A PROFILE OF TEACHER COMPETENCE:
DOES PRACTICE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Paper Presented by

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at the

Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Hobart,
Tasmania
26 - 30 November, 1995
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Introduction

Controversy over the quality of teacher education programs and the quality of graduates from these programs as they enter professional settings has generated a wealth of research studies on the problems of inducting a new generation of teachers properly into classrooms. In more recent times various groups have made general criticisms about the weakness of teacher education programs, particularly their inability to provide the graduates with the necessary competence to begin teaching. Consequently, many groups have proposed an extension of these programs to five years with the inclusion of an extended internship component under the supervision of a master teacher with the intern receiving reduced pay and reduced responsibilities (Holmes Group 1986, Carnegie Forum 1986).

The debate about teacher competence has gained some momentum in Australia during the late '80s and early '90s based on economic rationalist arguments which were used to justify the development of competency standards for the professions including teaching. Some attempts have been made to counter this approach by focusing on the role of teachers and the work they do and by pointing out the deficiencies inherent in producing a "checklist" of competency statements and adopting a behaviourist approach to assess teacher competence.

Peacock (1993) pointed out:

"recent research highlights the need for a knowledge-based approach to defining teaching and teacher competence, one which draws together the wide range of teacher knowledge, including content knowledge, knowledge of pedagogy and the capacity to draw on a wide repertoire of teaching approaches ....." p9.

In order to easily assess the effectiveness of this type of approach there should be a high level of specificity. Masters and McCurry (1990) suggest the historical evidence reflect badly on this type of behaviourist approach which requires a large number of items for assessment.
Many authors have countered these arguments by suggesting that, despite the complex nature of teachers' work, attempts should continue to identify exactly what teachers do and how well they should do them. Eltis and Turney (1993) concluded that there appears to be some agreement about the need to identify what teachers do and the personal attributes they possess and use in various ways to perform their roles.

At a National level there is some agreement about the need to produce a profile of teacher competencies for establishing some standards for the profession. (National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) 1992, 1993, National Training Board 1992, Louden 1993, Preston and Kennedy 1994 Eltis and Turney 1993, Boston 1993). In addition, these lists have substantial common themes which allow the debate to accelerate to the point where various groups such as the Australian Council of Deans, The Australian Teacher Education Association and various boards representing state governments have proposed a system of teacher registration.

This context of rapid change and the identification of teacher competencies has generated a number of questions which formed the focus of this study designed to identify various groups of graduates' perceptions of their teaching competence in relation to a number of Teaching Domains. The two main questions were:

1. How do graduates from various programs feel about their ability to perform various competency statements?

2. Are there some differences in perception of abilities amongst the various groups of graduates?

The limitation of using graduates' perceptions was clearly a factor which may impact on the results from comparisons of different programs. Weinstein (1988) stated that preservice teachers may indeed have an unrealistic view, often bordering on over confidence, about their ability to become effective teachers. Wood and Eicher (1989) suggested that how graduates feel about themselves concerning their abilities to teach effectively and their adequacies in handling professional procedures are important issues to consider in the preparation of future teachers. Graduates from various programs at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean, have a number of opportunities to test their teaching skills whilst on Practice teaching, through tutorial presentations and participation in their professional activities. The development of these experiences should be an effective predictor of future teaching success and a reasonable reflection of current teaching competence particularly since all these graduates have successfully completed the final practicum and through various means of obtaining feedback on their teaching have had their performance affirmed by their co-operating teachers.
METHODOLOGY

The Instrument

The instrument used to measure graduates' perceptions of teaching competence was modified from an earlier study (Khamis 1995). The initial instrument contained 11 Domains which had a number of competency statements ranging from 15 to 25 in each Domain. Factor analysis procedures and high cronbach alphas for all Domains facilitated the reduction of the number of competencies in the final version used in the study which contained the following Domains.

1. Empowering others (10 competency statements)
2. Active Leadership (10 competency statements)
3. Building Relations With Others (10 competency statements)
4. Creating a Community of Learners (10 competency statements)
5. Developing Self Growth (10 competency statements)
6. Planning and Preparation (10 competency statements)
7. Communication (10 competency statements)
8. Questioning (10 competency statements)
9. Assigning Work Tasks (10 competency statements)
10. Classroom Management (10 competency statements)
11. Motivation and Reinforcement (10 competency statements)

The graduates were asked to indicate how well they can perform each competency statement within 11 Domains on a 10 point - Likert scale:- zero - unsure or not relevant; 1,2,3 unsatisfactory; 4,5,6,7 satisfactory; 8,9 outstanding competence.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected by administering the competency instrument to available samples of final year students in various Teacher Education programs and the Bachelor of Education Fourth year at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean. The analysis is based on the following samples. The percentage figures represent an approximation of the proportion of total number of graduates within each program who responded to the instrument.

1. B. Teach. Primary N = 66(50% of Total)
2. B. Teach. E.C. N = 46(75% of Total)
3. B. Ed 4th Year N = 59(45% of Total)
4. B. Ed Secondary N = 24(65% of Total)
5. Dip Ed Primary N = 64(80% of Total)
6. Dip Ed Secondary N = 74(90% of Total)
The respondents completed the survey 3 - 4 weeks before the end of their final semester. The task was undertaken straight after the students returned from a block practicum ranging from 3 - 4 weeks duration. The ratings for each group were summarised by providing a comparison of the means and standard deviations for each of the 11 Domains. These comparisons are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Cluster Means for Various Groups of Respondents

Perceived Competence for the Total Group

In order to obtain some indication of the perceived competence of the total group, Domain means were calculated and listed in rank order. The results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
DOMAIN MEANS ARRANGED IN RANK ORDER HIGHEST TO LOWEST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Building relations with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Motivation and reinforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>Classroom management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>Developing self growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>Active leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Planning and preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Assigning work tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Creating a community of learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Empowering others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ranked means for the 11 Domains do not show substantial differences in the distribution ranging from 6.3 to 7.4. This indicates that the
graduates perceived themselves to be quite competent. However, it is interesting to note that the rankings appear to reflect the academic and professional experiences of the various programs which focus on preparing graduates to begin teaching. It is also interesting to note that empowering others received the lowest rank. This may be an indication of the current stage of professional growth where the emphasis is on "performing" teaching tasks instead of developing a broader understanding of the teaching-learning process and becoming aware of strategies to empower students as learners. It may also reflect the "role" the student teacher is expected to play, namely, teaching a specific number of lessons and demonstrating competence in planning and preparing these lessons and executing them effectively. The nature of the Practicum experienced may not provide adequate opportunities for the student teachers to establish and sustain relations with their pupils as those that are able to be developed by co-operating teachers.

Domain Differences Amongst the Groups

The Domain means for each group reveal differences in perceptions of teaching competence. The Graduate Diploma of Education secondary group appeared to have the highest perceptions while the Bachelor of Teaching Early Childhood had the lowest perceptions. In order to test for differences between the groups the Domains were collapsed into two Broad Categories. The first category included the first five Domains, namely: Empowering Others, Active Leadership, Building Relations With Others, Creating a Community of Learners and Developing Self Growth.

The second category included the remaining six Domains i.e. Planning and Preparation, Communication Questioning, Assigning Work Tasks, Classroom Management and Motivation and Reinforcement.

Collapsing the 11 Domains into two broad categories was based on the focus of each of the Domains. The first five clearly focused on and included "others" involved in the work of teachers while the remaining Domains appeared to focus on the teacher as the classroom practitioner.

One-way MANOVAs were conducted. Initially, significant differences were found between the various groups and Domains and subsequently between the two broad categories. The results for Domain and category comparisons are presented in Table 3.

| TABLE 3 |
One Way MANOVA Comparisons of the Eleven Domains and Six Groups

CATEGORY 1
Scale 1F (5,229) = 8.10, P<.000
Scale 2F (5,229) = 7.9, P<.000
Scale 3F (5,229) = 2.8, P<.01
Scale 4F (5,229) = 4.7, P<.000
Scale 5F (5,229) = 6.4 P<.000

CATEGORY 2
Scale 6F (5,226) = 6.0, P<.00
Scale 7F (5,226) = 1.1, P<.32
Scale 8F (5,226) = 3.6, P<.004
Scale 9F (5,226) = 4.0, P<.002
Scale 10F (5,226) = 3.3, P<.006
Scale 11F (5,226) = 3.8, P<.002

A Student NEWMAN-KEULS procedure was used as a follow-up to test for differences between the various groups. This highlighted the strengths of the perceptions of the Secondary Dip.Ed group in relation to all the other groups. The full comparisons are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4

STUDENT NEWMAN-KEULS FOLLOW-UP
COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE SIX GROUPS

CATEGORY 1
1. Empowering others-Secondary Dip.Ed better than all groups
2. Active leadership-Secondary Dip.Ed better than B.T. Primary and Early Childhood
3. Building relations with others-No difference between any two groups
4. Creating a community of learners-Secondary Dip.Ed better than B.T. Primary
5. Developing self growth-Secondary Dip.Ed better than B.T. Primary and Early Childhood

CATEGORY 2
6. Planning and preparation-Secondary Dip.Ed better than all groups
7. Communication-No differences between any two groups
8. Questioning-Secondary Dip.Ed better than all groups
9. Assigning work tasks—Secondary Dip.Ed better than all groups
10. Classroom management—B.T. Primary is better than other groups
11. Motivation and Reinforcement—B.T. Primary is better than other groups

Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to explore profiles of perceived teacher competence. Eleven Domains, each containing 10 competency statements were used to test final year graduates' perceptions of their abilities to perform the listed competencies and to compare the perceptions of graduates from Bachelor of Teaching Primary and Early Childhood, B.Ed (4th Year) Primary and B.Ed Secondary, and Graduate Diploma of Education Primary and Secondary.

Graduates from all these programs reported they had a satisfactory level of competency to embark on their teaching career. All graduates reported a high level of competence in "Communication", "Building Relations With Others", "Motivation and Reinforcement" and Classroom Management". Such competence appears to reflect the content of various teacher education courses and their subjects and the professional experiences particularly the "practicum". By contrast, the total group did not feel as competent in performing competencies related to "creating a community of learners" and "empowering others". This may reflect the stages of professional growth beginning teachers appear to experience. They may need to develop a high level of Teacher focused strategies before they feel comfortable in performing a variety of strategies designed to focus on the pupil as the learner. One may speculate about the effectiveness of feedback on student teaching performance and the lesson observation "instrument" designed by the university to provide student teachers with comments on observed lessons. The focus of this process tends to suggest the co-operating teachers and student teachers are more concerned with effective communication skills, sound planning and successfully using a variety of teaching strategies. This process may have served to reinforce the graduates' perceptions of this level of competence.

Comparisons of the individual cluster of responses to the groups of items within the 11 Domains revealed some significant differences between the groups. In general, the Secondary Dip. Ed graduates' perceptions were significantly higher than all the other graduates on almost all the Domains. By contrast, the Early Childhood graduates were significantly lower on almost all the Domains compared to the other graduates. In some instances the Bachelor of Teaching primary graduates were higher than other groups, e.g. "Classroom Management", and "Motivation and Reinforcement".
Such differences are difficult to explain. One suggestion could be the students in the B. Teach primary have to teach for extended periods of time and have a greater opportunity to motivate pupils and establish classroom routines while the secondary graduates have to deal with more difficult adolescents and do not have the same extended periods of teaching to develop and enhance their relations with pupils since their final practicum is three weeks instead of four.

Another explanation may relate to the nature of the program content and the delivery of various subjects. Much more emphasis may be given within the primary program to "motivation and reinforcement" and "establishing routines" which guarantee the smooth transition of lessons from one subject to another.

The Secondary Dip. Ed graduates appeared to be higher in their perceptions overall. This may reflect the nature of the breadth and depth of experiences in the undergraduate degrees as well as the level of maturity of the students themselves. However, if this were the case then the Graduate Diploma of Education primary groups should have similar perceptions because they have similar breadth and depth of experiences and levels of maturity. A more plausible explanation may relate to the structure of the program and its subjects as well as the practicum experiences provided within the total program. The primary graduates have to acquire a broad range of knowledge about their KLAS and are expected to teach lessons across all the KLAS. By contrast, the secondary Dip. Ed students have a limited number of KLAS such as Science, Maths, English History etc and may have greater awareness of the syllabus content within their respective areas of specialisation, particularly those referred to by Shulman (1987) as their Content Knowledge, Curriculum Knowledge and General Pedagogical Knowledge.

No differences existed between the various groups on "communication" and "building relations with others". The results of the rank order of the Domains revealed these two items were ranked one and two respectively and provided some indication of the emphasis graduates and co-operating teachers placed on these Domains. Moreover, they give some indication of the perceptions of the role of "Teacher" being predominantly an effective communicator and the person responsible for establishing good relations with pupils, colleagues and parents and appear to reinforce the expectation of "Teacher-centred" roles student teachers are expected to perform.

Care must be taken in drawing broad conclusions due to the inherent validity problems associated with self report measures. Howard, Schmeck and Bray (1979) suggested that in using self report instruments, researchers assume that the individuals evaluating themselves have an internalised standard for judging their levels of
functioning with regard to a given dimension. This is certainly applicable to the participants in this study. However, it was assumed that the perceptions of all participants must hold some reflection of their "true" abilities because they have successfully completed a number of professional and practice teaching experiences in schools and centres and would have received feedback from co-operating teachers, students and university lecturers to allow them to moderate these perceptions and develop some basis for judging their own competence and confidence. In addition, co-operating teachers' feedback on these graduates' teaching performance would have served to affirm their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of themselves as teachers, particularly since they all successfully completed their practicum experiences.

Another validity question arises when one analyses the competency statements within the 11 Domains. Despite the careful selection of these statements as a result of examining the literature on Teacher-Teaching effectiveness and referring to recent reports on competencies for beginning teachers there may be many competencies that do not accurately reflect the "role" of the Early Childhood teacher. Consequently, this group of graduates may have rated themselves much lower on these unrelated competencies than other which reflect a traditional "role" of teaching. Such questions need further study in order to ensure the validity of the competency statements and their relevance for all graduates.

Despite the limitations, these findings suggest a need to closely examine the Secondary Dip. Ed course in order to identify those aspects which contribute to the positive growth of student teachers. By contrast the Bachelor of Early Childhood should be examined to identify those factors which negatively contribute to the growth of students and design strategies and alternatives to overcome them and create a more positive learning environment. Moreover, the role of co-operating teachers should be studied in order to ascertain the level of influence they have on reinforcing graduates' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about teaching.

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