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Voices from the Field

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Voices from the Field

Abstract

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Keywords

Professional dispositions, Teacher education, Field experience

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Abstract: This research study sought to determine the impact from participation in a practicum field experience on teacher candidates' perceived professional dispositions for effective teaching. A further intent was to describe what teacher candidates perceived to be the necessary professional dispositions for effective teaching as they reflected on their experiences in their particular preparation contexts. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used to examine and understand the development of dispositions from pre-service teachers' perspectives. The participants consisted of seventeen middle grade undergraduate students who completed over 200 hours of field experience while attending a mid-size university in the Southeastern region of the U.S. The results of a paired-samples t-test showed there was a statistically significant difference on perceived dispositions for effective teaching before practicum experiences and after practicum experiences. From qualitative data analysis, three categories emerged to understand what the pre-service teachers perceived to be professional dispositions for effective teaching: the context for learning, student advocacy, and professional practices. The voices of the seventeen participants in this study provide valuable insights and implications for other teacher education programs who are involved in the planning and development of professional dispositions.

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Voices from the Field

Introduction

William James (1883) once said, “Education is the organization of acquired habits of conduct and tendencies to behaviour” (p. 37). While these words were spoken more than 100 years ago, the noted philosopher captured the important role dispositions play in effective teaching. Both then and now, the development of high-quality effective teachers in the United States (U.S.) is a fundamental aspect of teacher training programs (Thornton, 2013). However more recently, teacher effectiveness as it relates to student outcome has gained equal significance by those who are responsible for the training and development of pre-service teachers; a focus that is due in part to the increased emphasis on accountability (Amobi, 2006). As a result, teacher education programs in the U.S. are now tasked with doing more than preparing pre-service teachers’ knowledge and skills to be effective in the classroom. Today, they must also take into account what disposes pre-service teachers to become effective teachers (Sherman, 2004). As Duplass and Cruz (2010) explained, “Teacher educators are now also called on to assess candidates’ ‘fit’ for the profession on entry, at mid-program, and as they exit the program” (p. 140).

As part of the program approval and accreditation process in the U.S., the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2002), as well as The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) (2012) require evidence of the development and assessment of teacher candidates’ professional dispositions. In fact, both NCATE and INTASC have deemed professional dispositions just as important as subject knowledge and pedagogical skill preparation for teacher candidates (Bond, 2011; Wayda &

Lund, 2005). Recognizing the importance in such judgments, schools of education are working to equitably assess teacher candidates' professional dispositions. In order to do so, those who are responsible for this task must first have a working knowledge of the meaning of dispositions. Yet, studies that have focused on defining dispositions to teach provide little direction for teacher educators invested in disposition development and assessment (Loreman, Earle, Sharma, & Forlin, 2007).

The word disposition is a difficult term to capture due to the fact that multiple meanings and concepts are applied throughout different teacher education programs (Johnson, 2008). For historical purposes, the work of Dewey's (1909) understanding of the moral self, coupled with his writings on the habits of mind (1922, 1933) can serve as a springboard for the plethora of definitions that have been developed. As early as 1993, Katz defined dispositions in terms of observable behavior patterns that are spontaneously exhibited. According to Johnson and Reiman (2007), dispositions are defined as "attributed characteristics of a teacher that represent a trend of a teacher's interpretations, judgments, and actions in ill-structured contexts" (p. 5). Eberly, Rand, and O'Conner (2007) have offered that dispositions can be defined as the propensity to react professionally to specific conditions. Other definitions include professional behaviors, such as principled decisions (Stooksberry, Schussler, & Bercaw, 2009), having a set of virtues (Sockett, 2009), and possessing a moral framework from which to act (Sherman, 2006).

While the literature is clear the word dispositions takes on many different meanings, the complexity of the topic is further exacerbated by the terms or indicators used to describe acceptable behaviors. For example, the indicator such as "demonstrates a caring attitude" is one such example that highlights the fluid nature when considering dispositions. Teacher education programs in the U.S. would likely agree the aforementioned indicator represents a desired

disposition, but the precise behaviors to be manifested often invite more questions, rather than providing clarity. Wasicsko (2002) pointed out that teacher educators have many perceptual differences that can and do affect how precise behaviors are determined because a certain degree of subjectivity occurs when teacher educators rate the terms. One other prominent issue associated with disposition development is related to the assessment of teacher dispositions. Researchers concur that assessment of teacher dispositions must be tied to program goals; however, no one teacher education program in the U.S. is identical to another (Koeppen, & Davison-Jenkins, 2007), and thus, it is difficult to arrive at a norm.

On the other hand, research has identified a strong positive correlation between the dispositions of teachers and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Hochstetler, 2014; Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009). As a result, teacher quality and effective teaching have become an essential focus on the U.S. scene. To this end, the specific role that professional dispositions play as part of effective teaching needs further clarification. More specifically, the need to understand how a practicum field experience provides the optimal learning context for teacher candidates to develop professional dispositions needs further examination. The relevancy for this approach is necessary to the development of quality teachers (Raths, 2007).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine one component of a teacher preparation program – the field experience. Specifically, the study sought to determine the impact from participation in a practicum field experience on teacher candidates' perceived professional dispositions for effective teaching. A further intent of this study was to describe what teacher

candidates perceived to be the necessary professional dispositions for effective teaching as they reflected on their experiences in their particular preparation contexts.

To achieve the purpose, a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used to examine and understand the development of dispositions from pre-service teachers' perspectives. The study was further informed by Mezirow's (1991) Theory of Transformative Learning. Transformative learning can occur when individuals are given the opportunity to challenge preconceived personal beliefs through critical reflection. Because the study was designed to permit pre-service teachers the opportunity to reflect on the necessary professional dispositions for effective teaching while training in the field, transformative learning provided an appropriate framework for the study. Subsequently, the following research questions guided this study: 1) Does experience impact a teacher candidate's perceived dispositions for effective teaching? And 2) What do teacher candidates perceive to be professional dispositions for effective teaching during the course of a practicum experience?

While recognizing the findings of this study may be professionally limited to this researcher's specific teacher education program, valuable insights and implications were gained in terms of what pre-service teachers perceive to be professional dispositions for effective teaching. As a result, the findings of this study are offered for consideration to other teacher education programs who are involved in the planning and development of professional dispositions.

Related Literature

Talbert-Johnson (2006) posits that "...qualified and effective teachers are the most important building blocks for improving student achievement, especially that of at-risk students" (p. 151). These words would suggest that teacher education programs in the U.S. must align their

curriculum and educational experiences to prepare *highly-qualified* and *highly-effective* teachers for today's classrooms. Accordingly, the literature review first provides an examination of the terms *highly-qualified* and *highly-effective* teaching. The literature review then concludes with a focus on the role field experiences play on the development of pre-service teachers' professional dispositions as a foundation for this study.

Highly-Qualified

The term *highly-qualified* has invited much debate and is often confused with the term *highly-effective*. According to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001), *highly-qualified* teachers have obtained full state certification as a teacher, hold a bachelor's degree, and have demonstrated subject-matter competency in each of the academic subjects in which they teach (U. S. Department of Education, 2001). In greater detail, Rice (2003) reported the results from a meta-analysis that reviewed a wide range of empirical studies and found five categories that reflect teacher quality: "teacher experience, teacher preparation programs and degrees, teacher certification, teacher coursework, and teachers' own test scores" (pp. v-vi). From a different perspective, Kennedy (2008) ascertains that teacher quality must first be described as *qualities*; i.e. the specific attributes that can be linked to effective teaching and can be classified into three categories: personal resources, performance, and effectiveness. Kennedy (2008) describes personal resources as the values, personality traits, knowledge, and credentials that effective teachers bring to the classroom with them, while performance describes the day-to-day activities teachers implement in the classroom to improve student learning, and effectiveness refers to the extent that teachers increase students' academic performance.

While the basic requirements for the term *highly-qualified* appear to relate to teachers' content knowledge in conjunction with the coursework that was successfully completed for a

bachelor's degree and licensure certification, there is a paucity of evidence to support that *highly-qualified* teachers translate into *highly-effective* teachers in the classroom (Center for Public Education, 2005). From this stance, it is important to understand the difference.

Highly-Effective

Research has found that *highly-effective* teachers make a substantial difference in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Varlas, 2009). However, the determination of the characteristics to describe a good teacher has prompted many questions and without a consensus on an effective evaluation tool, the debate continues among experts in the field. Goodwin (2010) offers that a *highly-effective* teacher is one who possesses a strong set of skills that include content area knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and cognitive abilities. On the other hand, Stumbo and McWalters (2010) posit that the concept of *highly-effective* is more about what teachers do in terms of student performance. According to Ravitch (2010), it has become commonplace to link teacher performance to student outcomes in the U.S. given the era of high-stakes accountability at both the state and national levels.

For many years, different professional organizations have offered the various skills and attitudes that teachers should possess to be *highly-effective* in the classroom. The National Education Association (NEA) (2010) delineated specific core areas essential to effective teaching. The NEA espouses that *highly-effective* teachers know their subject content, know how to teach their subject content, know their students, and know how their students learn and are responsive. Others have commented on the meaning of *highly-effective* teaching. For example, Roeser, Skinner, Beers, and Jennings (2012) ascertain that *highly-effective* teachers build strong relationships with their students and establish healthy classroom environments for students to gain a sense of belonging. Ripley (2010) explicates that *highly-effective*

teachers possess perseverance and self-satisfaction with their daily lives. Still, Farr (2010) found through countless hours of observational research that good teachers plan purposeful lessons, re-evaluate their instruction on a continual basis, evaluate student learning on an on-going basis, and are fully invested in their students. While these are just a few examples, it is important to underscore that Darling-Hammond (2009) espouses that *highly-effective* teachers possess the ability, skills, and the determination to transform students' lives.

Field-Based Experiences

For many years, even decades, the field experience has been viewed as the rite of passage for student teachers (Ball, 2011). It is perceived to be the critical time for student teachers to transfer the theory, content and pedagogical skills they have acquired through coursework into practice in an actual classroom. Spawned by the ever-increasing diverse challenges teachers face in today's classrooms, coupled with the push to produce *highly-effective* teachers, teacher education programs now provide multiple opportunities for pre-service teachers to enhance their learning through field experiences before entering the semester of student teaching (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Prater & Sileo, 2004). Furthermore, there is an ongoing push to provide extensive field experiences for pre-service teachers during the course of their program of study (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

The literature is replete with the intended benefits that pre-service teachers gain from the field experience. Bodur (2012) documented that the field experience has a positive effect on pre-service teachers' attitudes regarding student diversity. Other studies have found that the field experience offers pre-service teachers a venue to enhance their problem solving abilities (Rozelle & Wilson, 2012), improve content knowledge (Smith & Lennon, 2011), and build empathy and tolerance for ethnically and linguistically diverse students (Mallone, Jones, & Stalling, 2002).

In regards to the development of professional dispositions, the research has shown that dispositions are more likely developed by numerous experiences offered during a pre-service teacher's education program (Burant, Chubbuck, & Whipp, 2007). Such experiences include a combination of coursework, field experience, and strong teacher mentoring (Doppen, 2007). Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, and Cargill (2009) lend support by stating, "Dispositions are environmentally sensitive, meaning they are acquired, supported, or weakened by interactive experiences in an environment with significant adults and peers" (p. 4). For example, Pietsch and Williamson (2010) posit that time spent collaborating and interacting with professional classroom mentors boosts pre-service teachers' professional identity. Additionally, Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, and Fry (2004) found that while tension is often manifested when a student teacher and a mentor teacher have different teaching philosophies, a pre-service teacher's professional identity can be developed through perseverance in a field experience.

Although there is a paucity of literature to support extended time in the field enhances pre-service teachers' dispositions about effective teaching, research has been conducted in this area. Doyle's (1997) seminal study found that pre-service teachers' beliefs regarding effective teaching move from a perception that effective teachers impart knowledge to one whereby effective teachers are actively involved in facilitating knowledge. When given time to interact with mentoring teachers, Doyle (1997) concluded that pre-service teachers' perceptions on effective teaching are influenced from extended time in the field and the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. More recently, Quinn, Pultorak, Young, and McCarthy (2010) found that pre-service teachers acquire strong skills in problem solving and the ability to handle numerous challenges that occur in the classroom due to longer time in the field.

Research conducted on professional development schools (PDS) provide more evidence that greater time in a field experience can be an influence on the development of pre-service teachers' professional dispositions. Professional development schools in the U.S. involve a shared commitment to effective teaching between the university teacher education program and their P-12 partners; pre-service teachers typically spend a year interning in a PDS (Thorton, 2006). Taymans, Tindle, Freund, Ortiz, and Harris (2006) offer that pre-service teachers who intern in a PDS classroom tend to establish student-centered classrooms, interact more with students through small group work, and possess stronger instructional skills. Wait and Warren's (2001) research showed that pre-service teachers who intern in a PDS become efficient instructional planners and as a result, are task efficient. Still, McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, and Robinson (2008) posit that pre-service teachers who intern in a professional development school are more likely to empower their students, develop greater appreciations for socioeconomically-challenged and students with diverse learning needs, and are more inclined to establish student-centered classrooms.

Summary

From a review of literature, it can be summarized that the terms *highly-qualified* and *highly-effective* teachers are not to be confused and are not interchangeable. While *highly-qualified* teachers are generally described in terms of teachers who know the content for which they teach and are frequently measured by completed coursework for a bachelor's degree and licensure certification, the term *highly-effective* is more often associated with teachers who possess a set of skills, attributes, and values that equate to student performance. Additionally, research has shown that pre-service teachers benefit in multiple ways from field experiences; yet, research has found that professional dispositions are more often developed from a combination

of coursework, field experience, and strong teacher mentoring. From a review of literature, research has offered mixed results that greater time in the field produces pre-service teachers with the dispositional attitudes for effective teaching; however, the PDS setting has shown positive results for pre-service teachers' professional development due to the yearlong internship.

Methodology

A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used to examine and understand the development of dispositions from pre-service teachers' perspectives. This design allowed for a combination of both quantitative and qualitative procedures, data collection, and data analysis with pragmatism as the underlying theory of inquiry (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). According to pragmatism, researchers apply methods that are outcome oriented such that "research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 16). In other words, pragmatism permits researchers to select methods that will address the totality of the study to arrive at the most complete answers to the research questions.

Participants and Setting Description

The participants were seventeen (eleven females and six males) middle grade pre-service teachers who were enrolled in Methods Block I for the spring 2015 semester at a mid-size university in the Southeastern region of the U.S. Of the seventeen participants, thirteen students were white, two students were black, and two students were identified as Hispanic. Methods Block I is designed to prepare undergraduate middle grade education majors to teach language arts and social studies for grades six through eight in preparation for certification. In addition, Methods Block I involves a 200 plus hour practicum field experience.

The language arts and social studies portions of Methods Block I each met once a week for three hours during the first nine weeks of the semester and focused on theories of learning, content knowledge, instructional methods, and assessment for teaching language arts and social studies in the classroom. Concurrently, the middle grade pre-service teachers spent over 200 hours in the field that included three mornings each week for the first nine weeks and then moved to the field placement site full time for five weeks. Placements were secured with the university's partnered schools by the field placement director. The Methods I field practicum functions as a totally integrated learning context and provided the pre-service teachers the opportunity to implement the strategies learned in their language arts and social studies methods courses. Specifically, the pre-service teachers planned, instructed, and assessed a two-week integrated language arts/social studies unit to fulfil course and licensure requirements by the state. The field practicum for Methods I offers a context-rich environment to investigate how and why such learning and teaching activities build professional dispositions.

The seventeen participants in this research study were first introduced to the program's professional dispositions during their pre-professional program block, which is the initial coursework in preparation for teacher education. Upon admittance to the undergraduate middle grade program, they were continually taught the professional disposition expectations and were evaluated each semester by their university professors, university field supervisors, and clinical classroom teachers.

Permission to conduct the research was granted by the university's Institutional Research Board (IRB), and in accordance with IRB, the participants were provided an overview of the research focus, a detailed account of their involvement, and consent letters to sign during the first class meeting. While the study focused on the impact from participation in a practicum field

experience on teacher candidates' perceived professional dispositions for effective teaching, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any academic penalty.

Quantitative Instrument

Quantitative data were collected by means of a survey instrument that was administered the first and last weeks of the spring 2015 semester. The survey was developed from the Performance Indicators for Professional Dispositions (PIPD) (Department of Teaching and Learning, 2009) – the actual rubric used by the researcher's teacher education program to assess undergraduates' professional dispositions (see Table 1). The survey consisted of ten positively worded statements that required the seventeen participants to record their perceptions of the necessary dispositions for effective teaching. The response scale ranged from "1" strongly disagree to "5" strongly agree.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data consisted of the seventeen participants' weekly e-reflection journals that were collected for fifteen weeks. Additionally, the researcher conducted observations of each candidate twice during the semester and conducted exit interviews. The exit interviews provided a means for the researcher to clarify responses recorded in the weekly reflections.

Data Analyses

Due to the mixed-methods research design, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed through sequential explanatory procedures. First, the seventeen participants' pre- and post-survey responses of the PIPD were analyzed using SPSS 21 to determine the impact from participation in a practicum field experience on teacher candidates' perceived professional dispositions for effective teaching. Means and standard deviations were calculated and a paired

samples *t-test* was conducted to measure the difference in student responses for individual statements on the PIPD (see Table 1) at the beginning of spring 2015 semester and at the end of the semester.

Table 1. *Performance Indicators for Professional Dispositions*

| | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Effective teachers interact and collaborate with all individuals in an educational environment. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | Effective teachers dress appropriately in all environments. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | Effective teachers are on time. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | Effective teachers complete assignments in a timely and quality manner. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | Effective teacher demonstrate professional conduct. They are prepared, listen to others, active in class discussions, and take initiative. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | Effective teachers use situation-appropriate, standard written English. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | Effective teachers use situation-appropriate, standard oral English. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | Effective teachers demonstrate positive regards for diverse learners, cultures, religions, genders, SES, and other's sexual preference. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | Effective teachers accept and implement constructive feedback. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | Effective teachers exhibit a caring attitude and with-it-ness for the safety, learning, and health of all students. | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Note. The response scale ranged from “1” strongly disagree to “5” strongly agree.

Secondly, a thematic analysis (Leininger, 1985) informed by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) was conducted to analyze what pre-service teachers perceive to be professional dispositions for effective teaching. Throughout the data analysis process, the reflection logs, observation notes, and the exit interviews were reviewed and theoretical notes were made using a

constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to determine what properties were comparatively the same and which properties were different. The researcher categorized data, developed codes, and then refined and renamed the codes as new data was integrated. From data analysis, three categories emerged to understand what pre-service teachers perceive to be professional dispositions for effective teaching.

Research Findings

Quantitative Results

Research Question 1 addressed: *Does experience impact a teacher candidate's perceived dispositions for effective teaching?* The results of the paired-samples t-test show (see Table 2) that survey response scores differ on perceived dispositions before practicum experiences ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .07$ and after practicum experiences ($M = 4.87$, $SD = .24$) at the .05 level of significance ($t = -16.13$, $df = 16$, $n = 17$, $p < .05$, 95% CI for mean difference -1.23 to -.95, $r = -.39$).

Table 2. *Results of Paired Sample t test and Descriptive Statistics for Student Survey Responses*

| <u>Before Practicum</u> | | <u>Post Practicum</u> | | N | 95% CI | r | t | df |
|-------------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|----|------------|------|--------|----|
| M | SD | M | SD | | | | | |
| 3.78 | .07 | 4.87 | .24 | 17 | -1.23,-.95 | -.39 | *-6.13 | 16 |

* $p < .05$

Qualitative Results

Research Question 2 sought to understand: *What do teacher candidates perceive to be professional dispositions for effective teaching during the course of a practicum experience?*

From qualitative data analysis, the findings consistently showed that the seventeen pre-service teachers perceive the context for learning, student advocacy, and professional practices are three important domains or categories that signify the necessary professional dispositions for effective teaching. For purposes of this article, the participants' responses from the weekly reflection journals and exit interviews provide the evidentiary material to support each category. To provide an overview, the qualitative findings are organized by categories and the supporting domains (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Overview of Findings by Categories and Data Sources*

| Findings | Categories |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Context for Learning | Student-centered |
| | Creates positive learning environment |
| | Caring |
| 2. Student Advocates | Respectful |
| | Respects difference of thought |
| | Respects individual differences |
| 3. Professional Practices | Appreciation of students' backgrounds |
| | Differentiates instruction/assessment |
| | Taps into prior learning |
| | Employs multiple strategies |
| | Knows content |
| | Relevant learning to students' lives |

Context for learning. Many participants highlighted the context for learning as an important disposition for effective learning. The majority of the pre-service teachers noted that when their classroom teachers provided a developmentally responsive classroom, it was associated with effective teaching. Words such as “respectful,” “creates a positive learning environment,” “safe,” and “caring” were repeatedly recorded in the pre-service teachers’ reflection logs. The following statements from the participants’ weekly reflection logs illustrate the perceptions the students made.

“I observed that students learn better when the environment is student-centered. This method gives students power in their own education and this is something my teacher does effectively.”

“My teacher effectively organizes her students’ desks in circles. This seating arrangement tells me that her students are the focal point and this illustrates her support for their need to collaborate and interact. I noticed she is more of a facilitator and encourages group interaction.”

“One thing I observed this week that my teacher does effectively is her ability to make everyone feel welcome. I think maybe it’s because she is very approachable and she wants all of her students to know they are important members of the class. She cares about all her students and they know it.”

“While observing her interactions with the students, I saw how she joked with them and kept their respect. In many of the situations where many teachers would have been annoyed, she shifted the situations into laughing matters and carried on. It was obvious to me she has their respect.”

“Being humorous is definitely a connection I made with my teacher this week. I agree that teachers should not be afraid to smile and laugh with their students. It shows students that teachers can relate to them.”

“On Wednesday, I learned about the importance of student feedback. Mrs. Jones (pseudonym) had me grade the student writing summary regarding their thoughts about segregation. I really did not grade the papers, but she had me go through each paper and write down meaningful comments. She told me it was important that students need to know that you care about them and their work and that you are really reading their work and compliment them on their thoughts.”

Student advocates. From data analysis of the participants’ reflection logs, the findings consistently showed that the pre-service teachers perceive effective teachers are classroom

teachers who advocate for their students. The majority of the participants noted in their reflection logs how important it was for every student to feel he/she is a valued member of the classroom.

“One observation I have made about the students in my classroom is that they want to be seen and known and my classroom teacher has established an environment that all voices should be heard. She definitely lets them be known; she encourages dialogue.”

“I have noticed how my teacher is there for his students; he listens and he encourages their opinions. This is something I knew firsthand. I know the good teachers I had always made me feel important.”

“One thing my teacher does effectively is to advocate for her students. She believes in them and they know it. She has established a classroom of communication and created an environment where her students feel safe to express their thoughts.”

“The first thing my classroom teacher spoke to me about is how diverse her classroom is. The students have different learning abilities, cultures, and some are poor and some are wealthy, but my teacher told me that it is the diversity she treasures. I have learned that diversity is a good thing.”

“I love how my teacher engages her students in reading diverse literature. In doing so, she has developed her students’ abilities to discover the commonalities across cultures and learn to respect cultural differences.”

“On Wednesday my teacher took the students to the computer lab so that they could have class time to work on their assignment. My teacher said that whenever you assign projects you want to make sure you allow class time so that the students who don’t have access to technology at home have the same opportunities to complete their assignments as everyone else. I also observed my teacher allows some students to use their cell phones for research. This tells me that she wants all her students to have the same opportunity to learn.”

Professional practices. The findings from data analysis showed the participants perceive effective teachers as those who possess sound professional practices to encourage student learning. Several participants reflected on their teachers’ abilities to build on prior knowledge and personal experiences. Other participants commented on their teachers’ abilities to tailor instruction to students’ interests and learning preferences. Additionally, some participants noted in their reflection logs that effective teachers know their content, employ multiple strategies, and manage their instruction and classroom efficiently.

“This week I observed how important it is to guide students through the learning process. My classroom teacher carefully reviews the previous day’s lesson to give her students time to tell her what they know or what she needs to reteach. I observed how she taps into prior learning so her students can then use that learning to add new learning. I did not fully understand the power of prior learning but it makes sense now that I have had a chance to see it and use it in my own teaching.”

“This week I observed how important it is to know what the current trends are for middle grade students. My teacher keeps up with his students’ popular culture trends and stays connected to them. He feels that building on their interests will be the best thing to engage them in lessons. This is an effective teaching practice that I will adopt. Through my students writing and discussions, I will encourage them to bring any of their experiences into the classroom. I, most definitely, will use technology, books, songs, social media, and etc. in my lessons to keep their attention and to build off their schemas.”

“There are many methods that one can use to stay current with adolescent trends and fads. One method is to watch movies and television shows that are popular with this age group. This will allow you to make references that the students will not only understand, but also find it amazing that you know about. Another method is to tweak cultural references, so that they are relatable to classroom life. This can decrease the tension in the room and lighten the mood. It was suggested that breaking out in a current pop song can get students on track, and even then the students will be shocked that you know the song and how are singing poorly (unless you can sing).”

“On Tuesday my teacher introduced a project which served as a social studies and language arts assessment. My teacher said that project-based learning is an excellent method to permit high level thinking, creativity, give higher-level assessment, and build content knowledge. This particular project required the students to write a letter, taking on the persona of someone living during the Civil War times. She spent the class period reading her example and explaining to the students exactly what they had to do.”

“I am constantly amazed by how well my teacher knows her content. I spend hours developing my lesson plans and I worry that I do not know the content like my teacher. My teacher does not just depend on the textbook; she studies the content using many different sources even though she has taught this subject a long time. I did not realize that to be an effective teacher, I really need to know my content and study my content.”

“One thing I found that my teacher did that was so effective was to teach to her students’ many different learning styles as possible in one lesson. She acknowledges that students learn best when instruction is tailored to fit their learning preferences.”

“This week I observed the important in time management. By that I mean my teacher is so efficient with her instruction. She doesn’t waste a minute. I think this is because she is well-prepared each day and presents her content using meaningful learning activities.”

Discussion

In order to determine the impact from participation in a practicum field experience on teacher candidates' perceived professional dispositions for effective teaching and to describe what teacher candidates perceived to be the necessary professional dispositions for effective teaching, the researcher assumed the field experience and time to reflect would be vital to this study. These assumptions proved to be instrumental to the findings of the study and were formed over the course of a semester during day-to-day classroom activities while the pre-service teachers were in the field.

In response to the first research question, quantitative findings from a paired samples *t*-test showed a difference on perceived professional dispositions did occur over the course of the practicum experience for the seventeen participants. Significant to this finding was the organization of the Methods I practicum that provided the seventeen participants the opportunity (200+ hours) to put into practice the theory, content, and pedagogical skills they perceived to be needed for effective teaching. In addition, the researcher found evidence through the participants' reflective journaling their perceptions of effective teaching did change during their practicum experience. The finding to the first research question is in keeping with other studies of different pre-service teacher populations that found time in a field experience and the opportunity to reflect can influence pre-service teachers' perceptions of effective teaching (Doyle, 1997; McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, & Robinson, 2008).

From analysis of the reflection journals, observation notes, and exit interviews, three categories emerged to describe what pre-service teachers perceive to be the necessary professional dispositions for effective teaching: 1) the context for learning; 2) student advocacy; and 3) professional practices. Significant to the findings for the second research question is that

when given the appropriate guidance and support from classroom and university supervisors, the seventeen participants were able to analyze the attitudes of effective teachers, make personal connections, and identify what effective teaching looks like in practice with a classroom of students. The findings are in keeping with previously conducted studies. The context for learning is consistent with Taymans, Tindle, Freund, Ortiz, and Harris, 2006 who found that pre-service teachers who intern in a PDS establish student-centered classrooms and spend more time interacting with their students with focused small group work. In addition, the seventeen participants perceived that effective teachers are student advocates who respect their students' individual differences and affirm diversity in the classroom. This finding parallels other studies that have shown the field experience affords pre-service teachers the opportunity to build positive attitudes regarding diversity (Bodur, 2012), develop empathy and tolerance for their students (Mallone, Jones, & Stalling, 2002), and develop greater appreciation for socioeconomically-challenged and students with diverse learning needs (McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, and Robinson, 2008). Additionally, the researcher found evidence that the field experience is an effective venue for pre-service teachers to understand that classroom teachers' professional practices are essential for effective teaching. This finding is consistent with prior studies that found the field experience offers pre-service teachers a venue to enhance their problem solving abilities (Rozelle & Wilson, 2012), improve content knowledge (Smith & Lennon, 2011), develop stronger instructional skills (Taymans, Tindle, Freund, Ortiz, & Harris, 2006), and become efficient instructional planners and teachers (Wait & Warren, 2001). Finally, the findings are supported by Mezirow's (1991) Theory of Transformative Learning. This perspective provided insight into how the participants acquired new perspectives on the

necessary professional dispositions for effective teaching by connecting experiences in the field with prior beliefs and by then offering new perspectives through their personal reflections.

Conclusion

Teacher quality and effective teaching have become an essential focus on the U.S. educational scene. As a result, teacher education programs in the U.S. are now tasked with doing more than preparing pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills to be effective in the classroom, but they must consider what disposes pre-service teachers to develop into effective teachers. The implications from this study suggest that teacher preparation programs may need to rethink the important role dispositions play in effective teaching. The voices of the seventeen participants as they chronicled their time in the field point to a need to develop teachers who not only know their discipline-specific content, but employ multiple instructional strategies to meet the needs of all young adolescent learners, create caring respectful learning environments where all students feel safe to learn, and model that diversity of thought is valued. As a result, the findings suggest that this researcher's teacher education program needs more than a simple checklist of professional skills and behaviors to measure when evaluating pre-service teacher dispositions. The voices of the seventeen participants in this study resonate the need to recognize both tangible and intangible attributes for effective teaching that have a significant impact on the classroom.

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