Educational Administration Candidates' Diversity Dispositions: The Effect of Cultural Proficiency and Service Learning

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To creatively and competently utilize community resources and to work successfully for the benefit of all students requires that educational leaders develop positive diversity dispositions. This study explores the effect of school community relations instruction in enhancing educational administration candidates' skills, beliefs, and connections to the community. As a pretest and posttest, candidates completed the Diversity Dispositions Index to self-assess their perceptions. While these dispositions were generally reported to be positive, cultural proficiency instruction and activities, along with reflection upon a school community service project, resulted in significant gain in community connection dispositions regardless of the service learning setting.

Introduction

More than ever before, those who train educators need to assist candidates in cultivating their positive diversity dispositions in order to help all students succeed. In a time when school resources are limited, communities are an underappreciated resource, not only to PK–12 schools but to universities as well (Price, 2008). Yet while American educators today are serving an increasingly diverse community, educators are predominately middle-class, European American, and English-only speakers (Banks et al., 2005; Jazzar & Algozzine, 2006; Swartz, 2003; Zeichner, 2003). Not only must school leaders understand students' communities and experience, they also need the willingness, attitudes, and ethics—or dispositions—to work well with diversity and to teach these skills to others (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Dispositions may be defined as, "values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities" (NCATE, 2002, p. 53). More specifically, diversity dispositions include the skills, beliefs, and connections to be successful within the community (Schulte, Edwards, & Edick, 2009). For school administrators, the objective is to become a leader who "promotes the success of students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to the diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources" (CCSSO, 2007, p. 16).

In order for educators to understand the role they play in a diverse community, it is not enough to participate in preparation programs that espouse

multicultural education. Candidates must have opportunities to engage in dialog on social justice and to reflect about personal beliefs, as well as practice in culturally diverse settings (Barnes, 2006; Guerra & Nelson, 2008; Hafner, 2006; Howard & Del Rosairo, 2000).

Diversity Dispositions for Administrator Candidates

Many university programs that prepare school leaders include courses or program emphasis on diversity and equity, though the number of resources that address teaching social justice in leadership preparation programs is small (Hafner, 2006). At our Midwestern university, educational administration faculty have begun to address sociocultural consciousness, cultural proficiency, and community connections with candidates in an intentional, developmental manner in order to promote measurable growth in knowledge, skills, and dispositions of diversity.

Developing Sociocultural Consciousness

An educator's knowledge of diversity dispositions is founded in self-awareness. Sociocultural consciousness is "the awareness that a person's worldview is not universal, but is profoundly influenced by life experiences" (Villegas & Lucas, 2007, p. 31). Educators without this awareness overuse their own experience, and may misinterpret communication and behaviors of students and other adults. Educators who see themselves as monocultural Americans are more likely to perpetuate misconceptions and stereotypes (Dantas, 2007). Yet awareness of positive dispositions and the savvy to utilize them for the improvement of school culture is not only important for administrators to work well with students—it is also critical for the school leaders themselves. Administrators who have not developed this awareness have trouble being the leader of an effective school (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In fact, the leading cause of administrator dismissal is the lack of interpersonal skills (Davis, 1998).

Based upon studies of teacher and administrator dispositions (Edick, Danielson, & Edwards, 2006; Edwards & Edick, 2006; Keiser, 2007; Schulte, Edick, & Mackiel, 2004; Schulte, Edwards, & Edick, 2009; Schulte & Kowal, 2005) and upon analysis of candidate portfolios by the educational administration faculty, candidates in educational administration have positive beliefs about students, but need attention to sociocultural consciousness. This message also comes from reflections of course instructors, employers, and from the candidates themselves (Smith, 2008). Improvement in this facet of the program is imperative. As Parker and Shapiro (1992), state:

> More attention needs to be given to future school and district leaders' . . . ability to support the education of all children. Opportunities must be provided for leaders to examine and reflect on the meaning of their cultural background, their skin color, and their belief systems as well as the relationship between these attributes and their personal and professional practice. (pp. 387, 388)

Developing Cultural Proficiency

Cultural beliefs and models are built over years and so are resistant to change (Dantas, 2007). Cultural proficiency, as proposed in *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders* by Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2003), was selected by our educational administration faculty as an instructional model because it is proactive, usable in any setting, and behavioral rather than emotional. Being culturally proficient enables administrative candidates to address issues of diverse school culture. Those who are culturally proficient "welcome and create opportunities to better understand who they are as individuals, while learning how to interact positively with people who differ from themselves" (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006, p. 4–5). The core values of cultural proficiency are:

1. Culture is a predominant force; you cannot NOT be influenced by culture.
2. People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
3. People have group identities that they want to have acknowledged.
4. Cultures are not homogeneous; there is diversity within groups.
5. The unique needs of every culture must be respected. (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006)

Throughout the semester of school community relations, candidates develop cultural proficiency not only through reading, lecture, and guest speakers, but also by becoming involved in group and individual activities, discussion, and reflection. Along with the guiding principles, candidates build cultural proficiency through experiencing the tools to develop cultural competence, the continuum for seeing and responding to difference, and the essential elements as well as barriers to creating a foundation of positive behaviors and practices within themselves, their schools, and the diverse community.

Developing Community Connections

One challenge of developing diversity dispositions is transforming understanding into action. Theoretical knowledge is not sufficient to change teachers' sociocultural assumptions (Dantas, 2007). Through service learning (or experiential learning and community engagement), candidates gain experience to use as the foundation of learning (Butin, 2003; Fall, 2006). Successful service learning captures *mutuality,* where the needs of both server and served are met by the other, *solidarity,* "becom[ing] part of my awareness of myself" (Radest, 1993, p. 184), and *diversity*. "Service, understood in this way, is educational because it anticipates future encounters, and service thus envisioned teaches that diversity is the essential and unavoidable fact of the democratic experience" (Sheffield, 2005, p. 50). Viewed from a technical, cultural, and/or political perspective (Butin,

2007), service learning can foster respect for diversity, awareness of social concerns, and a sense of ethics and civic engagement (Coles, 1993). Because of the emotional component of the community service, candidates perceive this active learning as being long lasting and significant (Wittmer, 2004).

During the school community relations course, our educational administration candidates are required to complete nine hours of community service, although most volunteer many more hours. Each candidate proposes an individual service learning project enhancing school community relations, resulting in a wide variety of settings, such as homeless shelters, after-school tutoring, and local disaster relief fundraisers. Candidates then write reflective papers and share oral presentations, discussing how their project embodied the skills and dispositions as a leader in school community relations, and how the project benefited the school community.

Although all candidates emphasize some aspect of the diverse community, many choose to serve in their own school, church, or neighborhood while others stretch their boundaries by going into less familiar or comfortable cultural settings. It has not been determined if the service learning settings should be regulated to maximize candidate sociocultural growth.

Aligning a school community relations course with the objectives of cultural proficiency and practicing community involvement through service learning have been well received by candidates, but there has been no measure of effectiveness at a fundamental level of culture and beliefs. Thus the purpose of this study was to explore the effect of cultural proficiency instruction with service learning participation on educational administrative candidates' diversity dispositions.

Method

Participants
The participants were 47 graduate students seeking an administrative endorsement and enrolled in a graduate level school community relations course (25 in the fall semester and 22 during the following spring). All participants had completed at least 2 years of successful teaching, and their demographics reflected administration candidates at the research college.

Diversity Dispositions Index (DDI)
The Diversity Dispositions Index (DDI) was developed and validated to provide a psychometrically sound "self-assessment instrument in graduate teacher education and educational administration programs to help candidates become more aware of and develop the dispositions necessary to be effective educators with students from diverse backgrounds" (Schulte, Edwards, & Edick, 2009, para. 11). It was also created to assist faculty members in aligning course activities with dispositions.

The framework of the DDI was adapted from the propositions of culturally relevant teaching: *conception of self and others; social relations; and*

conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This perspective is appropriate for graduate students in educational administration as they view their dispositions from current teaching roles. Factor analysis indicated that 3 factors best fit the index (actual items are listed according to factor in Results):

Factor 1—Educators' Skills in Helping Students Gain Knowledge

Factor 2—Educators' Beliefs and Attitudes about Students

Factor 3—Educators' Connections with the Community

The 43 item instrument measures responses on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), and was tested for content and construct validity. Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was conducted with 0.91 for Factor 1, 0.90 for Factor 2, and 0.84 for Factor 3 (Schulte, Edwards, & Edick, 2009).

Data Collection Procedures

During the first session of the school community course, participants completed the DDI. Data was recorded and coded by a graduate assistant. During the course, cultural proficiency was introduced through direct instruction and reinforced through discussion, reading, videos, and writing assignments. Participants were actively involved in simulations and case studies as well as sharing short presentations from their personal or professional experience. The DDI was administered again during the last class session.

The community service learning projects participants completed were coded into comfortable (familiar) settings for those who volunteered within their own school, church, organization, or neighborhood. Other projects were considered non-comfortable (unfamiliar) settings. This information was gathered from the reflections and presentations students shared at the conclusion of the service project.

Data Analysis

The following statistical analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between educational administration candidates' perceptions, or awareness, of their diversity dispositions and school community relations course activities:

1. Respondents' perceptions of their diversity dispositions were summarized by calculating mean scores for each of the DDI subscales.
2. For each of the DDI subscales, two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted with a time factor (pretest or posttest) and a service learning setting factor (comfortable or non-comfortable). A 0.05 level of significance was employed.

Results

The educational administrative candidates espoused positive diversity dispositions, with most answering agree or strongly agree in all 3 factors. Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations of the DDI broken down by pretest/posttest. Factor 2, *beliefs about students and teaching /learning*

Table 1
Diversity Dispositions Index (DDI) Descriptive Statistics by Item.

Factor 1 Items—Educators' Skills in Helping Students Gain Knowledge	Pretest		Posttest	
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
1. I teach my students the skills to gain knowledge on their own.	4.49	0.62	4.54	0.50
2. I work to develop my students' critical thinking skills.	4.53	0.54	4.59	0.61
3. I am successful at creating meaningful relationships between knowledge and new information.	4.33	0.63	4.46	0.50
4. Students enter my class with excitement about what the day will bring.	4.22	0.67	4.17	0.77
5. I use the teaching "moment" to enhance my students' understanding of today's world.	4.64	0.51	4.76	0.43
6. I provide opportunities and structure for my students to work cooperatively.	4.54	0.68	4.65	0.53
7. I possess a large repertoire of teaching strategies to help students access their prior knowledge.	4.44	0.60	4.43	0.65
8. I create opportunities of my students to express their knowledge in a variety of ways.	4.49	0.63	4.61	0.49
9. I create opportunities for and encourage my students to share their knowledge and talents with their peers.	4.37	0.64	4.46	0.66
10. I differentiate expectations for individual students.	4.54	065	4.48	0.84
11. I encourage my students to take responsibility for their own and their peers' learning.	4.56	0.57	4.67	0.47
12. I make an effort to build positive relationships with my students' parents/guardians.	4.69	0.56	4.71	0.58
13. I deliver instruction using an interactive process that enhances further discovery.	4.24	0.54	4.33	0.63
14. Many of my lessons require my students to think critically.	4.37	0.71	4.20	0.86
15. I determine where my students are and help them reach their potential.	4.52	060	4.65	0.53
16. I help students understand their connection to global issues.	4.08	0.73	4.11	0.77
17. I continue to reteach my students until they have an understanding of the content.	4.37	0.61	4.41	0.54
18. I contact my students' parents/guardians about positive growth.	4.64	0.48	4.20	0.85

Table 1 (continued)
Diversity Dispositions Index (DDI) Descriptive Statistics by Item.

Factor 2 Items–Educators' Beliefs and Attitudes about Students and Teaching/Learning	Pretest M	SD	Posttest M	SD
1. I believe that all students can succeed.	4.86	0.35	4.89	0.38
2. I believe that all students can learn.	4.89	0.36	4.83	0.48
3. I believe that students learn in a variety of ways.	4.95	0.22	4.89	0.31
4. I demonstrate enthusiasm for the content I teach.	4.95	0.35	4.85	0.36
5. I look for new ways to teach difficult material.	4.69	0.46	4.74	0.53
6. I am enthusiastic about sharing knowledge with my students.	4.83	0.38	4.83	0.38
7. I collaborate with others in order to learn and grow.	4.63	0.58	4.70	0.55
8. I am reflective about how my actions affect student achievement.	4.47	0.65	4.67	0.47
9. I can express myself creatively as a teacher.	4.59	0.53	4.50	0.55
10. I continue to look for new information to share with my students.	4.68	0.47	4.76	0.43
11. I learn from my students.	4.75	0.44	4.78	0.41
12. I continually search for new knowledge within my content area.	4.58	0.53	4.67	0.51
13. I am responsible for creating an atmosphere where all students feel free to openly exchange ideas, thoughts, and opinions.	4.64	0.48	4.70	0.47
14. I believe in setting high standards for all students.	4.81	0.43	4.87	0.40
15. I am passionate about my own learning.	4.81	0.39	4.83	0.38
16. I believe that diversity enhances student knowledge.	4.78	0.46	4.83	0.38

Factor 3–Educators' Connection to the Community	Pretest M	SD	Posttest M	SD
1. I collaborate on providing community service opportunities for my students.	3.41	0.98	3.65	0.90
2. I plan instructional opportunities for my students to interact with peers, family members, and the whole community.	3.76	0.84	4.00	0.60
3. I help my students make connections in their community.	3.86	0.77	4.11	0.71
4. I encourage my students make connection in their community.	4.27	0.76	4.43	0.62
5. I am involved in the community where I teach.	3.95	0.99	4.04	0.97
6. It is important that I attend activities in my students' neighborhoods.	4.16	0.85	4.26	0.68
7. I see myself as a part of the community in my role as a teacher.	4.61	0.59	4.61	0.54
8. I welcome community members into my classes to share their skills.	4.02	0.88	4.46	0.75
9. I work to establish positive school-community relationships.	4.23	0.77	4.41	0.69

had the highest mean for pretest ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.21$) and for the posttest ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 0.26$). Factor 1, *skills in helping students gain knowledge,* also had positive results for the pretest ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.34$) and for the posttest ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.38$). Similar to pilot study of the DDI to administrator candidates (Schulte, Edwards, & Edick, 2009), Factor 3, *educators' connection with the community,* was not as positive, with most answering neutral to agree on the pretest ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.53$) and neutral to strongly agree on the posttest ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.45$).

The two-way ANOVA comparing candidate perceptions in *skills in helping students gain knowledge* indicated that the interaction between the time factor and service learning factor was not statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 0.345$, $p = 0.560$. The main effect for time was statistically significant with a small effect size, $F(1,44) = 5.411$, $p = 0.025$, $d = 0.28$.) The main effect for service learning setting was not statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 1.020$, $p = 0.318$.

For *beliefs about students and teaching/learning,* the two-way ANOVA indicated that the interaction between the time factor and service learning factor was not statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 0.221$, $p = 0.641$. The main effect for time was not statistically significant, $F(1,44) = 3.669$, $p = 0.062$. The main effect for service learning setting was not statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 2.840$, $p = 0.099$.

The two-way ANOVA comparing candidate perceptions in *connections with the community* indicated that the interaction between the time factor and service learning factor was not statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 1.852$, $p = 0.180$. The main effect for time was statistically significant with a moderate effect size, $F(1,44) = 17.514$, $p < 0.0005$, $d = 0.57$. The main effect for service learning setting was not statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 2.381$, $p = 0.130$. Table 2 summarizes results utilized for conclusions.

Conclusions and Discussion

Educational administrative candidates espoused more positive diversity dispositions after completing the school community course. Yet when try-

Table 2
Factors With a Statistically Significant Main Effect for Time
(Pretest to Posttest).

	df	F	p	d
Factor 1 Items—Educators' Skills in Helping Students Gain Knowledge	1, 44	5.411	0.025	0.28
Factor 2 Items—Educators' Beliefs and Attitudes About Students and Teaching/Learning	1, 44	0.345	0.560	ns
Factor 3—Educators' Connection to the Community	1, 44	17.514	< 0.0005	0.57

ns = not significant

ing to understand and explain the beliefs and values of candidates, expressed views could have a tendency to be self-serving. People explain their actions as espoused theories, but their theories-in-use (actual patterns of actions) can only be measured through observation (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Espoused theories, such as those gathered through the DDI, need to be examined within actual practice (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002). So in other recent studies, we have compared the results of candidates' reported dispositions with the observations of their supervisors and found that the supervisors ranked candidates as high or higher in professional dispositions (Keiser, 2007; Keiser & Smith, 2009). Although it is difficult to discriminate between growth in awareness of positive dispositions and actual changes in dispositions, when the results are observable positive actions, not only the candidate but the community benefits.

While almost every item showed growth, Factor 2, *educators' beliefs and attitudes about students and teaching/learning* started the semester at such a high level (4.71, with 5.00 maximum) that there was little room for improvement. *Educators' skills in helping students gain knowledge,* Factor 1, indicated slightly significant growth, and the increase in Factor 3, *educators' connections to the community,* was statistically significant. If candidates begin the course with very positive beliefs and skills in diversity dispositions, then why do they not feel as though they act in a way that connects them to the community? What then allows them to develop more positive community connections during the semester course?

Aligning Beliefs With Actions

A disconnect between beliefs and actions can be described as the 'knowing-doing gap' (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). This gap can occur when individuals or organizations substitute talking for action, fall back on traditions, fear change, focus intensely on short-term measurements, or rely on internal competition. To varying degrees, all of these can be common barriers for educators. Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton (2000) suggest that when uncovering a knowing-doing gap, it was "clear that knowing what to do was not enough. It was clear that being smart was not enough to turn knowledge into practice. It was evident that reading, listening to, thinking, and writing smart things were not enough" (p. ix). Therefore, it becomes the role of the university instructor to supply opportunities for candidates to actively confront these barriers. Reflection and discussion enhances adult learners' multidimensional consciousness (Grossman, 2009; Scheckley & Bell, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2007), and requires them to grapple with the mutuality, solidarity, and diversity of their experience based upon their learning. "The ideal end result of transformational learning is that one is empowered by learning to be more socially responsible, self-directed, and less dependent on false assumptions" (Kiely, 2005, p. 7).

The Elements of Social Justice Education Practice (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997) provides a good framework to address the development of diver-

sity dispositions. These elements were included in the school community course to create an intentional sociocultural environment for active learning. These include:

1. Balance the emotional and cognitive components of the learning process.
2. Acknowledge and support the personal (the individual student's experience) while illuminating the systemic (the interactions among social groups).
3. Attend to social relations within the classroom.
4. Utilize reflection and experience as tools for student-centered learning.
5. Value awareness, personal growth, and change as outcomes of the learning process.

Awareness and personal growth blend together as candidates reframe their actions through a sociocultural lens. For example, on the item, "I help my students make connections in their community," responses were more positive on the posttest than the pretest (pretest $M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.77$; posttest $M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.71$). While candidates may alter their teaching, what was more widely reported in reflection was that they realized how they were already teaching had an impact on the students, community, and school culture.

Improving Community Connections

If becoming actively involved with cultural proficiency instruction combined with community service enables future school leaders to become more positive in their connections to the community, then it would seem that novel, intense experiences in unfamiliar cultures would result in greater growth in dispositions. However, the candidates in this study made similar growth even when completing service projects in settings that seemed not to challenge their cultural assumptions. They did report benefits of moving outside their own neighborhood or culture. For example, one candidate reflected, "The first time I went [to the site], I was afraid to drive to that part of town. But it was wonderful. Everyone was respectful, and the older kids truly looked out for the younger kids. [Now] I bring my children along when I volunteer there."

But working within a familiar culture could also lead to insights, as candidates looked at familiar settings through a sociocultural and service leadership lens. Another candidate wrote, "I grew up in this area and went to school here. Then after listening to these kids talk about their dreams—now I know what my job needs to be." Making these kinds of commitments to the community gives candidates not only a sense of purpose, but also confidence to face the challenges of school leadership.

A secondary benefit is to the community itself. Many of the candidates have continued to be involved with the people, organizations, and agencies from their service learning projects. Several local community groups now

not only welcome but seek out educational administrative volunteers for their energetic teaching experience and leadership initiative. These partnerships aid not only the immediate participants, but begin future networks between the school and community, leading to school improvement. As in any change, the first step is to increase awareness and purpose, followed by providing opportunities to share knowledge and build relationships, with the goal of realizing effective leadership and long-term community commitment (Fullan, 2001).

While the results of this study showed an increase in positive diversity dispositions by candidates, success will be measured over time. Developing positive dispositions through transformative reflection in class activities can be powerful (Grossman, 2009), but whether the gains made in coursework extend to the workplace is not guaranteed (Zeichner, 2003; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Also, exploring how diversity dispositions are impacted by gender, ethnicity, and teaching experience may provide new insights. Discovering which factors enhance meaningful school community connections and how service learning improves lasting cultural competence is essential to administrator preparation programs. Ultimately, by preparing candidates for leadership in a richly diverse world, positive beliefs can become proactive endeavors for schools today and society tomorrow.

Acknowledgements

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