

## Meeting NCATE Disposition Standards: A Study of Processes Used When Evaluating Teacher Candidates

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study was to examine the processes used to assess teacher candidates with respect to dispositional expectations. The study revealed there was a degree of uniformity in the screening process. In addition, the results suggested that institutions were using the results of these evaluations for candidate remediation.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching Dispositions, Teacher Preparation, Remediation*

Teacher institutions seek to produce teacher candidates who display professional dispositions, which are consistent with successful teaching and social interaction. These future teachers will serve as role models for future generations. Therefore, it is incumbent upon institutions to ensure that all teacher candidates are displaying suitable dispositions. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) defines professional dispositions in the following way.

Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive behaviors support student learning and development. NCATE expects institutions to assess professional dispositions based on observable behaviors in educational settings. The two professional dispositions that NCATE expects institutions to assess are *fairness* and the belief that all students can learn. Based on their mission and conceptual framework, professional education units can identify, define, and operationalize additional professional dispositions (2014).

The search continues for a way to accurately appraise teacher dispositions. "Despite the desire for a Harry Potter (Rowling, 1998) type sorting hat, that can be placed on students' heads to magically illuminate their mind and heart, sensing their true inner disposition, such technology is not open to us" (Bice, Sherblom, & Thouvenot, 2011, p. 5). Having a dispositional evaluation process in place assists institutions in clearly communicating the overall expectations for teacher candidates. It also allows for remediation, identifies opportunities for growth, and provides a standard to judge incompetence that might suggest a teacher candidate does not possess the appropriate dispositional affect. The researchers set out to determine what processes were in place to assess teacher candidates' dispositions and whether there was some degree of uniformity. The study was built upon an earlier unpublished study conducted by a colleague from the same institution.

The study was theoretically limited by how well the participants represented the population studied and their willingness to accurately disclose procedures used in their institution. It was further limited in generalizability due to the sample size. It was anticipated

that it might be difficult to ensure the introductory email went to the correct individual due to changes in participating institutions' leadership.

The development of the survey instrument was guided by the following questions (a) What processes are in use to evaluate the professional disposition of Teacher Education candidates?, (b) Is there a dominant method or constellation of indicators for evaluating dispositions?, (c) When are dispositions evaluated in the undergraduate Teacher Education programs?, and (d) How did Teacher Education faculty provide formal intervention when inappropriate candidate behavior was detected?

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to the Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching (2012), it was important that "prospective teachers have the predisposition to apply thoughtfulness, self-reflection, respect for differences, compassion, honesty, fairness, and other key qualities in their professional conduct" (p. 10). Notar, Riley, and Taylor (2009) noted that teacher education programs do not have a universal system for determining effective teacher dispositions.

One might ask, "What is disposition?" Mark Wasicsko, director of the National Network for the Study of Educator Dispositions (NNSSED), conducted a nationwide survey in which 5,000 stories were collected. He determined that 75% of the time, disposition is what people remembered when they fondly reflected on the qualities of their favorite teacher (Wasicsko, 2007). Likewise, when Walker (2008) questioned his students, they listed personal qualities (qualitative) of their most memorable teacher, not their teacher's academic qualifications (quantitative). The challenge then involved measuring those qualities and determining which teacher candidates were accepted into our programs and prepared to teach in our schools (Serdyukov & Ferguson, 2011).

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling was used to identify all higher education programs accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools which also held National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation at the time of the study, resulting in 222 institutions being identified. Of the selected schools, there was a response rate of 63 schools or 28.38%. Respondents were all unit heads of undergraduate teacher education programs. The titles of the individual varied according to the structure of the institution. No inducements were offered for participation in the study.

### SURVEY PROCESS

The survey was conducted using an electronic media survey service (Survey Monkey), which contained the actual survey instrument. The list of contacts was managed through this service. It allowed the researchers to send an invitational email to all participants. Within the email were a unique link to the survey and a link to opt out of the email list, if desired. The electronic service was also utilized to collect and tabulate data.

### DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

A non-experimental design was used. Survey questions were adapted from a similar previous study conducted by a member of the same institution in 2003-2004 (Drew, 2004). The

previous researcher was studying professional disposition at an earlier point in time. He consented to the use and revision of the survey instrument. The instrument was piloted at our institution to enhance internal validity. Doing so helped ensure the survey instrument revealed the information sought (Herman & Winters, 1992).

An invitation was emailed to all unit heads of Teacher Education programs that met the selection criteria. The email contained an invitational letter, which informed the recipient about the purpose of the study and included a definition of NCATE Unit Standard 1g. *Professional Dispositions for All Candidates*. It also contained a link to the online survey and a link to opt out of the mailing list. The link led the participant to an electronic media survey service (Survey Monkey), which contained the actual survey instrument. The survey is available in Appendix A.

The survey contained 23 questions, but respondents did not see all questions due to the use of question logic. The instrument was structured in such a manner that responses to specific items could cause the participant to be directed to additional questions pertaining to their unique situation. Thus all recipients did not complete the same number of items. Many of the questions were in a format that allowed the participant to select all that applied. Several questions allowed the participant to select "other" and be more specific. The program provided the basic numerical results, which were expressed in raw numbers of responses and percentages. Those numbers were examined to determine where clear preferences or trends existed for each item. Where appropriate, the results for given items were compared to their counterparts in the earlier unpublished study previously mentioned. Since both studies did not utilize identical items, only select comparisons were made.

## RESULTS

The study focused on four key topics: processes for assessing disposition, method(s) of evaluating dispositions, when dispositions were assessed, and type(s) of intervention utilized. Using a 95% confidence interval, the margin of error for the study was .1235 or 12.3%.

The first research question looked at the processes that were in place for assessing disposition. Participants from the participating institutions gathered information regarding professional disposition from a variety of sources. Participants were able to select all that applied which accounted for high percentages in more than one area. The three key processes identified for gathering information on candidates' professional dispositions were self-developed assessment instruments (89.80%); cooperating teachers' and/or college supervisors' evaluations (88.10%); and reference, employment, and/or criminal background checks (50.80%). In the previous study 64% used an assessment instrument they had developed; 68% relied on evaluations; and 48% conducted reference, employment, and/or background checks. Fewer than half used candidate interviews (40.70%), internal letters of recommendation (35.60%), external letters of recommendation (23.70%), campus judicial records (15.30%), and assessment instruments from an external supplier (5.10%).

Next, the researchers tried to discern whether there was a dominant method or constellation of indicators for evaluating dispositions. Based on the above results, it can be suggested that there were two dominant methods. They were institution-developed assessment instruments and evaluations from cooperating teachers and/or college supervisors. Although institutions used multiple methods for evaluating dispositions, a predominant constellation of methods was not evident.

Next, attention was focused on when candidates' dispositions were assessed in their programs. The majority of respondents assessed disposition at multiple points as evidenced by

the percentages of 50% or more in six of the seven answer choices. The choices were (a) before entry into teacher education, (b) before first field experience (77.60%), (c) during field experiences (50.50%), (d) before student teaching (80.80%), (e) during student teaching (89.70%), (f) after student teaching (31.00%), and (g) assessed continuously (55.20%). Further investigation into the individual responses revealed that 88% of the institutions evaluated disposition at three or more different points during a candidates' undergraduate teacher education program.

Finally, the type(s) of intervention were examined. It appeared the majority evaluated each incidence on an individual basis and selected from a variety of potential consequences. When combined, an overwhelming majority required a meeting with a specific person (84.50%) or a committee (53.40%). Equal numbers reported a student may be placed on probationary status (70.70%) or permanently removed from the program (70.70%). Given the equal percentages, institutions appeared to be just as likely to put a candidate on probationary status as permanently remove them from the program. The determination was likely dependent on the severity of the infraction(s) and the number of prior incidences. Temporary suspension from the program was the next most common consequence (58.60%).

### IMPORTANCE TO THE FIELD

This study contributes to the field by providing information with which to compare an institution's policies and procedures with similar institutions, which are held to the same standards. The guidelines for professional disposition are purposely vague and allow for flexibility in their assessment. Therefore, it is helpful to know how other institutions are addressing the same issue.

Raths (1999) questioned whether dispositions and strengths could be measured. They are being measured, but not against a national scale. It appeared that most institutions were determining their own scale of what constituted professional disposition and were setting their own criteria for retention or removal from the teacher education program.

Commonalities and patterns could be noted, but few clear conclusions could be drawn due to the limited amount of current research on this topic. An interesting discovery was the overwhelming belief that dispositions were constantly evolving and as such could be changed. Of those surveyed, over 88% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "*Candidate dispositions can be changed as a result of participation in a teacher education program.*" An increased percentage, 85% compared to 76% in the previous study, used the process to give individual feedback regarding professional dispositions compared to 76% in the previous study. It would appear the results of dispositional assessments have found greater utility with respect to aiding student growth. Since remediation and growth are so strongly encouraged, the topic warrants further research.

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## APPENDIX

### DISPOSITIONAL RESEARCH SURVEY (WITH SKIP LOGIC DIRECTIONS EMBEDDED)

1. Please indicate which of the following NCATE defined ratings, as determined by your last NCATE assessment, describes your unit's performance on Unit Standard 1g Professional Dispositions for All Candidates, in terms of teacher candidates' dispositions (The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010).
  - a. Unacceptable -- "Candidates are not familiar with professional dispositions delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards. Candidates do not demonstrate classroom behaviors that are consistent with the ideal of fairness and the belief that all students can learn. They do not model these professional dispositions in their work with students, families, colleagues, and communities."
  - b. Acceptable-- "Candidates are familiar with the dispositions delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards. Candidates demonstrate classroom behaviors that are consistent with the ideal of fairness and the belief that all students can learn. Their work with students, families, colleagues and communities reflects these professional dispositions."
  - c. Target -- "Candidates work with students, families, and communities in ways that reflect the dispositions expected of professional educators as delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards. Candidates demonstrate classroom behaviors that create caring and supportive learning environments and encourage self-directed learning by all students. Candidates recognize when their own professional dispositions may need to be adjusted and are able to develop plans to do so."
2. Does your unit have a procedure currently in place to assess teacher candidate dispositions?
  - a. Yes (If a, go to question 4.)
  - b. No (If b, go to question 3.)

3. Please indicate which of the following are reasons why your unit has not developed a professional dispositions assessment procedure. Check all that apply.
  - a. It is too difficult to define this concept.
  - b. Candidate dispositions are difficult to quantify.
  - c. We are unable to agree internally on a procedure.
  - d. We are in the process of developing a procedure, but have not yet completed it.
  - e. We are concerned with the legal implications of implementing such a procedure.
  - f. We would like to implement a standardized procedure in the future.
  - g. Other – please specify (Any answers on this question, go to question 8.)
4. How are candidate dispositions assessed at your institution? Check all that apply.
  - a. We use an assessment instrument acquired from an external supplier. (If a, go to question 5.)
  - b. We use an assessment instrument we developed.
  - c. We require internal letters of recommendation.
  - d. We require external letters of recommendation.
  - e. We rely on cooperating teachers' and/or college supervisors' evaluations prepared during the student teaching experience.
  - f. We conduct reference, employment, and/or criminal background checks to determine dispositions.
  - g. We consider campus judicial records.
  - h. We interview the candidates to determine their dispositions.
  - i. Other – please specify (If b - i, go to question 6.)
5. Please note the name of the assessment instrument and the supplier.
6. When are candidates' dispositions assessed? Check all that apply.
  - a. Before entry to the teacher education unit
  - b. Before a candidate's teaching practicum (first field experience)
  - c. During practicum experiences
  - d. Before a student teaching assignment is made
  - e. During student teaching
  - f. After most program requirements are met (including student teaching), but before graduation
  - g. Dispositions are assessed continuously (either in every course or every semester)
  - h. Other – please specify
7. How are the results of the disposition assessment used? Check all that apply.
  - a. Determining who should be admitted to the teacher education program
  - b. Determining who should proceed to the next step in the program
  - c. Determining the extent of candidates' (as a group) personal and professional growth in the program
  - d. Determining the impact on candidates (as a group) of a specific course or instructional approach in the program
  - e. To give feedback to individual candidates regarding their dispositions so that they may grow professionally
  - f. Results are collected for accreditation purposes only and are not actually used for program evaluation or to give feedback to individual candidates
  - g. Other – please specify
8. How are students informed of dispositional expectations? Check all that apply.
  - a. Teacher Education handbook
  - b. Student handbook

- c. College catalog
  - d. Orientation
  - e. Course content
  - f. Seminar
  - g. Other document or manner – please specify
9. How do you communicate to employees, outside full-time faculty in the education unit, that they can file a dispositional deficiency? (Example: faculty in other schools or departments, administrators, practicum partners, adjunct faculty, etc.) Check all that apply.
- a. We need to do a better job of communicating this.
  - b. We cover it in our faculty handbook.
  - c. We cover it in an in-service meeting.
  - d. We cover it in a campus-wide meeting.
  - e. We cover it in new teacher orientation.
  - f. Deans/Department Heads cover this information.
  - g. We cover it in our Practicum/Student Teaching handbook.
  - h. Other – please specify
10. Is a specific dispositions deficiency form used to document concerns about candidate dispositions?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
11. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement:  
"Candidate dispositions can be changed as a result of participation in a teacher education program."
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. No Opinion
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
12. Based on your answer to the previous question, which statement best describes your unit's approach to development of appropriate dispositions of teacher education candidates?
- a. We select for appropriate dispositions and focus on content knowledge and pedagogy skill development. (If a, go to question 14.)
  - b. We actively describe and promote the development of appropriate dispositions throughout the curriculum. (If b, go to question 14.)
  - c. We have a specific course or learning experience that is designed to promote the development of appropriate dispositions. (If c, go to question 13.)
13. Please describe the course or learning experience.
14. In the event a dispositional problem exists, how is it communicated to the student? Check all that apply.
- a. Letter
  - b. Email
  - c. Personal meeting or conference
  - d. Phone call
  - e. Other – please specify
15. Does the candidate have an opportunity to respond to the dispositional concern?
- a. Yes (If a, go to question 16.)
  - b. No (If b, go to question 17.)
16. In what manner may a candidate respond to a dispositional concern? Check all that apply.

- a. In writing
  - b. Via email
  - c. A meeting with the Dean, Certification Officer, etc.
  - d. A meeting before a panel
  - e. Through an appeal process
17. Incidences involving teacher candidate disposition are reported to the following:
- a. A specific individual
  - b. Several individuals
  - c. A specified committee
  - d. Specific individual(s) and a specified committee
18. Please indicate the TITLES of the individuals and/or NAME of the committee the incident is reported to.
19. What are the potential consequences of a negative dispositional report? Check all that apply.
- a. Remedial counseling
  - b. Remedial coursework
  - c. Probationary status
  - d. Temporary suspension from the program
  - e. Permanent removal from the program
  - f. Meeting with a specific individual (Example: Chair, Department Head, Dean, Certification Officer, etc.)
  - g. Meeting with a specified committee
  - h. Referral to the Student Judicial Board
  - i. Other – please specify
20. Who makes the final decision with respect to the consequences of a dispositional report?
- a. The Chairperson
  - b. The Dean
  - c. The Assistant Dean
  - d. The Vice President/Provost
  - e. A designated committee
  - f. The Certification Officer
  - g. A hearing board
  - h. Other – please specify
21. What percentage of teacher candidates was eliminated from your program per year due to dispositional concerns?
22. Based on the dispositional process that is already in place, is there a specific number of deficiencies that would warrant dismissal from the program?
- a. One (If a, this ends the survey.)
  - b. Two (If b, this ends the survey.)
  - c. Three (If c, this ends the survey.)
  - d. There is not a specific number. (If d, go to question 23.)
  - e. It depends on the situation. (If e, go to question 23.)
23. In the previous question you either selected one of the two following answer options: "There is not a specific number" or "It depends on the situation." Please explain what you meant by your answer. It will give us more information about how institutions determine when a teacher candidate should be removed from the program.