

## The Potential for Dispositions Assessments to Evaluate PDS Relationships

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Abstract: The dispositions assessment has been adapted from the InTASC standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013) and increases the level of expectations for the teacher-candidates as they progress through the EPP's teacher preparation program. The EPP collects dispositions data at three intervals in the EPP's program, aimed at providing support and ensuring the growth of our teacher-candidates. However, an argument can be made that the dispositions data could also be used to evaluate the PDS relationship.

**KEYWORDS:** professional development school, dispositions

**NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:**

1. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
2. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;

## Introduction

Impressed by the story of an organization that advocates and promotes “continuous development of collaborative” (National Association for Professional Development Schools, 2018b, p.1) partnerships among the higher education teacher training programs and the cooperating schools, we explore the mutual impact rendered by our Education Preparation Program (EPP) and the various Professional Development Schools (PDS) in which our teacher-candidates are placed. We provide an analysis of a disposition assessment that can be used to provide support and guidance, as well as ensure the growth of teacher-candidates as they go through teaching training.

## The PDS Model

The development of a PDS is based on the Holmes Group (1995) report that recommended the establishment of PDS “to enhance the quality of schooling through research and development and the preparation of career professionals in teaching” (p. 1). Campoy (2000) further suggests that the mutually beneficial collaboration should eventually lead the participating K-12 schools, as well as the university’s EPP, towards educational reforms. According to Levine (2002), a PDS shares with the EPP the “responsibility [of] the preparation of new teachers, the development of experienced faculty members, and the improvement of practice—all with the goal of enhancing student achievement” (p. 65).

The EPP’s teacher-candidates get hands-on training in putting their theoretical knowledge of differentiation and accommodation into practice in the PDS under the able guidance of their mentor teachers. The mentor teachers in the PDS have always shown enthusiasm in providing opportunities for our teacher-candidates to benefit from their experience in the application of their knowledge. Through the scheduled observations by EPP faculty, the teacher-candidates demonstrate the use of research-based instructional and differentiation strategies. The opportunities to implement various educational practices, including co-teaching, individual instruction, one-to-one tutoring, mentoring opportunities, and small group instruction, help the teacher-candidate to develop strategies to respect their students’ strengths and needs to develop the learner as a whole.

The strategies teacher-candidates acquire from their research-based EPP courses provide professional development for the mentor teachers, as well. The mentor teachers, with an additional person in the class who is eager to learn from the example of the mentor teacher, have the rare opportunity to apply innovative teaching techniques with the assistance of the teacher-candidate. The process, which includes co-teaching, has proven to be the best model of mutual benefits for both teacher-candidate and the mentor teacher. The scores obtained by teacher-candidates in this criterion of the dispositions assessment indicate the benefits provided by the PDS program to both the teacher-candidates and the PDS.

In a series of key assessments throughout the EPP’s program, teacher-candidates are required to collect information about their students from the perspective of their mentor teachers. The process includes (1) accommodations for students based on their special needs, (2) a variety of activities to meet different learning styles of students in the class using various differentiation

strategies, and (3) other factors that might influence learning in the classroom including demographics of the class, guardian involvement, and student-administrator relationships.

Training teacher-candidates to plan for these factors provides them with the skills to act on the belief that all students can enjoy academic success. The knowledge of these factors inspires the teacher-candidate to demonstrate optimism for their students, which positively impacts the learning environment in the classroom. These same contextual factors encourage teacher-candidates to prioritize and cultivate collaboration with colleagues, families, and communities, in addition to their students, to establish a supportive learning environment. Thus, through the mutually beneficial PDS relationship, teacher-candidates have the opportunity to develop their skills in responding to the needs of learners and the learning environment under the guidance of mentor teachers. The mentor teachers also benefit from the classroom partnership. In addition to the practical benefit of extra hands in the classroom, which any teacher can appreciate, mentoring provides opportunities for professional development (Campoy, 2000). Many mentor teachers are removed from the immersion in research-based best-practice that EPP's provide to teacher-candidates. Participating in the PDS relationship can reinvigorate mentor teachers, keeping them current on innovative teaching strategies and resources, particularly educational technology.

### **Teacher-Candidate Dispositions**

EPPs have used dispositions as a requirement for teacher certification for nearly three decades (Wise, 2005). The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) establishes dispositions as a vital component in the teaching practice (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). InTASC defines dispositions as “habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie the performances” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 6), including an individual’s fitness to interact with education stakeholders, diversity sensitivity, and the ability to create a positive classroom environment (Shoffner, Sedberry, Alsup, & Johnson, 2014). Dispositions are assessed in the four broad categories: (a) Learner and Learning; (b) Content; (c) Instructional Practice; and (d) Professional Responsibility, as established by InTASC (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). An educator’s dispositions are important for both professional development and student success (Hindin & Mueller, 2016) and benefit from consistent assessment and feedback (Brewer, Lindquist, & Altemueller, 2011). In addition, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (2015a, 2015b) affirms the importance of a dispositions assessment as a key assessment tool through Standards 1 and 2 in the accreditation process of EPPs. As such, teacher-candidates’ growth, as measured by the EPP, at three levels; (1) beginning level, completed during the Educational Psychology, (2) developing, completed during methods courses, and (3) mastery, completed during clinical teaching.

### **Using Dispositions Data to Evaluate the PDS Relationship**

Teacher-candidates’ dispositions demonstrate how they synthesize the knowledge gained in the program and how it is replicated in their classroom (Serdyukov & Ferguson, 2011). The

EPPs benefit from examining teacher-candidates' dispositions at fixed intervals in the program to provide guidance, support, and success strategies (DiGiacinto, Bulger, & Wayda, 2017; Serdyukov & Ferguson, 2011). Assessing teacher-candidates' dispositions throughout the program to ensure the growth and development of those skills necessary to be an effective teacher (Brewer, Lindquist, & Altemueller, 2011) can provide the EPP with valuable program information on how to better serve both their teacher-candidates and their PDS partners. Analyzing teacher-candidate data can provide the EPP not only with continuous improvement data, but also information on where to direct faculty and resources for professional development in the PDS. Teacher-candidates' growth in each of the dispositions components is heavily influenced by their time in the PDS classroom, as is evidenced below.

One area in which dispositions data could be useful in evaluating the PDS relationship is content application. In order to motivate students to learn, teacher-candidates must first address the classroom environment, as the content knowledge they acquired in their college courses is not sufficient for effective teaching. Their time in the PDS provides them with the classroom experience they need to recognize their role in the ever-evolving nature of teaching content knowledge. The partnership between the EPP and PDS is essential for teacher-candidates' content application growth. InTASC characterizes this category as encouraging flexible learning environments that facilitate student exploration, discovery, and the connecting of ideas across the curriculum (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). The PDS relationship provides teacher-candidates with opportunities to observe and engage in flexible learning environments and student-centered pedagogical practices with a mentor teacher.

Teacher-candidates' understanding of the role of educational assessment is also developed in the PDS classroom. Teacher-candidates are obligated to use multiple forms of assessment to support instruction and comprehension based on the standards they teach at the PDS classroom (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). Assessment, like planning, is an abstract construct for teacher-candidates until their placement in a PDS. The PDS classroom environment supplies the real circumstances where teacher-candidates experience authentic assessment implementation. Mentor teachers model different assessment strategies during the semester, providing context to assessment-usage and instructional modifications that follows the assessments, which ultimately facilitates effective student learning. Teacher-candidates can observe how multiple forms of assessments drive instructional strategies that enhance student comprehension and application.

In addition to a firm grasp of assessment, successful teaching requires developing a solid foundation in instructional delivery. The instructional planning dispositions component requires that teacher-candidates understand and respect their students' strengths and needs when developing lessons (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). Teacher-candidates' experiences in the PDS make the planning process less abstract, as they are planning for real students. The teacher-candidates must synthesize the educational methodology learned in their coursework and apply it with a diverse population. Teacher-candidates have opportunities to observe lessons by their experienced mentor teachers, as well as discuss best planning practices with their mentors during and after instruction. Collaborative networks are established in this process as teacher-candidates work with both their mentor teachers and university supervisors, as well as their peers, to create engaging, standards-based, data-driven lessons. The feedback

obtained from the PDS has strongly confirmed the importance of the collaboration between the teacher-candidates and the mentor teachers in planning and implementing instructional strategies together. Engaging colleagues in instructional strategies is an important starting point that leads to professional development through professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004). These connections build confidence and establish collaborative relationships that exist well beyond the PDS placement.

The collaboration of the teacher-candidates with their mentor-teachers and the mentor-teachers' professional learning communities introduces the teacher-candidates to the professional practices of educators. The teacher-candidates are expected to recognize the impacts of their behaviors on their students. Continuous and ongoing analyses, coupled with reflection of teaching practices, help the teacher-candidates to observe, learn, practice, and implement professional ethics involved in the teaching profession. Thus, when the teacher-candidates have gone through the disposition assessment used by the EPP throughout their program, they will be equipped with the tools necessary to assume responsibility for effective teaching. Conversely, the steps involved in the assessment of the professional and ethical practice component of disposition assessment will engage the mentor-teachers in the process of evaluating and supporting their teacher-candidates in this criterion and thus improve the morale of the participating mentor-teacher.

The EPP continuously encourages teacher-candidates to get acquainted with school administration. The program also requires the teacher-candidates to observe, critique, and reflect on administrative activities in addition to the classroom activities at the beginning of a school year. It is only natural that the teacher-candidates get involved in the school-wide activities that happen during the time they are in the field. The teacher-candidates provide immense help during special days, such as testing days and community conference days. Getting involved in these school-wide activities provide the teacher-candidates opportunities to collaborate with the school community.

### **Conclusion**

The PDS model discussed above is an ongoing effort and is effectively maintained by both the EPP and the PDS. The mutually supporting system is continuously evaluated using the disposition assessment tools, in addition to other measures. Well supported by the concept of "shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants" (National Association for Professional Development Schools, 2018a), the mutually beneficial system has proven to be highly effective in building a strong relationship between the EPP and the PDS. The mutually beneficial collaboration has continuously provided academic and strategic benefits to the teacher-candidates and the mentor-teachers alike and has been instrumental in bringing the educational community focused towards the educational achievement of the students in the community.

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