can nurture students’ dispositions to seek knowledge and understanding, Lilian Katz (2010) stated:

If we want our children to grow up to become responsible participants in a democracy, the disposition to seek understanding of the complex issues and decisions for which we all share responsibility should be a major goal of education at every level, including at the preschool level.

Besides the endeavoring to graduate qualified effective teachers, teacher education programs are obliged by external accreditation requirements to assess teachers’ dispositions. Almerico, et.al. (2011) pointed out that “teacher education programs have been charged with the responsibility of assessing more than their candidates knowledge and skills in teaching”. However, because dispositions are grounded in the theory of moral education, not paying appropriate attention to moral



and ethical aspects is counterproductive, argued (Schwartz, 2008 in Osguthorpe, 2013)
Why we need teachers with good dispositions.

There is a large body of research that presents a robust rationale that effective classroom teachers should possess positive professional dispositions and moral character so that they may positively influence their students. "Recently it has become clear that the quality of the education that our children receive depends directly upon the quality of the teachers in our schools. Parents, teachers, educators, and researchers agree that effective teaching happens when the teachers thoroughly know their subjects, have significant teaching skills, and possess dispositions that foster growth and learning in students" (Wasicsko, 2002, in Yturriago, J. and Garcia, A. 2012). Along the same lines, Osguthorpe (2008) argues that positive teacher dispositions and good moral character is a predictor of well morally developed students. He states that "... a purported reason for wanting teachers of good disposition and moral character in the classroom is that teachers act as moral exemplars and models, which in turn is believed to have a direct effect on the moral development of students." (p. 288). Academic optimism is also connected to dispositions of effective teachers. Academic optimism "encompasses a teacher's belief that he or she can make a difference in the academic performance of students, academic emphasis, and trust between the teacher and the family" (Shepherd and Linn, 2015, p. 82). The best way for a teacher to promote fairness in classrooms is to lead the way themselves and be fair and just. It has been attributed to Aristotle that young children acquire virtue by being around virtuous people.

However, it is important to note that students don't learn manners in the same way they learn subjects, such as physics or biology, rather they pick them up through interactions with virtuous teachers who exhibit them. "[Dispositions] become visible via the practice of teaching as a modifier to methods-displayed in a teacher's manner" (Osguthorpe, 2008, p. 297). Obviously, teachers who don't possess virtuous traits and

dispositions will be unable to exhibit them in classrooms and consequently deprive students of the opportunity to enhance their moral development. Many researchers claim that teachers' attitudes, values, and beliefs about students, strongly impact students, learning and development, (Collinson, et. al., 1999 and Combs, 1974 in Taylor, R., & Wasicsko, M., 2000). It is insufficient for a teacher to acquire content knowledge and pedagogical skills to be effective in a classroom. Schulte, Edick, Edwards, and Mackiel (2004) highlight that by saying "one of the most difficult situations faced by teacher educators is interacting with teacher candidates who meet the requirements of content knowledge and pedagogical skills, yet lack the dispositions essential to effective teaching" in (Johnston, P. 2011, pp. 392-393).

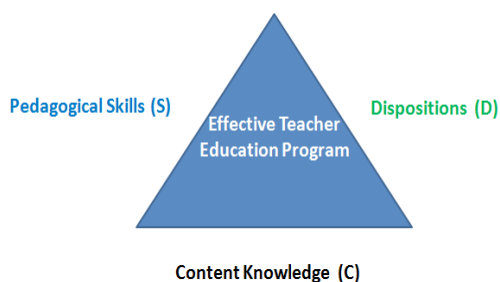
Rationale of the study

This study examined the significance of developing and nurturing teaching dispositions for first year students at Bahrain Teachers College (BTC). Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) is the only and sole provider of teacher education in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The college was established in 2008 as a key educational reform initiative as outlined in the Kingdom's economic and social 2030 vision. BTC primarily provides a Bachelor of Education degree for pre-service teacher candidates. However, to serve the need of teacher professional development in Bahrain, the college also offers a post graduate diploma in education as well as formal training and professional development for K-12 in-service teachers.

This study provides a road map for BTC to systematically incorporate teacher dispositions in the curriculum. It recommends strategies to develop and nurture professional teaching dispositions. A number of research studies confirmed that pre-service as well as in-service teachers can benefit significantly from training programs that are designed to change and improve teaching dispositions. Powers (1999) in Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) "suggested that pre-service teachers could be placed in situations that bring them into social contact with others exhibiting appropriate dispositions." Pre-

service teachers at the University of North Iowa in the United States of America are required to take a Human Relation Training course as part of their teacher practice program. The training includes discussions about professional teacher dispositions (Stahlhut & Hawkes, 1994).

Another important aspect of this study is its direct contribution to the accreditation requirements of the teacher education program at BTC. A highly revered and effective teacher training program that can successfully gain national and international accreditation must provide evidence of systematic assessment for teaching dispositions. Since BTC is in the middle of the national accreditation process as part of the University of Bahrain, this study comes at an appropriate time to fill the gap in the required professional teaching disposition. This can be illustrated with the following diagram:



Research Questions

This study answers the following research questions:

- 1- Are there significant differences between the pre- and post-tests in students' dispositions before and after the implementation of the mentoring intervention?
- 2-Why do we need teachers with positive dispositions?
- 3-How should we develop and foster Professional Dispositions?

Methodology

To address the above research questions, the study employed a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Elmahdi (2003)

argued that “The combined use of different data collection methods is one form of triangulation that strengthens the credibility of the data and provides the researcher with a holistic view of the phenomenon under study” (p. 83). The primary data was collected using an adopted instrument that employs Likert Scale. The secondary data is qualitative in nature which consists of the researcher’s comments about his observation of the participants’ attitudes and behavior of conduct during a teacher practice experience as well as in classrooms over two semesters. In support of employing direct observation, Jersild and Meigs (1939) argued that “Direct observation is the oldest, and remains the commonest, instrument of scientific research” (P. 472).

The instrument employed in this study was adopted from the University of Tampa in the United States. After extensive research and study of a number of instruments that assess dispositions by a variety of best teacher education programs, the researcher found that the Tampa University’s instrument is suitable for BTC’s context and decided to adopt it. Permission from the creator of the instrument (Dr. Gina Almerico) was secured along with the procedures that she followed to identify dispositions and to build and validate the instrument. The Instrument consisted of 9 indicators of dispositions, each consisting of a number of descriptions. This instrument was framed in light of three important American educational big studies: (1) The Framework for Teaching by Charlotte Danielson; (2) The Marzano’s Casual Teacher Evaluation Model; and (3) Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Model Core Teaching Standards: A Resource for State Dialogue. The researcher translated the instrument into the Arabic and validated the translation with the help of an expert.

Participants and sampling

The sample consisted of 24 students in year one at BTC. They were randomly selected and randomly assigned into two groups (experimental and control). Each group consisted of 12 participants and all of them



participated in a pre-, and post-self-assessment survey using the Tampa's instrument. During their Teacher Practice experience, which lasted for one month, the experimental group went through intensive training activity on teacher dispositions. The training was designed to build awareness and understanding of the concept of dispositions and the importance of dispositions in shaping effective teaching. It includes presentations, videos, discussions and document analysis. The training also involved modeling of positive teacher dispositions during training and the teacher practice experience.

Primary Data Instrument

In both groups the participants self-assessed themselves twice (pre- and post-intervention) using the Tampa University's instrument. The instrument has nine dispositions categories; each category associated with a number of indicators. The dispositions indicators were assessed based on the following scale:

- 1 = Emerging: no evidence of understanding and commitment to the disposition
- 2 = Developing: some evidence of understanding and commitment to the disposition
- 3 = Meets Expectation: considerable evidence of understanding and commitment to the disposition
- 4 = Exceeds Expectation: complete evidence of understanding and commitment to the disposition.

The data was tabulated and the means were calculated and arranged into four sets as follows:

- 1. The means of pretests of the control and the treatment groups
- 2. The means of pre- and posttests of treatment group
- 3. The means of pre- and posttests of control group
- 4. The means of posttests of the treatment and the control groups

Secondary Data Instrument (Observations)

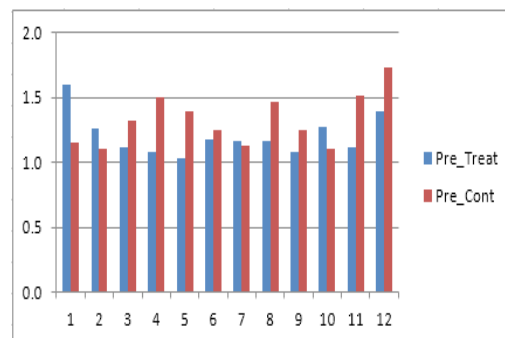
The researcher's observation focused on the following students' behaviors and attitudes indicators:

- 1. Levels of attendance and punctuality
- 2. Levels of preparedness and organization
- 3. Level of respecting other
- 4. Appearance
- 5. Desire to study
- 6. Levels of complains regarding required tasks
- 7. Levels of helping others
- 8. Levels of group cooperation
- 9. Ability express one's selves verbally and in writing

Results

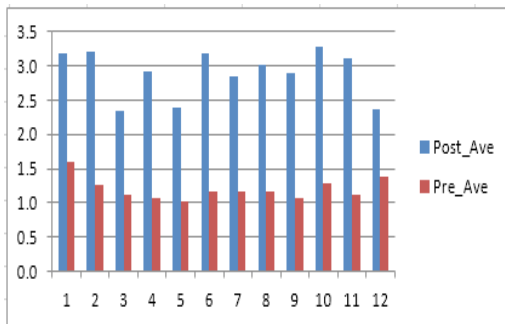
Control and Treatment pretest

A pair sample t-test was conducted to evaluate whether a statistically significant difference existed between the means of students dispositions of the pretest for the control group and the pretest for the treatment group. The results of the paired sample t-test was not statistically significant: $t(11) = 1.8$, $P\text{-value} > .05$ indicating that there wasn't a significant difference in dispositions between the pretest of the control group: ($M=1.35$, $SD=.183$) and the posttest of the treatment group: ($M=1.22$, $SD=.164$).



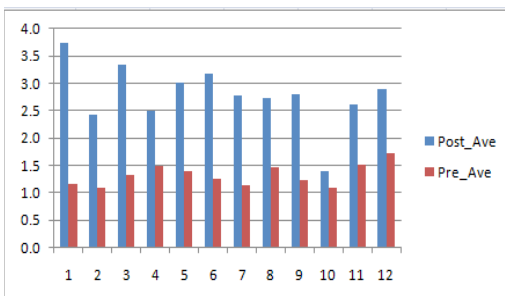
Treatment pre and posttest

A pair sample t-test was conducted to evaluate whether a statistically significant difference existed between the means of students dispositions before and after the intensive training program. The result showed that there was a statistical significant difference between pre- and post-treatment: $t(11) = 17.83$, $P\text{-value} < .05$. This indicates that there was a significant improvement in positive dispositions from the pretest ($M=1.22$, $SD=.164$) to posttest ($M=2.90$, $SD=.349$). The mean increase was 1.68, with 95% confidence interval for the difference between the means of 1.48 to 1.89.



Control Pre and posttest

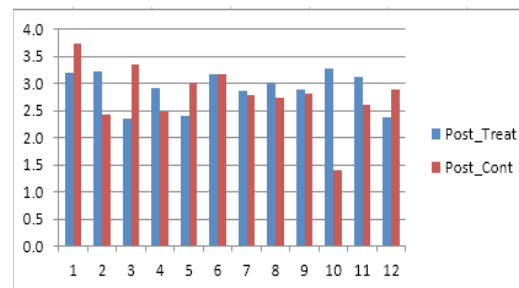
A pair sample t-test was conducted to evaluate whether a statistically significant difference existed between the means of students dispositions in the control group. The result showed that there was a statistical significant difference between pre- and post-treatment: $t(11) = 7.04$, $P\text{-value} < .05$. There was a significant improvement in positive dispositions from the pretest ($M=1.35$, $SD=.183$) to posttest ($M=2.75$, $SD=.635$). The mean increase was 1.40, with 95% confidence interval for the difference between the means of .96 to 1.84.



Although there was a statistical significant improvement in dispositions for the control group between the pre- and post-treatment, it was less compared to the improvement for the treatment group. The improvement in the control group can be attributed to the fact that the students in both groups were exposed indirectly to instructions that positively impacted their dispositions. All students in both groups took the researcher's two courses that have elements that improve dispositions. The courses are (1) Managing the Learning Environment, and (2) Human Rights.

Control and treatment Posttest

A pair sample t-test was conducted to evaluate whether a statistically significant difference existed between the means of students dispositions between the post-test for the control group and the posttest for the treatment group. The result showed that there wasn't a statistical significant difference between pre- and post-treatment: $t(11) = .566$, $P\text{-value} > .05$ indicating that there wasn't a significant difference in dispositions between the control group posttest ($M=2.78$, $SD=.566$) and the treatment group posttest ($M=2.90$, $SD=.349$).



Although there was insignificant difference in dispositions of the control and the treatment groups' posttests, the mean of the treatment group ($M=2.90$, $SD=.349$, $N=12$) was higher than the mean of the control group ($M=2.78$, $SD=.566$, $N=12$), which explains that the treatment impacted the students' dispositions positively.

Observations results

The results of the researcher's observation complemented and triangulated the qualitative



data presented above. Phelps (2006) argues that “the best true measure of appropriate dispositions derives from observing classroom practice” (in Notar, Riley, and Taylor 2009, p. 5). Over a period of two semesters the researcher observed positive progress of dispositions made by the participants in both the experimental as well as control group in most of the observation’s indicators mentioned earlier. However, the improvement in the experimental group is more visible. Moreover, unlike the control group, participants in the experimental group were mindful and conscious about the positive progress they made in dispositions. The researcher argues that it is crucial to make the awareness of dispositions and its connection to effective teaching explicit. Students in teacher education programs need to understand that possessing positive dispositions is a required teaching competency.

The researcher observed positive attitudes and behaviors that manifested in the participants’ interactions with one another in groups as well as with the whole class. The progress in dispositions made by participants was also observed in their punctuality, writings, responding to tasks, working collaboratively in groups and helping each other. However for such positive development in disposition to become observable “it is important to teacher educators to know and understand the dispositions of effective teachers, so as to design experiences that will help to develop these characteristics in students and to help students discover if they have the dispositions to teach” (Taylor & Wasicsko, 2000, p. 2).

Conclusion

This study provides strong evidence that teacher dispositions can be developed and nurtured if they are properly embodied within teacher education programs. Based on this study such improvement in dispositions can be achieved through direct training and/or by embedding in the coursework and in Teacher Practice. Powers, S. (1999) stated that “students might be able to become more aware of and able to adopt appropriate dispositions by being

in situations which bring them into social contact with teachers exhibiting appropriate dispositions” (p. 3). Although it is difficult to accurately assess dispositions, self- assessment combined with the evaluator’s observation is a highly recommended methodology. In this study the quantitative data obtained through self-assessment using a survey and the researcher’s observations go together hand in hand to provide evidence of the improvement in the participants’ dispositions.

The improvement of dispositions of the participants in the control group indicated that they were able to benefit indirectly through course work to possess positive dispositions. At least three courses contributed to that:

1. Managing the Learning Environment
2. Year one Teaching Practice
3. Principles of Human Rights

Therefore, the study concludes that the teacher education program at BTC needs explicitly to create the conditions that help pre-service teachers to possess positive dispositions. Moreover, systematic assessment procedures to measure pre-service teachers’ dispositions are eminently needed. On the one hand, this will enhance BTC’s mission in graduating effective teachers. And on the other hand, it will improve the college accreditation efforts. No doubt, including dispositions as a competency will have a positive appeal to the accrediting agencies. Similar teacher education programs assess dispositions two to three times during the program period.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that teacher dispositions should be added to BTC’s nine competencies which will encourage students to be serious in acquiring this competency. The study also recommending that the Teaching Practice program should require pre-service teachers to observe and reflect on dispositions. Moreover, the study suggests that faculty members in BTC to be trained not only to help students in developing dispositions, but also to have the skills to assess them.



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