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LIFELONG LEARNING CONCEPTUALIZED FROM THE LENS OF ENHANCING SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR TEACHERS

Article by Mary M. Ruettgers, EdD

Abstract

To be effective in the 21st century classroom, educators must be lifelong learners who promote social inclusion (European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning [EUCIS-LLL], 2011). Pre-service teacher candidates must explore and develop social inclusion during teacher development programs to be life-long learners and more effective in the classroom. Therefore it is imperative for teacher preparation programs to provide pre-service teacher candidates with meaningful opportunities to be life-long learners and develop an understanding of and model social inclusion practices in their classrooms. In order to understand the candidate's initial perception of social inclusion, the researcher will have candidates self-assess at the beginning and end of the teacher development program. This article details a piloted mixed-method research study of teacher candidates' perceptions of social inclusion and its application in the classroom. It also includes information related to the need for teachers to be lifelong learners, focusing specifically on the socially inclusive aspect.

Introduction

Many individuals and groups define lifelong learning differently; however, most would agree on the importance of lifelong learning in both the professional and personal domains. According to the Lifelong Learning Council Queensland, Inc. (2016), lifelong learning is "learning that is pursued throughout life; learning that is flexible, diverse and available at different times and places. Lifelong learning crosses sectors, promoting learning beyond traditional schooling and beyond adult life" (para. 1). The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL, 2011) believes "lifelong learning covers education and training across all ages and in all areas of life, be it formal, non-formal or informal" (p. 5). One goal of the EUCIS-LLL (2011) is for members of society to be 'lifelong learners' who understand and possess the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to be successful in various contexts. Lifelong learning

extends beyond the completion of a formal university degree; it may include attending conferences or meetings, reading professional publications, reviewing data or other evidence to create policy changes, and mentoring students (Steelman, 2014). Furthermore lifelong learning is essential for employability, social inclusion, active citizenship, personal development, and competitiveness in the work force (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). Equal access to knowledge throughout one's life is imperative to have an educated society (EUCIS-LLL, 2011).

Victoria Steelman (2014), President of the Association of PeriOperative Registered Nurses and an Assistant Professor at The University of Iowa College of Nursing, noted the importance for nurses to be lifelong learners.

To effectively lead change to enhance health, we need the knowledge about best practices and successful implementation of changes. To gain this knowledge requires a commitment to lifelong learning because the available knowledge changes rapidly and continuously. Lifelong learning is twofold, academic education and professional (p. 557).

Even though Steelman was specifically referencing nursing professionals, this ideology is relevant to all professions, including education.

Students should have opportunities to apply knowledge and skills from coursework to jobs and careers; they must "Learn to do" as it relates to future and current employee skillsets and competencies (Delors et al., 1996, p. 21). These learning opportunities are all acceptable means for professional development for practicing educators. Lifelong learning is essential today for one to be able to function in society. Lifelong learning is a concept required in the 21st century; however, to continue learning, one must "learn how to learn" (Delors et al., 1996, p. 20).

In the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, Delors et.al. (1996) identified two principles of learning: Learning throughout life and The Four Pillars of Education: Learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together, and with others; and learning to be. The learning to live together pillar is considered the most important pillar. Furthermore, Delors et.al. (1996) acknowledged the requirement for individuals to learn to live with others, since society must be composed of individuals who are understanding of each other's histories, traditions, and values within their communities and in the world in order to promote peaceful interactions and harmony. With this knowledge, ideally, individuals would then address conflict peacefully and with intelligence (Delors et al., 1996). EUCIS-LLL provides individuals opportunities to hear and debate various points of views on topics; thus providing insight and growth for all involved (Laal & Salamati, 2012). According to the Lifelong Learning Council Queensland, Inc. (2016), "lifelong learning can instill creativity, initiative and responsiveness in people by thereby enabling them to show adaptability in post-industrial society through enhancing skills to: manage uncertainty, communicate across and within cultures, sub-cultures, families, and communities, [and] negotiate conflicts" (para. 2). By being more educated with the Four Pillars of Education, society will be a better place for all.

Lifelong Learning as it Relates to Social Inclusion

To be effective in the 21st century classroom, educators must be lifelong learners who promote lifelong learning and social inclusion at all levels (EUCIS-LLL, 2011). Lifelong learning is an avenue to combat the effects of poverty and promote social inclusion (EUCIS-LLL, 2011). The World Bank (2017) defines social inclusion as “the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society-improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity” (para. 1). Furthermore, it also recognizes barriers, such as stereotypes, gender-bias, race-bias, religious beliefs sexual orientation, disabilities, which effect specific groups around the world from actively participating in society (World Bank, 2017). These are just a few of the many reasons pre-service teacher candidates and current teachers must be aware of their biases and create a learning culture that is socially inclusive of all learners.

When discussing social inclusion, one must also note the necessity of integration. According to Sowa-Behtane (2016), integration is the “social coexistence that brings about racial desegregation, equal opportunities regardless of race and cultural origin” (p. 236). When countries experience increased immigration or migration, communities must identify factors, which will help those individuals become integrated (Sowa-Behtane, 2016). In previous research, Sowa-Behtane (2016) identified many factors associated with positive experiences related to social inclusion: life plans; foreigners; knowledge of country and language; current employment; participation in the new culture, social networks, and its traditions; and absence of discrimination from locals, among other factors. If individuals are active within the new community, they are more likely to be included in the new environment (as cited in Sowa-Behtane, 2016). “Intercultural relations may take the form of hostility, conflict, antagonism, segregation, separation, neutral co-presence, partial social adaptation, avoidance, withdrawal, alienation, marginalization, integration, assimilation or acculturation” (Sowa-Behtane, 2016, p. 233). According to Sowa-Behtane (2016), “social inclusion becomes a key tool” (p. 238), which provides opportunities for successful integration of individuals from different demographics and backgrounds in society. Teachers must provide the “key tools” for all students and their families, so they can be an active participant in the learning community.

The World Bank (2017) concurred, noting the financial, social, and political cost of not having a socially inclusive society. Buddelmeyer, Leung, and Scutella, (2012) also agreed, noting seven dimensions that negatively impact one’s ability to actively participate in society: “material resources; employment; education and skills; health and disability; social interactions; community; and personal safety” (p. 8). Sowa-Behtane (2016) further noted the need for community and government entities, such as schools, employers, health providers, and others to be supportive (as cited in Sowa-Behtane, 2016). Huxley (2015) articulated the necessity of social inclusion:

Failure to promote social inclusion in young people may scar them for life, and better health and greater material-well-being, and employment are all predictors of inclusion.

With increasing international mobility and migration issues, the resolution of social inclusion problems will be of urgent importance in the coming years. In the same way the concept of the 'quality of life' has entered into the collective consciousness, so the term social inclusion can be expected to become more accepted and widespread, in social policy and academia (p. 51).

Buddelmeyer et al., (2012) noted that education had the most significant impact on social inclusion, and specifically, the completion of Year 12 in the Australian education system, which would be the equivalent of senior year in the United States. This is yet another reason the United States must make changes to increase the high school graduation rates across the country. Teachers must create classrooms that are socially inclusive. Progress is being made; however, analyses of implemented strategies and the method to determine the effectiveness of social inclusion efforts need further development (The World Bank, 2017).

Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

The goal of Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) is to create preservice teacher candidates who possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be effective in the classroom (Notar, Riley, & Taylor, 2009). Accrediting bodies of EPPs, such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), require the continuous monitoring and assessing of preservice teacher candidates as they progress through the program. EPPs must assess teacher candidates' knowledge, skills, and even dispositions in multiple field and clinical experiences (Johnston, Almerico, Henriott, & Shapiro, 2011).

The CAEP has five standards; Standard 1: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge, addresses the candidates' knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions. Candidates must also demonstrate an understanding of the 10 InTASC standards (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2015). InTASC Standard #2: Learning differences states, "The teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011, p. 11). InTASC also identified critical dispositions related to Standard #2:

2(l) The teacher believes that all learners can achieve at high levels and persists in helping each learner reach his/her full potential.

2(m) The teacher respects learners as individuals with differing personal and family backgrounds and various skills, abilities, perspectives, talents, and interests.

2(n) The teacher makes learners feel valued and helps them learn to value each other.

2(o) The teacher values diverse languages and dialects and seeks to integrate them into his/her instructional practice to engage students in learning. (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011, p. 11)

CAEP Standard #2 relates to the need for preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers to have dispositions that are socially inclusive. According to Schussler and Knarr (2013),

dispositions embody teachers' behaviors as well as the impetus underlying those behaviors. Dispositions embrace the *why* of teachers' decisions, not just the *what*. Furthermore, fostering awareness of dispositions helps teachers access the most foundational aspects of who they are, professionally and personally. (p. 73)

Schussler and Knarr (2013) stated,

beyond depicting *actions*, dispositions entail the *inclinations* of a person to behave in particular ways, the *context* of a situation and a person's *awareness* of his or her inclinations and what the context requires for desired outcomes to be reached." (p.73)

Proponents of the use of disposition assessments claim the necessity of such tools because they are predictive of future behaviors: how will the skills and knowledge be incorporated in the preservice teachers' future classrooms (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007). Likewise,

dispositions conjoin the knowledge and skills of teaching with the commitments one has to achieve intended purposes. Dispositions build candidates' awareness of their own perceptions (and misperceptions) and how they can best connect their intention with their perception and with their practice." (Schussler & Knarr, 2013, p. 71)

Proponents of disposition assessments also argue the need for dispositions in the accreditation process as it pertains to the preservice teachers' commitment to promote learning and growth for all students; however, the process should not be a way to screen students out of a program due to personal beliefs (Borko et al., 2007).

Teacher educators should first assist candidates [preservice teacher candidates] in becoming conscious of their dispositions, find out if they want to change, and then create circumstances in which they can begin this developmental transformation. It is a holistic development of the candidate through a variety of experiences in their teacher education program." (Notar et al., 2009, p. 6)

Preservice teacher candidates must be informed of the expected dispositions of the field of education early in their educational coursework, so they are aware and can strive for personal growth (Notar et al., 2009). The goal of identifying teacher candidates who are demonstrating disposition concerns is to provide mentoring and opportunities for personal and professional growth (Hochstetler, 2014).

As a result of implementing disposition assessments in teacher preparation coursework, faculty will begin to look at the preservice teacher candidates' dispositions in classroom interactions, as well as, in the field and clinical placement experiences in P-12 settings. It is important for EPPs to note candidates with disposition concerns early in the

program to provide opportunities for faculty and the candidates to discuss the concerns and create a remediation plan. The EPPs should also provide candidates multiple opportunities for growth. By identifying these concerns early in the program, EPPs should notice a decrease in the number of preservice teacher candidates who make it to the internship (student teaching), but must be pulled from the classroom due to poor dispositions (Notar et al., 2009). Moreover, Hochstetler (2014) noted the need for such assessments to “take behavioral, affective, and communicative as well as academic competencies into consideration when determining a candidate’s suitability for a long-term career teaching” (p. 13).

Some preservice teacher candidates are able to demonstrate both pedagogical and content knowledge; however, they are not able to effectively exhibit a disposition necessary to be an effective teacher (Notar et al., 2009; Schulte, Edick, Edwards, and Mackiel, 2004). According to Schussler and Knarr (2013), “dispositions are an essential component of quality teaching and therefore must be cultivated to increase teacher effectiveness” (p. 72). Research has shown that teaching requires more than content and pedagogical knowledge to be effective in the classroom. The manner in which the teacher conveys that knowledge and interacts with the students determines teacher effectiveness (as cited in Johnston, et al., 2011).

Hochstetler (2014) shared concerns associated with weak dispositions:

When students with weak dispositions enter into the classroom full time and struggle to the point of leaving the profession it undermines teacher and teacher educators’ authority to determine who is or isn’t prepared to enter the classroom; it impacts the quality of preservice teachers who student teach; it affects the learning experiences of those teacher candidates’ classrooms; it alters university relationships with K-12 teachers and administrators; and it potentially contributes to higher attrition rates. (p. 13)

Moreover there is a direct correlation between teacher disposition and teacher effectiveness, which affect student achievement; therefore, EPPs must continue researching the best methods to assess preservice teachers’ dispositions (Notar et al., 2009).

Social Inclusion Disposition Assessment - Lindenwood

As a means to assess teacher candidate dispositions the Lindenwood University Council of Teacher Education voted to implement a formal disposition assessment, The Teacher Education Disposition Evaluation, starting Fall 2017. This disposition will provide the College of Education and Human Services multiple data points for each preservice teacher candidate, depending on if the candidate transferred previous coursework into the teacher education program. The assessment includes areas focused on ethical decision-making, effective communication practices, professionalism, classroom contributions, open-mindedness and respect of diversity, and a few other related areas.

The disposition is an excellent starting point since evaluations of candidates' dispositions had not been previously implemented; however, the researcher and Dr. Joyce Piveral, College of Education and Human Services interim-dean, noted a need for a disposition which included aspects of social inclusion. Therefore, they examined avenues to embed such elements in the teacher preparation program. The researcher reviewed other institutions' dispositions, looking specifically for social inclusion aspects. The researcher was extremely impressed with the Niagara Candidate Dispositions Inventory for its comprehensiveness. After speaking with Dr. Vince Rinaldo, Associate Dean, College of Education at Niagara University, the researcher obtained permission to publish, duplicate, and distribute such derivative work of the candidate disposition. As a result of this permission, the researcher collaborated with Dr. Piveral to create a Lindenwood University Social Inclusion Disposition Inventory. The survey includes the following components:

- *Professional Commitment and Responsibility*: The candidate demonstrates a commitment to the profession and adhere to the legal and ethical standards set forth by it.
- *Professional Relationships*: The candidate develops, maintains, and models appropriate relationships within the workplace, community, and larger society.
- *Critical Thinking and Reflective Practice*: The candidate demonstrates a commitment to continuous development within the profession.
- Open response related to defining and describing social inclusion.
- Promotion of social inclusion in the teacher candidate's future classroom.
- Personal perspective on why elements of social inclusion are imperative in education.

The researcher obtained approval of the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study related to social inclusion disposition in the initial teacher education program. The Council of Teacher Education approved to pilot the Social Inclusion Disposition Inventory in Fall 2017, and will be considering full implementation late fall, after analyzing initial data from the pilot study.

Beginning Fall 2017, the pre-service teacher candidates enrolled in specific education courses will complete the Social Inclusion Disposition Inventory Self-Assessment in a course early in the program (within the first 10 hours of educational coursework), and in a course completed the semester prior to student teaching. This is to help students analyze personal growth and determine if their coursework, field and clinical experiences, and training has provided them opportunities to become more socially inclusive.

Table 1

Fall 2017-Social Inclusion Disposition Inventory: Self-Assessments

Assessment	Course #	Course Name	Notes
Inventory Self-Assessment #1	EDU 10000 (undergraduate)	Orientation to Educational Experiences	
Inventory Self-Assessment #1	EDU 50000 (graduate)	Foundations of K- 12 Experiences	
Inventory Self-Assessment #1	EDU 21501 (undergraduate)	Teacher Education Seminar	*Students complete self- assessment #1 if they have not yet completed it in EDU 10000.
Inventory Self-Assessment #1	EDU 51500 (graduate)	Teacher Education Seminar	*Students complete self- assessment #1 if they have not yet completed it in EDU 50000.
Inventory Self-Assessment #2	EDU 40400 (undergraduate)	Advanced Measurement and Evaluation to Enhance Learning	
Inventory Self-Assessment #2	EDU 58404 (graduate)	Advanced Measurement and Evaluation to Enhance Learning	

Note: Spring 2018-Social Inclusion Disposition Inventory: Self-Assessments will be completed in the same courses.

If the piloted social inclusion disposition is approved, it will be fully implemented in the spring 2018 semester. Students will still complete the self-assessment at the beginning of the program and the semester prior to student teaching. Preservice teacher candidates who are enrolled in practicum experiences will then be evaluated by their instructors and host teacher, using the social inclusion disposition assessment. The instructors will receive a link to complete the social inclusion disposition on behalf of each student enrolled in their practicum course.

Table 2

Spring 2018-Social Inclusion Disposition Inventory: Instructors of following courses will complete the Inventory.

Assessment	Course #	Course Name
Inventory Instructor Assessment #1	EDU 34300 (undergraduate)	MS/HS Differentiation and Classroom Management
Inventory Instructor Assessment #1	EDU 34400 (undergraduate)	Elementary School Differentiation and Classroom Management
Inventory Instructor Assessment #1	EDU 54310 (graduate)	MS/HS Differentiation and Classroom Management
Inventory Instructor Assessment #1	EDU 54410 (graduate)	Elementary School Differentiation and Classroom Management
Inventory Instructor Assessment #2	EDU 40400 (undergraduate)	Advanced Measurement and Evaluation to Enhance Learning
Inventory Instructor Assessment #2	EDU 58404 (graduate)	Advanced Measurement and Evaluation to Enhance Learning

Note: Fall 2018-Social Inclusion Disposition Inventory: Self-Assessment and Instructor Assessments will be completed in the same courses as [Spring 2018](#).

For the host teachers, the social disposition questions will be added to the current assessment, The Observation Experience Evaluation, which is sent to the host teachers of the students who are hosting preservice teacher candidates who are completing practicum #1 and The Practicum Experiences Evaluation for those who are completing practicum #2. The host teachers will receive a link to the assessment and be asked to complete the assessment near the completion of the semester. All disposition results will then be shared with the students via their personal electronic portfolio account. If a disposition concern is noted, the EPP will follow the procedures outlined in its College of Education and Human Services policies.

Table 3

Fall 2018-Social Inclusion Disposition Inventory: Host teacher of following courses will complete the Inventory.

Assessment	Course #	Course Name
Inventory Host Teacher Assessment #1	EDU 11000 (undergraduate)	School Observation
Inventory Host Teacher Assessment #1	EDU 50000 (graduate)	Foundations of K-12 Experiences
Inventory Host Teacher Assessment #2	EDU 38000 (undergraduate)	Pre-student Teaching Practicum
Inventory Host Teacher Assessment #2	EDU 54310 (graduate)	MS/HS Differentiation and Classroom Management
Inventory Host Teacher Assessment #2	EDU 54410 (graduate)	Elementary School Differentiation and Classroom Management

The researcher believes with the integration of the current disposition and the piloted Social Inclusion Disposition Inventory, the College of Education and Human Services will have a more comprehensive disposition assessment. Just because preservice teacher candidates have good grades in both core academic and pedagogical courses, it does not mean they will be effective teachers. As EPPs, we must address dispositions as well as the academics. According to Schussler and Knarr (2013), “all teachers possess dispositions which affect their teaching, though they often lack awareness they possess dispositions or that dispositions affect their teaching in specific ways. Developing awareness can increase the teacher’s effectiveness by aligning their intentions with their perceptions” (p. 75). The goal of this assessment is for the preservice teacher candidates to be aware of their own dispositions and experience growth as they progress through the teacher education program. Research shows that “Dispositions make a difference in teacher effectiveness and the sustainability of our profession” (Hochstetler, 2014, p. 13); therefore, it is imperative for EPPs to assess and address dispositions of teacher candidates.

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