

Innovations

A Conceptual Understanding of Professional Dispositions and its Significance in the Pedagogical Practices at Tertiary Level of Education

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Abstract

The present study addresses the conceptual understanding of professional dispositions and its significance in the pedagogical practices at tertiary level of education. Professional dispositions are the ethical values, personal beliefs and novel ideas of educators that engage moral principles like social justice, accountability and honesty aligned with educational standards. Such dispositions are more than the knowledge of subject content, systematic academic planning and instructional skills. In other words, it is one of the most important skill sets of educators that help the optimization of academic excellence by deploying an array of pedagogical resources to build positive interpersonal and productive pedagogical relationships with the learners. In regard to this, the present study attempts to show that these dispositions facilitate educators to ease and ameliorate pedagogical practices so as to meet the varied levels of learners' capacity. For instance, educators engage high standard communicative techniques for promoting students' autonomy in functioning academic performance, expected behavior, seeking continual amelioration in teaching performances, ensuring fair communications, accommodating diverse learners' requirements and so on. In view of this, it is argued that the professional dispositions must be valued and observed correspondingly in pedagogical practice without fashioning any hierarchical prominence. The paper thus argues that professional dispositions are not limited to the pedagogical skills or professional training manuals but the real virtues of professional dispositions are substantially significant to develop self-efficacy, value pedagogical relations and maintain commitments towards professional responsibilities.

Keywords: Ethical Values, Pedagogical Relationship, Professional Dispositions, Tertiary level

Introduction

Professional dispositions involve a wide range of academic as well as professional abilities. For instance, it comprises specific characteristics of the discipline being taught, academic prowess, profundity of pedagogical skills, a personification of morality, appropriate skills and virtues and so on. It includes a variety of behaviors and attitudes such as

- i) Recognizing students' culturally-grounded experiences as a foundation on which to build knowledge
- ii) Demonstrating cultural competency when interacting with students and families
- iii) Upholding a deep care ethic and affirming views of students
- iv) Cultivating in students a sense of efficacy about learning and making changes to promote equity (Darling-Harmond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron & Osher, 2020)

However, it is observed that educators who have less knowledge of such dispositions unknowingly follow their preconceived notions and lack in incorporating novel perspectives, new patterns of behavior or new ideas into their instruction (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Undoubtedly, the job of educators is a challenging pursuit when compared with other professions like medical and legal practice. For instance, physicians and lawyers deal with one patient or client at a time whereas educators have to deal with learners individually in a group. However, it often seems difficult for them to deal with students individually in a group particularly when the size of the classroom is large (perhaps more than fifty students). In such situation they need multiple skills: at the very first s/he must know her/his students formally as well as informally (up to some extent) to whom s/he is going to teach, second s/he must not always fully rely on the pedagogy of behavioral science rather s/he should also involve her/his personal beliefs, ethical values, self-efficacy and experiences of good teaching that come in the category of professional dispositions. Hitherto, it is observed that at tertiary level of education, educators are compelled to prioritize academic ability and skills over other subtleties of educational objectives. Unknowingly, they fail to engage the pedagogical philosophies and/or professional dispositions and spend much time on managing duties, academic planning and instructional chores. It is therefore argued that the absence of such dispositions may have disparaging effects on the teaching-learning process.

To overcome such a crisis, the present paper attempts to show how professional dispositions facilitates educators understanding learners' psychology, their unique learning capacities and many more like this. Considering the contemporary trends, the paper proceeds in arguing that the pedagogical skills of educators are not inherited ritual rather they are deliberately devised maneuvered skills facilitated by the professional dispositions. It is the need of an hour to think more profoundly to discern the significance of such dispositions that would not only empower them to mobilize equitable practices in a variety of situations but also enable them to provide quality instruction in classrooms.

Methodology of the Study

The methodology of the present research engages analytical observation of the professional dispositions of educators demonstrated in their roles. Various attributes of professional dispositions are critically discussed with a view to show its substantial significance in maintaining a positive and effective learning environment. The argument shows that in doing so, it not only enhances learning outcomes but also brings out the expected excellence in academics.

Various Aspects of Professional Dispositions

Dispositions in general are similar to professional beliefs aligned with values systems such as honesty, equality, equity and social justice. These dispositions are further extended to professional modes of conduct and the ways in which beliefs and attitudes are exhibited to perform in a particular manner in particular situations (Villegas, 2007). Professional dispositions in teachers' behavior can be traced long back in John Dewey's philosophy (1922, 1933), who wrote that personal attributes are desirable personal qualities and

traits of educators which were later referred to as habits rather than dispositions. Much later the term disposition was associated with habit basically because the occupation of education rigorously requires rationality and reason to work (Katz & Raths, 1985). It refers to a pattern of those actions by which educators act in a certain manner under certain conditions following their beliefs, making new phenomena and developing novel ideas of teaching and learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Pajares, 1992).

There are several forms of professional dispositions in the context of education that refer to propensities or tendencies to accomplish tasks not in a singular manner but rather in a variety of ways such as:

- **Interactions between Educators and Learners:** This attribute of disposition is directly related to educators' interpersonal relations with learners to create an ambience of learning, to make them comfortable to exchange information freely and question without fear of being reprimanded or denigrated. Indeed, it provides a forum for discussion on a plethora of new views and approaches (Bain, 2004). Such interpersonal relations between educators and learners encourages contemporary educators to remain in the profession (Hargreaves, 1998; O'Connor, 2008).
- **Professional Ethics and Pedagogical Skills:** In this category of professional disposition, educators show a great sense of reasonable professional conduct such as maintaining honesty, integrity, equity, justice and confidentiality at work. In doing so, educators tend to set moral examples for their learners by following ethical principles in an honorable way. In observation with such disposition they attempt to model and demonstrate proper (socially acceptable) kinds of behavior and avoid those that may be seen as setting a repugnant example to learners (Carr, 2005).
- **Effective Communication along with Substantive Content Knowledge:** The present attribute of professional disposition behavior of teachers is a skill domain that refers to truthful, fair and accurate communication with learners. They maintain a sound hold of dispositional sensitivity, substantive content knowledge, respect and co-operation as part of their work in order to teach and reach learners in all capacities. The distinction between knowing and educating is termed 'communication' (Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1978) connected to fostering students' motivation in academics (Frymier, 1994). Effective communication along with the substantial expertise in particular discipline makes the learning process more convenient (Ellis, 2000). Thus, the significance of effective communication has been signified by previous studies (Byrne, 1983; Darling-Hammond, 2020) that is evidently essential for students' progress in academics and promoting future skill.
- **Planning for Effective Academic Processes and Procedures:** This disposition is reflected in the empathetic behavior of educators towards learners (Banner & Cannon, 1997). Apart from scientific competences, they also include a variety of pedagogical skills to the learning environment coupled with the students' personal and academic needs. One of the pedagogical researches underscored that this disposition facilitates educators in planning academic processes and procedures in advance to simplify the subject content so as to make it more comprehensible and understandable for the learners.
- **Empathetic Sensibility to Social Justice and Diversity:** This disposition guides educators to be cautious of behaving in an unbiased manner to promote the bond of true compatibility. They strive to maintain equal and supportive learning opportunities to all learners irrespective of their diverse cultures. It is thus believed that this dispositional behavior of educators at tertiary level that not only influences pedagogy but also enhances the learning process.

Professional Disposition in Promoting Better Learning

Learning in common parlance, involves mastering abstract things, memorizing factual information, deliberating new ideas, discussing concepts or creating behavior tailored to certain circumstances. Conventionally, learning is viewed as an addition to further knowledge instead of a substantive modification

to the pre-existing knowledge of the students (Mezirow, 1991). Though learning is the addition to knowledge as a kind of amassed information may be possible without extensive transformation but any learning of high order involves more refined understanding and association which is likely to facilitate retention of content for a longer period of time. This view of learning demands educators to deal efficiently with complex and multifaceted situations, create a learning environment and provide students with choices for self-directed learning that increase their feeling of mastery. Moreover, educators have to possess professional dispositions that consist of subject expertise, pedagogical dexterity and so on. The possession of professional dispositions of educators provides guidance to respect the uniqueness, individuality and specific needs of each student for example the diverse nature of students' learning, diversity of students' social backgrounds etc.

In order to meet such requirements in an educational arena, educators with sound sense of professional dispositions learn to deal with the daily unknowns of the classroom and perform in a good way. Education aims to deal with distinct goals and circumstances that are completely different and transitory in nature. For instance, each and every learner learns in a different way, and may not be equally enthusiastic about all types of learning materials. Moreover, learning at tertiary level is beyond the high school level, educators at higher level are asked to encourage learners towards learning. It is self-evident that dispositions are often gathered and developed by educators over time, first being students and then from their work experiences with students (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In relation to this, Marton conducted an empirical work and investigated the dispositions of educators and a set of learning tasks that showed how students approached the work influenced, how involved they were with their pupils and which in turn affected the quality of the results (Marton, 1975). In order to better understand the role of professional dispositions two different approaches of learning Deep Approach and Surface Approach are briefly discussed. Surface Approach to learning is the completion of a task, memorization of the information, without making any differences between novel ideas and existing knowledge. It indicates that learners succeed at superficial levels of cognitive processing. Hence, learning is carried without a meaningful framework. Deep approach to learning intends clear understanding and pursue meaning, allowing students to link concepts to existing understanding in order to differentiate between new concepts and previously learned material, critically assess and identify significant themes and concepts. Due to their high levels of cognitive processing throughout their learning, students who use this method of instruction want to get the most meaning possible from their studies. The successful educators possess particular dispositions and concentrate on what they perform, assuming that everyone else who would emulate the same will carry out the same results. Certainly, such an assumption has repeatedly been proven wrong.

In the philosophical theory of education, good organizational structures are remarkably difficult to transfer from one setting to another. Therefore, educators who maintain professional dispositions emphasize more on a deep approach of learning to encourage teaching-learning process effectively (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Deep approach thus substantially involves learners' distinctive and unique learning tendencies, their intellectual and emotional capacities and so on. The attributes of deep approach significantly engages the importance of relational elements in an education setting. This is to say that human beings are unique creatures who interact with other people for social adaptation and social roles. Similarly, academic abilities and skills constitute the crucial context of education when interpersonal relations between educators and learners are dominantly engaged. The interpersonal relations between them could be better understood in opposition to the invisible but real matrix of intersecting relations. It is therefore argued that the dispositional attitude of educators promotes healthy relationships between them since learning is a function of relation, educators must lay stress on it as it is the fundamental belief of teachers' dispositional behavior (Teven, 2001). Furthermore, to augment learning, a good relationship with the learners significantly determines the interest in academia and performance level of students (Teven, 2001). This view of relations signifies a kind of moral association with students and is all about 'internal' rather than 'external' relation Winch (1967). The most eminent British political and moral philosopher Peter Winch (1967) characterized

the idea of such association as an 'internal relation' that depends on a certain amount of personal rational appreciation of authority as logically presumed to any and all social relationships in contrast to the external coercion of power structures. Therefore, the exercise of such dispositions with respect to interpersonal relations are trustful, open, secure, reciprocal in manner and determined by mutual agreement (Tiberius & Billson 1991). In this respect, such a relation is the prerequisite for comprehending positive thoughts, motives and feelings of learners precisely for a wide academic purpose. These significant key aspects of educators' are not limited to the pedagogical skills or professional training manuals but the real virtues of professional dispositions that are significant to maintaining self-efficacy, a passion for teaching and commitment towards profession.

Scopes for the Future Research

At the corollary, this paper attempted to show that the significance of professional dispositions of educators educate the academic community on the need of high-quality education. The analysis has also shown how learners' perceptions of educators' behavior are related to quality learning and impact the personal and professional lives of educators. In addition it should also study the distinctive form of pedagogical communication that impacts students' learning outcomes. Even if education is a social activity, it differs fundamentally from the social world; hence, future study should look at educational implications to comprehend the details of the educational world alone. Besides, educators and academic administrators must comprehend the substantial role of professional dispositions in the classroom interactions with learners, pedagogical upliftment of educators and amelioration of the quality of education. At last, it is also important to understand how educators can be ready with interpretive frameworks that would support both their ongoing professional development and future skill. On the basis of such arguments it is suggested that the professional dispositions should be considered as a relevant research agenda for tertiary education.

[Conclusion

The analysis reached to the conclusion by showing the significance of varied forms of professional dispositions and its practical applicability in the pedagogical practices at tertiary level of education. The argument reflected that such dispositions serve as a foundation for enduring professional responsibilities when taking into account the duties of educators at the tertiary level. It is therefore concluded that they are essential elements for effective pedagogy and important attributes for not only enhancing learning but also for achieving the ultimate goals of education. On the whole, this study provided an overview of professional dispositions in higher education and how dispositional attitudes of educators facilitate in maintaining the positive interpersonal relation between educators and learners, in establishing effective communication along with sound content knowledge, in managing academic process and procedures effectively, in sensitizing the diversity among learning community, promoting social justice and many more like this.

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