Chapter 13
Disposition and Early Childhood Education Preservice Teachers: A Social Justice Stance

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the development of social justice dispositions in early childhood preservice teachers. The participants of the study included two preservice teachers assigned to a four-week prekindergarten field experience, one Black and the other White, both female. This was a qualitative study utilizing observational case study methods and open coding. Data were collected using the Cultural Fluency Survey, the annotated lesson plans of the preservice teachers, and the reflective journal the kept; as well as the recorded responses of the prekindergarten students during the literature lesson in pictorial form. The researchers found the early childhood preservice teachers who participated in this study exhibited strong social justice dispositions in development. The current study may help teacher educators consider what areas of the early childhood program could be changed to equip relevant preservice teachers with multiple opportunities and field placement.

INTRODUCTION

What Is Disposition?

Council on Educator Preparation (CAEP) formerly known as National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) now defines Professional Dispositions as: 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 (2007).

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Due to pressure from the education community to address teacher quality in urban and rural areas, CAEP amended the disposition definition by stating:

CAEP expects institutions to assess professional dispositions based on observable behaviors in educational settings. The two professional dispositions that CAEP 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.

Institutions take their own stab at this in many ways. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that disposition is defined through “All teaching staff evaluates and improve their own performance based on ongoing reflection and feedback from supervisors, peers and families. They add to their knowledge and increase their ability to put knowledge into practice. They develop an annual individualized professional development plan with their supervisor and use it to inform their continuous professional development”.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children also states that disposition is defined through “All teaching staff continuously strengthening their leadership skills and relationships with others and works to improve the conditions of children and families within their programs, the local community or region, and beyond. Teaching staff participate in informal or formal ways in local, state, or regional public-awareness activities related to early care by joining groups, attending meetings, or sharing information with others both at and outside the program” (2005).

Review of Literature

As a professional body, educators struggle with identifying, developing and gauging dispositions. Many institutions attempt to capture this in a “goodwill methodology”. “During the second half of the 20th century, the issue of multiculturalism as a demographic fact and the need for interculturalism as a basis for education has been recognized (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Pitkaenen et al., 2002)” (367).

“An understanding of teachers’ selves, their cognitive and emotional identities, is central to the analysis of variations in teacher’s work, lives and effectiveness in which structure (external influences) and agency (one’s ability to pursue the goals that are values) are perceived to be in dynamic tension (Archer, 1996, 2000)” (602). “Several researchers (Nias, 1989, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Sumsion, 2002; Gu and Benson, 2015) have noted that teacher identities are constructed from technical and emotional aspects of teaching (i.e. classroom management, subject knowledge and pupil test results) and their personal lives.

A goodwill methodology is an instructional approach that teacher education programs use to “say” they are addressing behaviors that surface and honor diversity. Institutions use a number of strategies to do this. They often use a course specifically to attend to this (Palaiologou and Dimitriadou, 2013). They “embed” dispositions of diversity as a thread throughout the methods courses. They also attempt to address this in field experiences (Warren, 2014). Sleeter (2001) identifies these as Multicultural Teacher Education Courses (MCTE’s).

What Does Research Say about Disposition?

The arena of literature on dispositions in the field of teacher education is one of great concern. As our professional organizations and accrediting bodies are still crafting dispositions requirements, includ-