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Assessing Conceptual Orientations in Teacher Education Programs

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Abstract

A well-defined conceptual framework helps identify a program's central tasks, such as helping teachers become intellectual leaders, promoting the primacy of experience and/or developing a progressive social vision in teachers. This type of conceptual clarity provides guidance to teacher educators in program development and evaluation by identifying issues or tasks that specific programs should address (Feiman-Nemser, 1990).

Conceptual orientations research has typically relied on the analyses of course syllabi to infer a program's emphases. The degree to which a program fosters knowledge acquisition in a particular area may or may not conform to these course/program descriptions. Direct data gathered from students can help address the issue of espoused versus enacted curriculum. However, students' voices have been noticeably absent from conceptual orientation research within teacher education programs. This paper describes the instrument development and process for assessing conceptual orientations using a structured questionnaire with student teachers. Qualitative data that was used to help validate the survey as well as the statistical properties that attest to the soundness of the instrument will also be presented. The discussion outlines various applications of the developed instrument and proposes future areas of research.

Introduction

Why is it so challenging to devise effective teacher education programs? Part of the answer lies in the fact that teaching styles and methods continue to be ideologically contested (Hargreaves & Jacka, 1995). Although many preservice programs are based on particular views of what constitutes an effective teacher, there is no single unifying theory of teacher education (Goodlad, 1998; Schwartz, 1996). Theorists and researchers in teacher education disagree about what student teachers need to know, and the best ways to help them develop that knowledge (Jackson & Leroy, 1998).

Differentiating Teacher Education Programs

Teacher education programs are characterized by both structural models and conceptual orientations that influence student teachers' interpretations of effective teaching and learning

(Zeichner, 1993). Structural differences across programs may include various practicum arrangements, cohort grouping of students, as well as differences in the length and duration of preservice course work. Conceptual differences across programs reflect different views of teaching and learning to teach and different orientations to the preparation of teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1990).

Although this paper focuses on conceptual orientations, it is worthwhile to provide a brief overview of structural models. Structural models are tied to particular forms of teacher preparation. Different structural models typically offer students various practicum arrangements within school settings. For student teachers aspiring to secondary teaching, the practicum is designed to integrate themes from courses in social foundations and adolescent psychology with work in a particular high school, providing ongoing support as interns become involved with a growing number of school activities, and to create the first purposeful contact between teaching interns and high school students and parents (Clarke, Dwyer, Glesne, Kostin, Leo, Meyers, & Prue, 1997; Johnson, 1997). The vast majority of reform initiatives in teacher education have focused on altering the practicum component since it is viewed as the most important element within preservice education.

Although effective teacher education programs require adequate time for preservice students in schools, time alone does not guarantee quality. All preservice programs must determine what counts as “knowledge for teaching” and decide how to embody it in a preservice curriculum (Feiman-Nemser, 1990). An important starting point in this regard is the explication of a program’s conceptual orientations. Unlike structural models, conceptual orientations are not tied to particular forms of teacher preparation. Although much research has been devoted to understanding the impact of various structural models, little research has been conducted with the aim of understanding the main conceptual orientations within preservice programs.

Conceptual Orientations in Teacher Education

Conceptual orientations reflect different views of teaching and suggest different approaches to preservice student development. Each conceptual orientation has a particular focus that highlights certain aspects of teaching, learning, and learning to teach; directs attention to a central goal of teacher preparation; and results in particular practices (Feiman-Nemser, 1990). Conceptual orientations can shape a single component of a program or apply to an entire sequence of professional development courses. All teacher education programs reflect all of the major conceptual orientations. It is the degree of emphasis and particular meaning given to the various orientations within particular teacher education programs which give them their identities (Zeichner, 1993).

Both Feiman-Nemser (1990) and Zeichner (1993) have developed frameworks for examining conceptual variations in teacher education programs. Zeichner (1993) called these orientations “traditions of practice” and identified a set of four major categories: (a) academic, (b) social efficacy, (c) developmentalist, and (d) social reconstructionist. Feiman-Nemser (1990) identified a larger set of five major conceptual orientations: (a) academic, (b) practical, (c) technological, (d) personal, and (e) critical/social. Although there is considerable overlap between the two taxonomies, Feiman-Nemser’s (1990) classification scheme seems to be the more comprehensive of the two. Her classification scheme addresses all

the major elements that define teacher education programs, including teacher craft, technique and artistry. The latter elements are subsumed under her practical orientation category and are not explicitly addressed by Zeichner's scheme.

Investigating Conceptual Orientations in Preservice Programs

Determining the conceptual orientation(s) of a particular teacher education program is an important research endeavour. A well-defined conceptual framework helps identify a program's central tasks, such as helping teachers become intellectual leaders, promoting the primacy of experience and/or developing a progressive social vision in all teachers. These core activities "logically and practically belong to the preservice phase of learning to teach" (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 227). This type of conceptual clarity provides guidance to teacher educators in program development and evaluation by identifying issues or tasks that specific programs should address (Feiman-Nemser, 1990).

The bulk of the conceptual orientations research has typically relied on the analyses of course syllabi to infer a program's emphases. The degree to which a program fosters knowledge acquisition in a particular area may or may not conform to these course/program descriptions. Feiman-Nemser (1990) points out that her brief sketches of programs were "based mostly on efforts by faculty to explain, document, and evaluate their own work" and that these descriptions "reflect the espoused, rather than the enacted curriculum" (p. 221).

This study describes a method for studying conceptual orientations using data gathered directly from students to address the issue of espoused versus enacted curriculum. Although students are ideally situated in the daily workings of preservice programs to provide the insights needed to study an ongoing program, their voices have been noticeably absent from conceptual orientation research within teacher education programs. In this study, direct data gathered from students via a structured questionnaire provided a mechanism for studying a program's conceptual makeup in a relatively quick and inexpensive way.

The Study

This paper describes the instrument development and process for assessing conceptual orientations using survey responses from student teachers. The survey was developed and used as part of a larger study of an alternative teacher education program. The larger study investigated an alternative secondary teacher education program emphasizing a "School, Community, and Global Connections" focus, using a mixed-method approach that included interviews, focus groups, field-work and questionnaires. For the purposes of this study, these qualitative measures were used to help validate the results from the survey questionnaire. The next section describes the development of this instrument.

Survey Development

The survey questionnaire was developed on the basis of the conceptual orientations proposed in Feiman-Nemser's 1990 article entitled *Teacher Preparation: Structural and*

Conceptual Alternatives. Feiman-Nemser outlined five main conceptual orientations within this article. The ensuing descriptions are based largely on this article.

Academic Orientation

The academic orientation emphasizes the fact that teaching is primarily concerned with the transmission of knowledge and the development of understanding. This orientation developed out of the liberal arts educational philosophy and focuses on the teacher's role as a scholar and subject-matter specialist. Advocates of the academic orientation write about inducting students into different ways of knowing and thinking, teaching the "structures of the disciplines," and fostering "meaningful" understanding of academic content. Different interpretations of these goals yield different ideas about how particular disciplines should be taught.

The academic orientation views effective teachers as those that have a solid understanding of the subject-matter they teach and the means for transmitting this knowledge. The implication for teacher education is that clear standards are needed to ensure preservice candidates are well versed in their teaching disciplines. This is particularly true at the secondary level where high school teachers are specialized to teach specific courses.

Practical Orientation

Feiman-Nemser's practical orientation focuses on the elements of craft, technique, and artistry that skilful practitioners reveal in their work. This orientation supports the primacy of experience as a source of knowledge of teaching and as a means of learning to teach. In this orientation, a structured repertoire of teaching strategies is seen as having limited practical value given the diversity of classroom situations that a teacher must navigate on a daily basis. Advocates of the practical orientation do not always share the same image of good teaching. They do, however, agree that teachers must be prepared for the localized, uncertain and often conflicting nature of teaching, with its associated demand for personal artistry, adaptability, and invention.

The practical orientation asserts that teachers learn best by teaching. Effective teachers as those that refine their practice by learning from their experiences. Wisdom of practice takes precedence over content knowledge or structured pedagogical practices. The implication is that teacher educators need to highlight the flexibility needed within classrooms.

Technological Orientation

Feiman-Nemser's technological orientation, or what Zeichner (1993) calls the social efficiency tradition, focuses on the knowledge and skills of teaching. The primary goal of teacher education should be to prepare students to carry out the tasks of teaching with proficiency. Learning to teach involves the acquisition of principles and practices derived from the scientific study of teaching. Student teachers must learn generic teacher behaviours and strategies associated with student achievement in order to be effective practitioners. Professional knowledge is essentially procedural knowledge: ways to achieve specific goals and solve familiar problems. Teacher competence is defined in terms of performance. Advocates of this

orientation assert that the future of teaching is dependant on the accumulation and application of scientific knowledge about successful teaching practices.

The technological orientation is primarily concerned with those strategies that have been supported through empirical research. Zeichner (1993) noted that it is precisely this reliance on the scientific study of teaching that has remained the common thread that ties variations of the technological orientation together. It logically follows that effective teachers are those that can utilize these scientifically proven generic teaching behaviors. The implication is that teacher education must stress scientific knowledge and the application of validated principles of practice.

Personal Orientation

Feiman-Nemser's personal orientation places the teacher-learner at the centre of the education process. Learning to teach is a process of learning to understand, develop, and use oneself effectively. Preservice students are encouraged to drive towards self-adequacy and enhancement. That is, the teacher's own personal development is the central part of teacher education. The personal orientation also acknowledges that school children share this basic drive toward self-adequacy and enhancement. Thus, it follows that teaching is less a matter of prescribing and moulding and more a matter of encouraging and assisting. The teacher is a facilitator who creates conditions conducive to learning. Effective teaching is dependant on teachers knowing their students so that they are adept at selecting materials and arranging learning tasks that relate to individual interests, needs, and abilities.

The personal orientation views effective teachers as those that are in tune with the intra- and interpersonal dynamics of teaching. That is, teachers not only need to understand themselves but also the unique qualities of their students if they are to teach effectively. The implication is that teacher educators need to assist students with their personal development. This personal development may take a number of forms such as the psychological shift from being a student to a teacher or finding one's particular style of teaching. Despite these various conceptions of personal development, Feiman-Nemser noted that most proponents of the personal orientation talk about creating an atmosphere in which preservice students feel safe to take risks and discover personal meaning.

Critical/Social Orientation

Feiman-Nemser's critical/social orientation, or what Zeichner (1993) calls the social reconstructionist tradition, combines a progressive social vision with a radical critique of schooling. Although the critical/social orientation advances the view that education can and should help shape a new social order it also recognizes that schools have been instrumental in reinforcing social inequities. Teacher education is envisioned as a larger strategy to create a more just and democratic society. The teacher is both an educator and political activist creating a learning community that promotes democratic values and practices through group problem solving. The critical/social orientation also underscores the dual responsibilities teachers have within the school and community. In the school, teachers participate in curriculum development and policy-making. In the community, teachers work to improve school conditions and educational opportunities through community involvement and political activity.

The critical/social orientation is chiefly concerned with social justice issues. Effective teachers as those that help students foster a critical outlook and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the world in which they live. Feiman-Nemser argued that teacher educators are charged with helping preservice candidates align school practices with the democratic principles of justice and equality. Proponents of this orientation would also argue that teacher educators need to highlight the implications of past and present school practices that have maintained the status quo. The hidden curriculum also becomes an important consideration within the critical/social orientation.

Methodology

This study was conducted at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto within an “alternative” intermediate/senior program. Operating under the main umbrella of the regular intermediate/senior program, students focused their studies within the “School, Community, and Global Connections” theme. Fundamental capacities for teaching and learning, school-based initiatives that connect community and international contexts, and opportunities and challenges of educational reform are emphasized through faculty-based and extended field-based experiences and inquiries.

This paper draws on data from the qualitative investigation (i.e., field-work, focus groups, and interviews) to determine the reliability and validity of the questionnaire designed to assess conceptual orientations. This process allowed for triangulation, that is, research that seeks convergence, corroboration, and correspondence of results across different method types (Jick, 1979).

Questionnaire Instrument

The questionnaire included two major sections: A. Personal Information, and B. Program Emphasis Scales. Section A required students to check off which age bracket they fell within (i.e., 20-25, 26-30, etc.). It also required students to indicate their gender and list their two teachable subjects in the space provided. Section B, the core of the questionnaire, required students to rate a list of 25 statements using a 5-point likert scale, with 1 equal to low and 5 equal to high. Descriptions of the conceptual orientations within Feiman-Nemser’s (1990) article were utilized to devise questionnaire items that were closely related to each orientation. For example, she stated that “the academic orientation is primarily concerned with the transmission of knowledge and the development of understanding” (p.221). This salient feature was used to develop the first academic orientation item: “the program emphasizes teaching preservice candidates to transmit knowledge to students”. Similarly, she noted that “the practical orientation focuses attention on the elements of craft, technique, and artistry that skilful practitioners reveal in their work”. This description was used to develop the first practical orientation item: “the program emphasizes teaching preservice candidates to focus attention on the elements of craft, technique, and artistry that skilful practitioners reveal”. A similar procedure was repeated until five statements were developed to measure each particular orientation. Table 1 lists the five statements that corresponded with each orientation.

This program emphasizes teaching preservice candidates to:

Academic Orientation

1. Transmit knowledge to students.
2. Assume the role of a scholar and intellectual leader.
3. Assume the role of a subject-matter specialist.
4. Induct students into different ways of knowing and thinking.
5. Understand the structures of the disciplines.

Practical Orientation

1. Focus attention on the elements of craft, technique and artistry that skilful practitioners reveal.
2. Deal with unique and ambiguous situations within classrooms.
3. Focus attention on the primacy of experience as a source of knowledge.
4. Adjust to the localized, uncertain and often conflicting nature of teaching.
5. Develop adaptability and invention skills.

Technological Orientation

1. Focus on the knowledge and skills of teaching.
2. Carry out the tasks of teaching with proficiency.
3. Acquire principles and practices derived from the scientific study of teaching.
4. Focus on generic teacher behaviours and strategies associated with student achievement.
5. Develop procedural knowledge: ways to achieve specified goals and solve familiar problems.

Personal Orientation

1. Understand, develop and use oneself effectively.
2. Drive towards self-adequacy and enhancement.
3. Be facilitators that create conditions conducive to learning.
4. Know their students as individuals and allow students to know them as a person.
5. Form classrooms where learning derives from students' interests and takes the form of active, self-directed exploration.

Critical/Social Orientation

1. Develop a progressive social vision.
2. Question taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching, learning, knowledge and schooling.
3. Create classrooms that promote democratic values and equity.
4. Participate in curriculum development and policy-making in schools.
5. Work to improve school conditions and educational opportunities through community involvement and political activity.

Since there were five statements, each particular orientation could receive a mark as high as 25 (i.e., 5 questions * score # 5) or a mark as low as 5 (i.e., 5 questions * score # 1). The questionnaire was rearranged so that items 1, 6, 11, 16, and 21 determined how strongly students felt the *academic* orientation was emphasized within the program. Items 2, 7, 12, 17, and 22 determined how strongly students felt the *practical* orientation was emphasized within the program. Items 3, 8, 13, 18, and 23 determined how strongly students felt the *technological*

orientation was emphasized within the program. Items 4, 9, 14, 19, and 24 determined how strongly students felt the *personal* orientation was emphasized within the program. Lastly, items 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 determined how strongly students felt the *critical/social* orientation was emphasized within the program.

Participants

Forty of the 47 students within the program completed and returned the questionnaire. Thus, the completion rate was approximately 85%. Seven of the students were males (17.5 %) and 33 were females (82.5 %). The composition of the questionnaire participants was very similar to the composition of the program student body.

Data Collection Procedures

Questionnaires were distributed to students in the later part of March 2001, after they had completed their second/final teaching practicum. Students were informed that the aim of the questionnaire was to determine how strongly they felt certain ideas were emphasized within the Alternative III Program. No names were required for the questionnaire and participation was completely voluntary.

Data Analysis

Means and standard deviations were calculated for each item within the questionnaire. These means were then ranked from highest to lowest so that the researcher could distinguish which items were assessed most positively and which elements were assessed most negatively. Means and standard deviations were also calculated for each conceptual orientation. This allowed the researcher to compare the relative weightings of the main conceptual orientations by individuals and the student body as a whole. The above calculations were made using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 10.0.

Results

Scale Structure

An exploratory factor analysis using the principal axis method was conducted on the scales. This procedure uses the intercorrelations among a collection of variables to determine the underlying factors to which the involved variables relate (Anderson & Arsenault, 2000). Results indicated that all five questions for each subscale loaded onto only one factor. Therefore, each of the subscales was one-dimensional. These results indicate that each subscale accurately measured one key concept and suggest that the developed items logically group together.

Reliability

The reliability of the entire questionnaire was high with a coefficient alpha of .89. Reliability coefficients for individual subscales also fell within an acceptable range. The academic subscale had a coefficient alpha of .64. The practical subscale had a coefficient alpha

of .66. The technological subscale had a coefficient alpha of .70. The personal subscale had a coefficient alpha of .71. Lastly, the critical/social subscale had a coefficient alpha of .69.

Interestingly, coefficient alphas tended to rise when one question was dropped from each of the subscales, with the exception of the technological orientation. For example, the alpha score for the academic subscale rises from .64 to .68 if question 16 is deleted. The alpha score for the practical subscale rises from .66 to .73 if question 12 is deleted. The alpha score for the personal subscale rises from .71 to .75 if question 19 is deleted. Lastly, the alpha score for the critical/social subscale rises from .69 to .74 if question 20 is deleted. These results suggest that the questionnaire may be shortened without compromising the integrity of the individual subscales.

Validity

Results from the student questionnaire indicated that students perceived the program as focusing primarily on the critical/social and personal orientations. The average score for the critical/social orientation was 19.05 with a standard deviation of 3.58. The average score for the personal orientation was 18.40 with a standard deviation of 3.26. The average score for the practical orientation was 15.83 with a standard deviation of 3.40. The average score for the technological orientation was 14.50 with a standard deviation of 3.43. Lastly, the average score for the academic orientation was 13.63 with a standard deviation of 3.70.

A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA), completely repeated design indicated that the subscale scores were statistically significant [$F(4,36)=25.6, p<.001$]. Pairwise comparisons among the five conceptual orientations using the Bonferroni test for multiple comparisons revealed that the critical/social and personal orientations were significantly different from the other three orientations at the $p<.05$ level. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the pairwise comparisons among the conceptual orientations. These results indicated that although the academic, practical and technological orientations were partly endorsed, students found the critical/social and personal orientations to be the main focus of the program.

Pairwise Comparisons Among The Conceptual Orientations

Orientation	Orientation	Mean Difference	Standard Error	Significance
Academic	Practical	-2.200*	.533	.002
	Technological	-.875	.440	.539
	Personal	-4.775*	.630	.000
	Critical/Social	-5.425*	.577	.000
Practical	Academic	2.200*	.533	.002
	Technological	1.325	.462	.066
	Personal	-2.575*	.434	.000
	Critical/Social	-3.225*	.414	.000

Technological	Academic	.875	.440	.539
	Practical	-1.325	.462	.066
	Personal	-3.900*	.631	.000
	Critical/Social	-4.550*	.587	.000
Personal	Academic	4.775*	.630	.000
	Practical	2.575*	.434	.000
	Technological	3.900*	.631	.000
	Critical/Social	-.650	.428	1.000
Critical/Social	Academic	5.425*	.577	.000
	Practical	3.225*	.414	.000
	Technological	4.550*	.587	.000
	Personal	.650	.428	1.000

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Qualitative data supported the main findings from the questionnaire subscales. Students who were interviewed repeatedly made reference to issues that are closely aligned with the critical/social orientation. Consider the following answers to the question, “what do you see as the main focus of the program?”

When I read the introduction to the program the first thing I thought was that this is a little different ... that is uh, critical. I want to treat my teacher education in a critical way. And when I saw the words community global connections, I said those are code words for being critical. Because implicit in all these, in connecting those ideas is the criticism of the status quo. So that's what attracted me, and I still really see that as the unwritten objective of the program ... to challenge, interrogate what you're learning.

I think that I was trying to think of was, maybe this open-mindedness and sort of, a place where people encourage each other to embrace values that are beyond what a lot of society is ready to embrace. Um, you know most of the class is against you know homophobic actions, they're against sexist actions.

The prominence of the critical/social orientation is evidenced by the fact that every student interviewed made reference to ideas that were congruent with this orientation when discussing the program.

Focus group transcripts also emphasized the critical/social perspective within the program. Although students were not explicitly asked to comment on the focus of the program, their responses to other questions highlighted the prominence of ideas related to this perspective. While discussing the cohesiveness of the program's student body, one student commented.

I've worked in organizations that had this type of program vision in that they were anti-racist, client centered, attempting to challenge the status quo, attempting to

challenge the envelope. In this program we are encouraged to be critical and reflective of board policies, ministry policies.

Clearly, students' interview and focus group responses indicated that ideas consistent with the critical/social orientation were a distinct focus of the program.

Students also made reference to the constructivist perspective that emphasizes a learner-centered teaching style and is closely related to the personal orientation. Proponents of the personal orientation argue for classrooms where learning derives from students' interests and takes the form of active, self-directed exploration. They also stress concepts such as readiness and personal meaning. The following interview quote echoed similar ideas.

I think it was trying to emphasize the importance of a constructivist approach to learning where learners construct their own knowledge ... to suddenly have a lot of textbooks and quotes to support what I believed was helpful.

In general, students equated the constructivist perspective with a student-centred approach to teaching.

Focus group responses also supported the questionnaire results. Focus group transcripts indicated that the program emphasized ideas congruent with the personal orientation. Consider the response of one student to the question, "Can people help flesh out what is it that makes this program what it is?" In other words, what is the defining feature(s) of this program.

I think part of it is that we have similar interests ... and then having all the classes together we feed off each other's enthusiasm and ideas ... like materials wise too, learning about equity issues and constructivist learning approaches. That all fills in to bring us in this big picture of what we would like to see as education.

Collectively, the critical/social and personal orientations were perceived as the main focuses of the program.

Very few interview or focus group comments were even remotely related to any of the three remaining conceptual orientations. This was not surprising given that the questionnaire results placed the academic, practical and technological orientations at statistically significant lower levels. Field-work also supported this convergence of data. Observations within classes revealed that much of the discussion revolved around radical critiques of schooling, progressive social visions, and a learner-centered teaching style. The instructor who was responsible for teaching the School and Society course, often encouraged students to think critically about concepts such as the "real school," "regular student," "regular curriculum," "applied/academic student," "problem student," and "real subject" and how this affects their thinking and practice. S/he would argue that education is a "multi-level phenomenon" and that there were forces that reinforced/conspired to maintain a regular program. The implication is that some students are not addressed. These shortcomings were often discussed in terms of race, class, and gender. Conversely, the instructor who was responsible for teaching the Educational Psychology course explicitly set up his/her classroom to both model and reinforce the constructivist perspective.

S/he would often discuss a theory of learning which views students as partners in the learning process. Understanding what your students' interests are in relation to your classroom was essential to structuring classroom activities. Ultimately, students should be the center of any classroom.

The two instructors that jointly taught the Teacher Education Seminar course also reinforced the ideas taking place in the other two classes. For example, one instructor discussed the importance of being critical of sources of information teachers utilize in classrooms such as textbooks, Internet, television, and other media sources. The other instructor arranged for a guest speaker to discuss how a teacher could carry out special projects with their students such as writing books on anti-racism, poverty and child labor, as well as outreach work with children and senior citizens in the community.

Student presentations also contributed to perceptions of the program. Students selected workshops on topics such as homophobia, feminist pedagogy, theatre of the oppressed, and aboriginal perspectives in education. These workshops reinforced the perceptions of students in relation to the main focus of the program. Presentations on school councils or evaluation techniques were also discussed in terms of race, class and gender. Thus, all qualitative data sources supported the main results from the questionnaire.

Discussion and Implications

The results of this study clearly indicated that it is possible to assess conceptual orientations through the use of a structured questionnaire. The convergence of data sources as well as the statistical properties of the questionnaire supported the construct validity of the survey instrument. Thus, the survey may be utilized as an important assessment tool in future research. Administrators may use this short 25-item survey to both monitor the orientation of an ongoing program and/or assess its perceived orientation at the end of the program. An administrator could easily use this questionnaire before a mid-year break to assess how closely students' perceptions match the intended purposes of the program. A high degree of incongruity may suggest a need for modifications to the program. An administrator could also use the survey to compare multiple programs within their institution such as the differences that exist between their alternative and traditional programs. If desired, an administrator may use the questionnaire to help bring closer alignment between these programs.

Whether an assessment is conducted during the middle or later stages of a preservice program, the aim is ultimately to improve the program. Patton (1997) argued that improvement-oriented evaluation includes information systems to monitor program efforts and outcomes regularly over time and that the feedback is used to fine-tune an established program. The present assessment instrument provides a vehicle to direct such fine-tuning. Based on the results of the assessment scale, faculty may address gaps between the espoused and enacted curriculum. This type of research data provides an opportunity for practitioners to critically reflect on the perceived effectiveness of their instructional techniques and curriculum. Addressing the congruity between a program's perceived focus and its actual implementation provides an important accountability component.

The assessment measure serves as a mechanism to discuss divergent perspectives among faculty members. In any faculty, beliefs are influenced by various factors - scholarship in content disciplines; wisdom of practice; and research on human development and learning, teaching, and schools as organizational systems (Shulman, 1987). The instrument's subscales aid faculty in openly deliberating the underlying objective of their courses and program. Fradd and Lee (1997) noted that when university faculty possess similar conceptions of teaching, the prospect of delivering a coherent program are multiplied. In this respect, the proposed questionnaire offers faculty a unique means to deliberate their program's purpose and come together around a unified conception of "effective" teaching.

The questionnaire also provides researchers with an effective means for making comparisons across program types and geographical locations. Perhaps particular program models (i.e., field-based programs) tend to emphasize particular conceptual orientations. Similarly, programs in particular states may tend to emphasize particular conceptual orientations.

Conclusion

The question "what should be the central task(s) of a teacher?" is one that continues to occupy the minds of those that prepare our nations teachers for the challenges of 21st century schools. Faculties of education cannot avoid emphasizing certain themes, such as the role of a teacher as an academic scholar or social advocate. In doing so, one can argue that all teacher education programs implicitly address what should be the main responsibilities of teachers. Although there is little consensus on the degree to which certain issues should be emphasized, Feiman-Nemser's taxonomy serves as a useful starting point for making such deliberations. Her classification scheme allows practitioners and researchers a simple and effective way of organizing the underlying themes that drive any particular program. Identification of a program's main conceptual orientations provides guidance to teacher educators in program development and evaluation. The present study suggested that this conceptual clarity could be achieved through the use of a structured questionnaire. In a field that has often lacked conceptual clarity, this type of research tool appears essential.

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