

Bubbling-In Checklists: Using Ethnodrama and Embodied Discourse to Discuss Assessing Teacher Candidates' Professional Dispositions

A. Purpose

Many teacher educator programs use some sort of “bubbled-in” checklist to gauge preservice teachers' aptitudes, or professional dispositions, for teaching, aptitudes which go beyond one's cognitive abilities to learn pedagogical methods of teaching content. While assessing dispositions is an obligation mandated by accrediting bodies, very little research has been conducted in what dispositions should be assessed and how. In this session, we use our approach to ethnodrama and embodied discourse to explore the denotations, connotations, and metaphors evoked by the terms “dispositions,” “checklist,” “bubbling in,” “assessment,” etc., in order to elicit discussions about dispositions, measurement, diversity, and professional development. Participants gain hands-on experience in using multimodal, kinesthetic strategies, such as process drama tableaux, to explore issues and engage in conversation related to these issues.

B. Perspective/Theoretical Framework

Many teacher educator programs use some sort of checklist to gauge preservice teachers' aptitudes for teaching, aptitudes or character traits which often are termed professional dispositions and which go beyond one's cognitive abilities to learn pedagogical methods of teaching content. As Rike and Sharp (2008) noted, however, while assessing dispositions is an obligation mandated by accrediting bodies, very little research has been conducted in what dispositions should be assessed and how. The recent merger of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), means most teacher educator programs will now be accredited by one organization, one whose goal is to create “a model unified accreditation system” (CAEP, “History,” para. 4). This paper explores the available literature surrounding the questions of (1) who defines professional dispositions, (2) how professional dispositions are normed and assessed, and (3) how ethnodrama methodologies can offer alternative perspectives to the discussion.

Sloan (2006) stated that “both the educational literature on test-based systems of accountability and the all-good/all-bad public discourse on accountability” portrays teachers in “undimensional” and “mechanistic” ways, seeing them as “passive agents whose teaching behaviors are leveraged (negatively or positively) in seemingly predetermined ways by accountability-related curriculum policies” (p. 121). Drawing on Moore's (2004) discussion of discourses of teacher identity, Foucault's (1982) discussion of “modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects” (p. 777), and Boal's (1979) discussion theater of the oppressed, we examine Sloan's observation and challenge the presumptions underlying the assessment of professional dispositions. Additionally, we draw on Barthes' (1967) ideas of “complex signifying systems” inherent in a multimodal practice of reflection (p. 39).

Using Goffman's (1974) theatrical frame and Saldana's (2005) approaches to performing data, in particular our approach to embodied discourse (Authors, 2013), we posit the stage of teacher education, which is peopled by various actors—policymakers, professional

organizations, teacher educators, and preservice teachers—and on which are enacted various scripts. In particular, we use terminology from ethnodrama to examine the scripts surrounding professional dispositions, i.e., the NCATE/TEAC/CAEP definitions and standards, the professional disposition checklists used by several teacher educator programs around the nation, and academic literature on the topic of professional disposition assessment.

C. Methods and Techniques

The information in this section refers to the techniques that will be used in this alternative format session. The session is designed as

Following a brief introduction, participants rate themselves on the dispositions by bubbling in responses to questions on a composite checklist and are asked to write a brief reflection about their thoughts about the dispositions and the ways dispositions are assessed. (15 minutes)

Participants then form groups of 6-8 people and discuss situations where one or more of the dispositions has been displayed in a positive, negative, or ambiguous manner. Using lengths of yarn to create inclusive/exclusive circles, each group creates simple representations of the situations presented. Finally, each group selects one situation to embody by means of a tableau. The written reflections are gathered at this point. (20 minutes)

Two groups are asked to share their representative tableaux without revealing the situations. The other participants examine the tableaux and share their impressions. The presenting groups then are guided into a re-creation of the situation to either resolve a problem, to clarify an ambiguity, or to celebrate a meeting of minds. (20 minutes)

We then present a short review of current research on how professional dispositions toward teaching are assessed, how the instruments for evaluating such dispositions are created and calibrated, how such assessments are administered. Participants are invited to pose questions based both on the research presented and on the exercises just completed. (25 minutes)

To close, one member of the presentation team uses the collected reflections to create an impromptu narration, the reading of which is accompanied by a choreographed representation of “bubbling in.” (10 minutes)

D. / E. Data sources / Results, conclusions, and/or interpretations

Data sources will be produced by the participants of the session as they consider and respond to scenarios related to the assessment of pre-service teacher dispositions. Results, conclusions, and/or interpretations will be generated during the session by individual participants and the group as a whole.

F. Educational and/or scientific importance

This paper adds to the relatively small body of literature written about the assessment of professional dispositions. Additionally, this paper approaches the topic from a critical frame and an uncommonly used mode of inquiry.

G. Interest/Connection to the Audience

As Rike and Sharp (2008) noted, while assessing dispositions is an obligation mandated by accrediting bodies, very little research has been conducted in what dispositions should be assessed and how. More critically, Sloan (2006) stated that “both the educational literature on test-based systems of accountability and the all-good/all-bad public discourse on accountability” portrays teachers in “undimensional” and “mechanistic” ways, seeing them as “passive agents whose teaching behaviors are leveraged (negatively or positively) in seemingly predetermined ways by accountability-related curriculum policies” (p. 121). We challenge the underlying presumptions of that view and explore one facet of such policies, the role of the assessment of professional dispositions. Of equal significance are the methods used. Attendees actively participate in ethnodrama methods such as process drama, tableau, and other multimodal strategies to create embodied discourse. This paper adds to the relatively small body of literature written about the assessment of professional dispositions. Additionally, this paper approaches the topic from a critical frame and an uncommonly used mode of inquiry.

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