What Makes a Star Teacher? Examining Teacher Dispositions, Professionalization, and Teacher Effectiveness Using the Haberman Star Teacher Pre-Screener

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Examining teacher dispositions, professionalization, and teacher effectiveness using the Haberman Star Teacher Pre-Screener

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What makes a Star Teacher?

PROFESSIONALIZATION: A SHORT INTRODUCTION

Part of the “professionalization” movement within education is the notion that teachers must have professional and clinical knowledge of teaching and learning gained through some sort of a teacher preparation program. However, the professionalization movement also can be an overly simplistic mentality, since it may consider teaching to be more of a science than an art. Moreover, under the professionalization movement, teachers are sometimes conceived to be educational technicians, resulting in the belief that teachers may not need to study curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy in order to be effective in the classroom. Is this effective or wise?

As a result, the authors of this report feel that substituting trained teachers with previously educated college students, such as in the case of Teach for America (TFA), is problematic, since TFA teachers may lack sufficient clinical training. Consequently, we sought to examine the likelihood that “older” and “more-experienced” in-service teachers at a selective enrollment public elementary school in Illinois would answer the Haberman Star Teacher Pre-Screener correctly. This is important since Haberman’s (2012) “research, conducted over a period of 55 years, indicates that of those over 30 who claim they want to teach diverse children and youth in poverty, approximately one in three passes (the) Star Teacher Selection Interview.” Conversely, “Of those under 25 who say they would like to teach diverse children and youth in poverty, the pass rate is one in 10” (p. 927).

MEASURING TEACHER DISPOSITIONS: THE HABERMAN STAR TEACHER PRE-SCREENER

The Haberman Star Teacher Pre-Screener has been used by suburban and urban school districts across the U.S. to identify prospective teachers who will be successful in the classroom (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2008). The Star Teacher survey instrument uses 50 multiple-choice items to assess 10 different attributes:

1. Persistence
2. Organization and planning
3. Beliefs about the value of students learning
4. Approach to students
5. Approach to at-risk students
6. Ability to connect theory to practice
7. Ability to survive in a bureaucracy
8. Fallibility
9. Explanation of students’ success
10. Explanation of teacher success

Present study

The present study focused on teacher dispositions and core beliefs. Particularly, the researchers were most interested in how the predictive nature of the Haberman Star Teacher Pre-Screener (Star Pre-Screener) might align with teacher dispositions and core beliefs. The purpose of this study was to examine potential relationships between dimensions of teachers’ dispositions, knowledge, and skills on the Star Pre-Screener and teachers’ background characteristics.
Background

TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Many factors contribute to teacher effectiveness, including age/experience, National Board Certification, advanced degree completion, teacher certification, and more. Yet teacher effectiveness is almost exclusively measured by student performance on high-stakes standardized achievement tests, although the push for additional measurement methods such as performance-based evaluations, observations, and merit pay are quickly gaining attention.

In the literature, teacher effectiveness—or what makes an effective teacher—is defined in numerous but similar ways. Morrison (2006) describes effective teachers as those who “accept responsibility for teaching, allocate most of their time to instruction, organize their classroom for effective instruction, […] maintain a pleasant learning environment that is student centered, and provide opportunities for practice and feedback on performance” (p. 13). Another definition was provided by Wong and Wong (2005), who define an effective teacher as “one who has positive expectations for student success, is an extremely good classroom manager, and knows how to design lessons for student mastery” (as cited in Aleccia, 2011, p. 87).

Some researchers break down the definition even further, separating teacher effectiveness into distinct categories. According to Aleccia (2011, p. 87), there are four criteria for being an effective teacher and/or teacher educator:

1. Be clear about your professional mission
2. Have the appropriate background/training
3. Keep current in your classroom practice by bridging theory with practice
4. Model what it means to be an “accomplished teacher” for pre-service teachers, including getting your National Board Certification.

All four of these criteria require experience, suggesting that older and more experienced educators would be more effective teachers than younger and inexperienced educators.

The literature says a lot about the role experience plays in teacher effectiveness. While many scholars have found it difficult to identify the factors that correlate well with teacher effectiveness, the one factor that has been regularly correlated with teacher effectiveness is experience from on-the-job training (Chingos & Peterson, 2011).

This correlation, however, is weak over time. Some recent studies have suggested that the value of on-the-job experience eventually decays and becomes negative after five to ten years of teaching (Chingos & Peterson, 2011; Staiger & Rockoff, 2010; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008; Harris & Sass, 2008; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Rivkin, Haushel, & Kain, 2005). In a study by Rivkin et al. (2005), the researchers noticed some improvements in teaching initially, but concluded that “there is little evidence that improvements continue after the first three years” (p. 449). Although these studies have indicated a leveling out or even a decline in teacher effectiveness, no previous study has detected the point at which that decline occurs, which is particularly of interest in terms of policy given that teacher salary schedules tend to reward teachers for additional years of experience (Chingos & Peterson, 2011, p. 458).

The other factor affecting the validity of the relationship between experience and teacher effectiveness is the potential bias that is inherent in the data. A study of Florida teachers by Chignos and Peterson (2011) analyzed student reading and mathematics scores on a state standardized achievement test. The scores were analyzed from 2002-2009 and adjusted for demographic characteristics in addition to matching the individual students’ scores with each teacher. The results showed a positive relationship between student achievement and the number of years teaching, although the authors note that a potential bias exists given the higher attrition rate of less effective teachers.

Nonetheless, the literature points to a clear, albeit small, correlation between age/experience and teacher effectiveness, part of which might be related to the development over time of teaching self-efficacy. As teachers increase their own personal teaching efficacy—the belief in themselves that they are effective teachers and can produce desired student outcomes—they often become more effective teachers because they are less concerned about the demands of teacher...
What makes a Star Teacher?

tasks and more likely to adopt innovative approaches that support diverse learning needs ((Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Ng, Nicholas, & Williams, 2010; Wetheim & Leyser, 2002). This efficacy is directly related to teaching experience and therefore impacts teacher effectiveness.

Another factor that is often said to increase teacher effectiveness is the completion of an advanced or terminal degree. Yet the research literature does not support this conclusion. Although most teacher pay scales reward the attainment of an advanced degree, the literature on teacher effectiveness shows that holding a master’s degree does not increase teacher effectiveness (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sanders, 2007; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1994; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008; Summers & Wolfe, 1977). Additionally, Chingos and Peterson (2011) found that “teachers with masters degrees are no more effective in the classroom than those without an advanced degree” (p. 464).

This does not mean that teachers with advanced degrees are not effective; in fact, they are highly effective teachers because they also tend to be those teachers with more experience. The completion of that degree, however, does not increase the already high level of effectiveness that these teachers have. In other words, the lack of change in teacher effectiveness could be, in part, due to the fact that teachers who are already effective are more likely to seek advanced degrees and certificates.

Part of identifying effective teachers includes developing reward systems that promote effective teaching practices, and that is exactly what the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) aimed to do with the creation of the National Board Certification process. Established in 1987, the National Board was founded as a voluntary process for advanced certification. The NBPTS outlined Five Core Propositions for the program (NBTPS, 1987):

1. Commitment to students and learning
2. Knowledge of subject matter and how to teach those subjects to students
3. Ability to manage and monitor student learning
4. Ability to systematically think about teaching and learn from experience
5. Become a member of learning communities.

In fact, one of the main reasons for creating the National Board Certification process was as a way to professionalize teaching and provide external motivation for accomplished teachers (National Research Council, 2008). Now, this certification process is highly regarded because, as Chingos and Peterson (2011, p. 452) explain, it involves many components that are intended to increase teacher effectiveness by developing reflective practices such as displaying lesson plans and other evidence of teaching methods, and providing videos of classroom instruction. Thus, it has become “the gold standard of accomplished classroom teaching” (Aleccia, 2011, p. 88).

Many studies have examined teacher effectiveness in relation to National Board (NB) certification as well as the underlying motivational factors behind attaining the goal of becoming NB certified. Chingos and Peterson (2011), for example, found that “teachers certified by NBPTS are more effective than those not certified” (Chingos & Peterson, 2011, p. 450). Many other studies have also suggested that NB certified teachers are more effective than their non-NB certified peers (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2004; Harris & Sass, 2007). And when it comes to motivation, it often has to do with professionalization.

Hildebrandt and Eom (2011, pp. 419-420) explain that the motivation for a teacher to move towards professionalization, which they define as achieving National Board Certification, can be broken down into five main components:

1. A desire to improve teaching
2. External validation
3. The opportunity for financial gain
4. Increased collaboration
5. Internal validation

Given that these motivational factors, as well as the fact that teachers completing National Board Certification are often mid-career teachers in their mid-30s and 40s, experience/age can again be directly linked to teacher effectiveness. Overall, the literature has shown that teacher effectiveness can be correlated with experience/age, which can be explicitly seen in the attainment of advanced degrees, and National Board Certification.


TEACHER DISPOSITIONS

Linked to teacher effectiveness are teacher dispositions and core beliefs. A study conducted by Masunaga and Lewis (2011) supported the notion that “positive teacher dispositions predict effective, successful teaching” (p. 44). Furthermore, educators tend to use dispositions to define teacher effectiveness. When discussing “good” versus “bad” teachers, the focus tends to be on dispositions rather than skills or pedagogy. “Good” teachers are generally described as encouraging, stimulating, etc., whereas “bad” teachers are categorized as impatient, remote, etc. (Katz & Raths, 1985).

In order to understand teacher dispositions, we must look at the moral and reflective domains of how we think and act for a variety of experiences (Dewey, 1904; Johnson & Reiman, 2007; Shulman, 1998). However, defining dispositions can be challenging, as many variations of the term appear in the literature. There are many competing definitions of dispositions, but generally they reflect beliefs and attitudes about specific knowledge or they represent belief statements that define the individual teacher (Welch et al., 2010). The most commonly cited definition comes from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008), which defines dispositions as the “professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and nonverbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities” (pp. 89-90). This tends to be the pattern in the literature because it is the definition connected with the NCATE standards for accreditation.

Other definitions of dispositions can also be found in the literature. Thornton (2006) presents two different definitions of dispositions, related to how these dispositions appear “in action” or in the classroom setting. The first is what she calls responsive dispositions, which reflect “a way of thinking about teacher and learning that is … responsive to the needs and actions of the learner, their developmental characteristics, their cultural background and experiences, (and) their levels of understanding” (p. 61). The second is what she calls technical dispositions, which represents the notion of “teacher as technician focusing on how to successfully employ the skills of teaching” (p. 62) resulting in little variation. Thornton argues that more effective teachers exhibit responsive dispositions.

Katz and Raths (1985), on the other hand, define a disposition as “an attributed characteristic of a teacher, one that summarizes the trend of a teacher’s actions in particular contexts” (p. 301). They go on to say that “the acts that constitute a disposition may be conscious and deliberate or so habitual and ‘automatic’ that they seem intuitive or spontaneous” (p. 301). Furthermore, they emphasize that dispositions involve not just having a particular skill or behavior but rather the likelihood and frequency of using that skill or behavior. Thus, dispositions can be distinguished from traits, habits, attitudes, and skills (e.g., see Katz & Raths, 1985, pp. 302-303).

In the end, sometimes dispositions are defined merely as beliefs or behaviors (NCATE, 2008) and other times they are defined as whether those beliefs and behaviors are prevalent in the classroom (Katz & Raths, 1985; Masunaga & Lewis, 2011; Thorton, 2006; Villegas, 2007). Perhaps what is more important is the fact that dispositions can be either positive (cultural-consciousness, self-awareness, and social justice) or negative (close-mindedness, impatience, and intolerance) in the context of teaching (Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007). Regardless, these dispositions have an effect in the classroom. Talbert-Johnson (2006) explains that “the personal belief systems of teachers significantly influence the behaviors displayed in the classroom and the instructional decisions teachers make” (p. 152). Therefore, understanding dispositions is important in relation to student learning and teacher effectiveness.

The history of teacher dispositions is a long one. One of the most influential thinkers on education, John Dewey (1904), believed that one of the primary challenges for teachers was the “development of dispositions toward reflection, inquiry, ethical judgments, and orientation towards the multifaceted processes of students” (as cited in Johnson & Reiman, 2007, p. 686). The push for understanding dispositions really came during the early 1990s when the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) outlined 10 dispositions that all teachers should have. According to INTASC (1992), teachers should have dispositions towards:

1. Being a lifelong learner
2. Having healthy relationships with children
3. Understanding and appreciating diversity
4. Using creativity, problem solving, and divergent thinking
5. Promoting positive social interactions
6. Maintaining effective communication
7. Planning, organizing, and goal setting
8. Recognizing and promoting growth in others
9. Self-reflection and self-development
10. Integrity and collaboration for student advocacy

In the end, sometimes dispositions are defined merely as beliefs or behaviors (NCATE, 2008) and other times they are defined as whether those beliefs and behaviors are prevalent in the classroom (Katz & Raths, 1985; Masunaga & Lewis, 2011; Thorton, 2006; Villegas, 2007). Perhaps what is more important is the fact that dispositions can be either positive (cultural-consciousness, self-awareness, and social justice) or negative (close-mindedness, impatience, and intolerance) in the context of teaching (Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007). Regardless, these dispositions have an effect in the classroom. Talbert-Johnson (2006) explains that “the personal belief systems of teachers significantly influence the behaviors displayed in the classroom and the instructional decisions teachers make” (p. 152). Therefore, understanding dispositions is important in relation to student learning and teacher effectiveness.
The importance of dispositions becomes clearer when we examine teachers with the same skills, content, and pedagogical knowledge who still vary in their effectiveness. Thornton (2006) argues not only that we need to examine why these differences occur but also that “dispositions may be the key” (p. 67). Given this paradox, most research surrounding teacher dispositions focuses on teacher candidates, and the nature of these dispositions has been studied extensively (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Katz & Raths, 1985; Villegas, 2007; Welch et al., 2010).

With such a long history and with so many competing definitions of dispositions, measuring these dispositions becomes very difficult. Yet, NCATE mandated that teacher candidates must reflect appropriate dispositions for accreditation. According to Welch et al. (2010, p. 181), the measurement tool most commonly used to gauge dispositions tends to be observations. Given that the measurement occurs only when a certain behavior or disposition is observed, the dispositions seen during observation might not reflect that teacher’s typical affective and social behaviors, making the measurement tool problematic.

Still, a vast amount of research has been conducted on teacher dispositions and its relationship to effective teaching. For example, reflection is one of the key dispositions, according to INTASC (1992), that plays a large role in teacher effectiveness. In Thornton’s (2006) study of middle school teachers in a specialized program, the teachers who did not reflect on their own teaching—those who felt the instruction was continuous among all the teachers and did not contain variation based on who was teaching—were the ones who were identified by other teachers, observers, and students as being less effective (p. 61). The lack of self-reflection, which can be seen as a negative disposition, had an impact on teacher effectiveness.

Another large area of focus in the disposition literature is on social consciousness. Mueller and Hindin (2011) define social consciousness in respect to teachers as those who “act as stewards and leaders; understand, respect, and value diversity; and apply what they have learned about teaching to support diverse learners” (p. 18). Furthermore, Villegas and Lucas (2002) outline six characteristics of socially and culturally responsive teachers—teachers who:

1. Are conscious of their own way of perceiving reality based on their background
2. Are positive and have high expectations for all students
3. Have high efficacy
4. Understand and can support how students build knowledge
5. Care about students’ lives
6. Create opportunities for students that build on prior knowledge and promote future growth

In particular, dispositions towards race and ethnicity are of growing importance given that the population of students of color continues to grow. According to Gollnick and Chin (2009), by the year 2020, more than half the student population will be students of color, whereas teachers will remain predominantly white and female. These dispositions are important because they can affect student learning. Teachers are more likely to adopt new ideas if they are compatible with their beliefs and dispositions; however, those ideas that contradict or challenge their dispositions are generally dismissed for being too theoretical, impractical, or wrong (Raths, 2011).

**HABERMAN STAR PRE-SCREENER**

One of the ways in which researchers have answered the call for a focus on teacher dispositions is through the development of measurement tools such as the Haberman Star Pre-Screener to identify those with the dispositions that have been shown to lead to effective teaching.

Martin Haberman spent decades of his life devoted to teaching children in poverty and learning about what makes teachers successful in urban schools. As Hart and Rowley (1999) explain, “few educators have the passion for teaching children in poverty that has defined the life and career of Martin Haberman” (p. 204). In order to understand the Star Pre-Screener, we must first look at how Haberman developed his definition of a Star Teacher. Star Teachers are those who “are so effective that the adverse conditions of working in failing schools or school districts do not prevent them from being successful teachers” (Haberman, 2004, p. 53).

According to Haberman (2004, p. 53), some of the qualities that Star Teachers possess include:

- their persistence, their physical and emotional stamina,
- their caring relationships with students, their commitment to acknowledging and appreciating student effort,
- their willingness to admit mistakes, their focus on deep learning, their commitment to inclusion, and their organization skills.

They also protect student learning, translate theory and research into practice, cope with the bureaucracy, create student ownership, engage parents and caregivers as partners in student learning, and support accountability for at-risk students.

In an interview conducted by Shaugnessy, et al. (1999), Haberman describes Star Teachers as those who “manifest an ideology based on a set of predispositions to act which is derived from their life experiences” (p. 198). He goes on to explain that “their ideology requires them to integrate ethical concerns in everything they teach” (p. 199) and that Star Teachers “think of themselves as using various forms of content to make better people” (p. 201).

Haberman’s concept of the Star Teacher is often contradictory to those who typically complete teacher education
preparation programs. The majority of pre-service teachers are full-time undergraduates under 25 years of age, with a small but growing number of college graduates age 30 and older. According to an interview conducted by Shaugnessy, et al. (1999), Haberman believes this trend needs to be reversed—that the majority of new teachers should be those who are over 30 and already have life experiences and a college degree (p. 198). One of the critical problems with teacher training programs, according to Haberman, in an interview conducted by Shaugnessy, et al. (1999), is that they try to prepare pre-service teachers for urban school settings without any background or context in teaching in those settings. As Haberman explains, “those who themselves have not been successful teachers of children in poverty for sustained periods cannot teach others to do so. By ignoring this rule, we have a traditional system in which the ignorant are teaching the fearful to do the irrelevant” (Shaugnessy, et al., 1999, p. 199). Additionally, teacher training programs cannot change if they continue to accept the same candidates. “If teacher preparation programs would like candidates with different visions of what teaching might become, then candidates would have to be identified and proactively recruited, rather than self-selected” (Haberman, in an interview with Shaugnessy, et al., 1999, p. 200).

From all of his experience with Star Teachers, Haberman recognized the need for a tool that could identify candidates who would be successful in urban education settings. Haberman (1993) believed that “what matters most is the quality of the teachers” (p. 1) and that when it comes to the quality of our schools, “a school district’s most critical decision is who to hire. No decision is more important in determining the quality of schools” (p. 2).

Thus, the Haberman Star Pre-Screener was developed to identify those potential teachers who exhibit the Star attributes. As Sawchuk (2012a) explains, “The (Haberman Star Pre-Screener) tool, used in districts across the country, is meant to determine which teacher-candidates have the dispositions for working with poor and minority schoolchildren” (p. 1). Based on Haberman’s identified Star Teacher traits, the Pre-Screener uses these attributes to “predict the effectiveness and staying power of teachers serving diverse students in low-income urban schools” (Haberman, 2004, p. 53). And this tool is proving to be successful, based on the literature of studies which have used the Pre-Screener as well as schools which have implemented it as a hiring mechanism.

Many schools and districts across the country have made use of Haberman’s methods for identifying Star Teachers and their dispositions, but the impact of Haberman is not just limited to K-12 schools. Universities have also used Haberman’s methods to supplement their teacher training programs. Though Haberman is a strong proponent of alternative certification methods, some institutions have also tried to bring his theories into their traditional undergraduate teacher education programs. For example, Hart and Rowley (1999) used Haberman’s idea of Star Teachers to develop a video series using case scenarios that each reflected one of the Star Teacher functions identified by Haberman. These case scenarios used urban students, Star Teachers, administrators, and urban school support personnel to provide a realistic virtual world of urban teaching for pre-service teachers, based on the expertise and reflections of actual star urban teachers (Hart & Rowley, 1999, p. 207).

Additionally, a study conducted by Rockoff, et al. (2008) examined the teacher characteristics associated with the Haberman Star Pre-Screener and then looked at whether performance on the pre-screener predicted any teacher or student outcomes. What they found was that teachers who had one standard deviation score higher tended to also have an increase in math achievement of their students (Rockoff, et al., 2008, p. 65). The study also showed a small but significant positive relationship between the Pre-Screener score and the tendency of the teacher to return to teaching the following year (Rockoff, et al., 2008, p. 65). As is apparent from the literature, the Haberman Star Pre-Screener has proven successful in schools, districts, and higher education institutions across the country.
Methodology

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING
The present study took place in a selective enrollment K-8 public elementary school in the state of Illinois: Meadowbrook Elementary School (a pseudonym). Initially attempting to survey all licensed staff members in the building (n = 35), 31 Meadowbrook licensed staff formed the analytical sample for this study provided that they completed both survey instruments—the Star Pre-Screener and a Survey Monkey background survey created by the researchers. This represented an 89 percent response rate. Table 1 below highlights comparisons made between the school and the State of Illinois:

**TABLE 1. MEADOWBROOK ELEMENTARY VS. STATE OF ILLINOIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>MEADOWBROOK</th>
<th>STATE OF ILLINOIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School enrollment</td>
<td>(K-5) 246 (K-8) 387</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 class size</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School low income</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School demographics</td>
<td>67.7% White 8.8% Black 9.3% Hispanic 8.3% Asian 0.0% American Indian 5.9% Multiracial</td>
<td>51.4% White 18.3% Black 23.0% Hispanic 4.1% Asian 0.3% American Indian 2.8% Multiracial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 ISAT (2010-2011)</td>
<td>Reading: 100 Math: 100 Science: n/a</td>
<td>Reading: 74.7 Math: 87.3 Science: n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets or Exceeds %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 ISAT (2010-2011)</td>
<td>Reading: 100 Math: 100 Science: 100</td>
<td>Reading: 74.7 Math: 87.7 Science: 79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets or Exceeds %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5 ISAT (2010-2011)</td>
<td>Reading: 100 Math: 97.9 Science: n/a</td>
<td>Reading: 76.4 Math: 84.0 Science: n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets or Exceeds %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 ISAT (2010-2011)</td>
<td>Reading: 100 Math: 100 Science: n/a</td>
<td>Reading: 84.1 Math: 84.0 Science: n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets or Exceeds %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7 ISAT (2010-2011)</td>
<td>Reading: 93.5 Math: 100 Science: 95.7</td>
<td>Reading: 78.8 Math: 84.3 Science: 81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets or Exceeds %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8 ISAT (2010-2011)</td>
<td>Reading: 98.0 Math: 100 Science: n/a</td>
<td>Reading: 85.0 Math: 86.3 Science: n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets or Exceeds %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance %</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEP</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCES: ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION (2012) AND MEADOWBROOK SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**
MEADOWBROOK ELEMENTARY STAFF

All 31 elementary school teachers who participated in this study self-identified as being white, and the majority were over the age of 44 (Table 2). The racial and gender composition of the Meadowbrook teaching staff should not be surprising. Toldson (2011) analyzed Census data and concluded that 80 percent of America’s K-12 teachers in 2010 were white and 90 percent were female. Meanwhile, compared to state of Illinois averages, Meadowbrook is considered to be a school that is highly white. Again, this should not be surprising. According to Sawchuk (2012b), writing in Education Week, Illinois ranks 49th out of 51 (the 50 U.S. states plus the District of Columbia) for having the largest percentage-point difference between nonwhite teachers and students. In other words, 46 percent of the student body in Illinois is nonwhite, while 11 percent of its teachers are nonwhite, resulting in a 35 percent discrepancy between students and staff.

FINDINGS

This report examined potential relationships between dimensions of teachers’ dispositions, knowledge, and skills on the Star Pre-Screener and teacher’s background characteristics. To this end, we used descriptive and graphical analyses to explore these relationships within this sample (n = 31) of teachers. We did not conduct inferential analysis, which is typically used to make broader statements about a target population based on the information provided by a sample, for the following reasons. First, the teachers who provided data for this study were not randomly sampled. Therefore, we could not assess the representativeness of this sample to the general teacher population. Second, data configuration and structure was not conducive to inferential tests. For example, most inferential procedures require one or more assumptions to be met in order for the results to be trustworthy. Given the size and unbalanced nature of the comparison groups, the assumptions for procedures, such as analysis of variance or chi-square, were not met.

For certain comparisons in these data, the chances of making an accurate inference would have been at least five times greater by flipping a coin rather than conducting an inferential test. Consequently, in order to avoid making an incorrect decision based on untrustworthy information, we used descriptive statistics and graphical displays to represent real data collected from actual teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHER AGE RANGE</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>% MEADOWBROOK TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33-35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39-41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42-44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48-50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51+</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n = 31</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Meadowbrook Elementary Teacher Age Information (n = 31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization and planning</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values student learning</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory to practice</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk students</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach to students</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survive in bureaucracy</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains teacher success</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains student success</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fallibility</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whole group overall score</strong></td>
<td><strong>37.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n = 31</strong></td>
<td><strong>n = 31</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Meadowbrook Teachers’ Star Pre-Screener Scores, by Domain

Note: the range of Star Pre-Screener scores: 1 (low), 2 (average), and 3 (high)
What makes a Star Teacher?

**STRENGTHS, AT A GLANCE**

The researchers found four domains in which Meadowbrook teachers scored well on the Star Pre-Screener (Table 3). These domains were as follows: (1) Persistence, (2) Values Student Learning, (3) Theory to Practice, and (4) Approach to Students.

**PERSISTENCE**

In his book *Star Teachers*, Haberman (2010, p. 131) refers to "persistence" as a teacher’s ability to problem solve with students. In other words, persistence refers to a teacher’s responsibility to make the classroom climate interesting and engaging so that students’ educational needs are met, ensuring that all students learn.

The researchers found that all teachers who had 30-plus years of teaching experience (n = 5) scored high on "persistence" (Figure 1). The "persistence" dimension that is assessed by the Haberman Star Pre-Screener predicts the propensity to work with children who present learning and behavioral problems on a daily basis without giving up on them for the full school year.

The researchers also found that teachers who completed education past the baccalaureate level were not at a relative advantage for scoring higher on "persistence" dimension (Figure 2). Stated differently, while a greater percentage of teachers who completed education past the baccalaureate level scored high on the "persistence" dimension, there were no teachers with just a bachelor’s degree who scored low on the persistence dimension (compared to those who completed higher than a baccalaureate).

**VALUES STUDENT LEARNING**

Predicts the degree to which the responses reflect a willingness to make student learning the teacher’s highest priority.

**THEORY TO PRACTICE**

Predicts the teacher’s ability to see the practical implications of generalizations as well as the concepts reflected by specific practices.

**APPROACH TO STUDENTS**

Predicts the way the teacher will attempt to relate to students and the likelihood this approach will be effective.

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT, AT A GLANCE**

The researchers also found that there were six domains of the Star Pre-Screener that Meadowbrook teachers could work toward improving:

1. Organization and planning
2. At-risk students
3. Survive in bureaucracy
4. Explains teacher success
5. Explains student success
6. Fallibility

**Organization and planning**

Haberman (2004, pp. 113-120) describes the organization and planning domain as one in which Star Teachers have the ability to manage a classroom with highly differentiated instructional methods and have the ability to manage as a normal level of activity what other teachers might consider chaos—i.e. simultaneous different activities occurring in the...
classroom, including teams or groups or individuals each engaged in different or independent activities. Teachers who are successful at organizing and planning tend to focus their attention and time on how to get students engaged rather than spending time grading, reading teaching material, or preparing handouts.

**At-risk students**

Haberman (2004, pp. 161-170) also identifies Star Teachers as those who can responsibly address at-risk student needs without blaming the child. Star Teachers believe that some of the issues surrounding at-risk students are tied directly to the school and curriculum, and they accept responsibility and personal accountability for students' learning. Additionally, Star Teachers believe failing students and schools are not only a result of societal issues but also result directly from irrelevant curriculum and authoritarian teaching methods. Thus, they use information about students to make curriculum more meaningful.

**Survive in bureaucracy**

Similarly, Star Teachers exhibit specific characteristics for how to survive in a bureaucracy, according to Haberman (2004, pp. 177-187). Teachers who are successful at surviving in a bureaucracy tend to recognize and accept the demands of the school bureaucracy, and they do not let organizational stress such as meetings, school notices, etc., take away too much time and energy that could be spent teaching children. These teachers tend to be experts at using the informal structure of the school to accomplish their goals (i.e. knowing which secretary, janitor, aide, or other teacher will help them with what they want or need in a way that provides the least amount of hassle) and often set up networks of likeminded colleagues who serve as a support group, not all of whom are teachers at the same school or even teachers at all.

**Explains teacher success**

Deals with the criteria the teacher uses to determine teaching success and whether these are relevant to teachers in poverty schools.

**Explains student success**

Deals with the criteria the teacher uses to determine students' success and whether these are relevant to students in poverty schools.

**Fallibility**

Refers to how the teacher plans to deal with mistakes in the classroom.

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**A CLOSER LOOK AT NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION**

The population of teachers at Meadowbrook was unique given that nearly a quarter (23 percent) of its staff held or was in the process of obtaining National Board Certification (NBC). Table 4 below highlights the performance of NBC Meadowbrook teachers.

Further examination of the scores shows that of the teachers who held NBC or were in the process of obtaining NBC, only one scored in the top quartile on the Haberman Pre-Screener overall. However, compared to their peers, National Board teachers (who had completed or were in-process) scored higher in the following categories: persistence, values student learning, theory to practice, approach to students, and explains teacher success.

The researchers also found that all teachers who held (n = 3) or were in the process (n = 3) of obtaining their National Board Certificate scored high on the "persistence" dimension (Figure 3, next page).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4. PERFORMANCE OF MEADOWBROOK NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED TEACHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOMAIN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole group overall score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization and planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCES: BACKGROUND SURVEY AND HABERMAN STAR PRE-SCREENER RESULTS**
This was also the case for the “approach to students” and “values student learning” dimensions, which can be seen in Figures 4 and 5 respectively.

Also interesting to note were the trends between the National Board Certified (n = 6) and Non-National Board Certified (n = 26) groups for the “explains teacher success” dimension (Figure 6). Although some of the National Board Certified teachers scored low, the percentage of middle and high scores were greater than their non-National Board Certified colleagues.
FINDINGS RELATED TO TEACHER TRAINING AND PREPARATION

As part of this research, the researchers conducted two separate qualitative sessions. The first session described the study to the teachers and walked them through taking the online background survey as well as the Star Pre-Screener. The second session was dedicated to sharing the results of the Star Pre-Screener. During this session, the researchers requested feedback from the Meadowbrook teachers. Two questions were asked of Meadowbrook teachers:

1. What can teacher preparation do to prepare pre-service teachers to be successful at organizing and planning, teaching at-risk students, and surviving in a bureaucracy?

2. How might the Meadowbrook teaching staff use the organizing and planning, teaching at-risk students, and surviving in a bureaucracy results from the Haberman Star Teacher Pre-Screener to better serve its students?

In homogeneous grade level groups, teachers responded. The following are unaltered quotes obtained from this data collection meeting.

K-5 at Meadowbrook: Teachers’ quotes

“Provide within the program more hands-on experience in classrooms. Better collaboration between pre-service programming and current practicing teachers. Longer, more thorough and complex student teaching process.”

“Provide real-life situations for pre-service teachers (i.e. video or observations.) Practical experience is important. Role playing?”

“Allow pre-service teachers to begin with the classroom teachers two weeks prior to school starting. More experiences in diverse classrooms. (BD, ESL, Special Ed. Hearing impaired) more functional activities. How to make a schedule, seats us chants, conflict resolution.”

“Exposure to various instructional approaches based on research. Increased opportunities for authentic experiences in the classroom. Learning how to collaborate! Analyze data, tools for planning.”

“Are we teaching to individual’s needs in our classroom? Do we use a variety of methods to meet those needs? We need more support groups? What other technologies do we need to meet at-risk students? How can we gain more confidence and knowledge in planning for individual and at-risk needs.”

“Prioritize interest of students and focus on what we are doing when planning. Memorize the Common Core so more time can be spent on creating interesting activities then looking at what needs to be thought. We don’t know? We reviewed the questions and believe our answers were right. We feel it is important that we take responsibility for our students’ learning.”

“Live video feed for teachers in action? Example: It’s hard to teach pre-service teachers about developing relationships with parents when they aren’t in a real classroom. I think the main thing that keeps coming up is that there needs to be more practical application and real-world experience instead of mostly theory based college learning.”

K-5 recommendations

Overall, the researchers found that K-5 recommendations focused more on behavior and classroom management (teacher-centered responses): the need for more time and more authentic experiences. There was a desire for practical and relevant teaching skills (time and classroom management, organizing and planning). In terms of Question No. 2—“How might the Meadowbrook teaching staff use the organization and planning, teaching at-risk students, and survive in a bureaucracy results from the Haberman Star Teacher Pre-Screener to better serve its students?”—there were no noticeable differences between K-5 and 6-8 were detected. Interestingly, responses tended to be teacher-centered. It appeared that teachers were absolving themselves from responsibility.

6-8 at Meadowbrook: Teachers’ quotes

“Think on their feet. Respond in a meaningful way to the specific needs of students and families. Getting to know student needs and learning styles being flexible. Making sure pre-service teachers are aware of research, promising practices. Getting to know students personally.”

“Provide real-life situations for pre-service teachers (i.e. video or observations.) Practical experience is important. Role playing?”

“There are a lot of inequities within our building which create pockets. How can this be addressed so teacher responsibilities and stress levels are managed?”

“None of the five of us in this group received any ‘surviving in bureaucracy’ training in undergraduate/teacher-prep programs.”

“One teacher had a high school senior student intern who volunteered (or, rather, interned) for a whole year, observing and assisting in the classroom. That intern is now a pre-service teacher, sophomore in college and automatically has more experience.”

“Parent communication, time management. Lesson planning with the end goal in sight. More collaboration between ISO teachers and classroom teachers (especially those who have students in our classrooms.)”

“Challenge pre-student teacher to problem solve, take risks, be more assertive as opposed to waiting for answers?”

“Make PDS a requirement.”
What makes a Star Teacher?

In reference to Question No. 1—“What can teacher preparation do to prepare pre-service teachers to be successful at organizing and planning, teaching at-risk students, and surviving in a bureaucracy?”—the researchers found that grade 6-8 recommendations focused more on the interpersonal and social dynamics (student-centered responses). For instance, they stressed the importance of personal relationships (teacher-student/teacher-parent) and fostering collaboration and communication.

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

In paying honor to the work of the late Dr. Martin Haberman, this report shared the findings of preliminary fieldwork done in the state of Illinois, at Meadowbrook Elementary, a selective enrollment K-8 public school. This study sought to examine potential relationships between dimensions of teachers’ dispositions, knowledge, and skills on the Star Pre-Screener and teachers’ background characteristics. Three salient findings emerged:

1. Elementary teachers who had more years of teaching experience (e.g., 30-plus years) scored higher on the “persistence” dimension of the Haberman Star Pre-Screener.
2. Elementary teachers who held or were in the process of obtaining their National Board Certification scored higher on the “persistence” dimension than those teachers to whom this did not apply.
3. Elementary teachers who completed education past the baccalaureate level were not at a relative advantage for scoring higher on “persistence” dimension compared to colleagues with just a bachelor’s degree.

The results of this small-scale study yield two interesting implications for the “professionalization” movement within (teacher) education. The first is the importance and need for revealing the myth of the “fully qualified” bright young teacher. Teaching experience matters much; seasoned teachers appear equipped to be more effective in the classroom as measured on the diagnostic Star Pre-Screener. The second implication is that formal education might matter, but further studies ought to examine the impact that graduate preparation does to prepare pre-service teachers to be successful in the classroom. Specifically, this study found that National Board Certified, and National Board Certification candidates, were most likely to be found to persist in the classroom. What sorts of dispositions are cultivated in the National Board Certification process? What sorts of training to Nationally Board Certified teachers have, and how does such training positively impact students’ learning?

**RECOMMENDED AND RELEVANT READINGS**


**REFERENCES**


Ng, W., Nicholas, H., & Williams, A. (2010). School Experience Influences on Pre-Service Teachers’ Evolving Beliefs about Effective Teaching. Teaching and Teacher Education, 26, 278-289.


**BIOGRAPHIES OF THE AUTHORS OF THIS REPORT**

Nicholas Daniel Hartlep is an assistant professor of educational foundations at Illinois State University. Hartlep earned his Ph.D. in the social foundations of education at the University at Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2012. He received his M.S. and B.S. in elementary education at Winona State University. He has Minnesota and Wisconsin State Certification in elementary education, as well as over three years experience teaching primary grades. He has taught in Quito, Ecuador, and is bilingual in Spanish/English. He is the author of *Going Public: Critical Race Theory and Issues of Social Justice* (Tate Publishing, 2010), *The Model Minority Stereotype: Demystifying Asian American Success* (Information Age Publishing, 2013), and *The Model Minority Stereotype Reader: Critical and Challenging Readings for the 21st Century* (Cognella Academic Publishing, 2013). His most recent publication, “The Model Minority? Stereotypes of Asian American Students May Hurt More Than They Help” appears in *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*. One critical component to the task of demystifying the Asian American model minority stereotype is to improve the dissemination of scholarly work on this insidious myth. He recently launched The Model Minority Stereotype Project (MMSP) (http://my.ilstu.edu/blogs/ndhartl/). The mission of the MMSP is focused on increasing accessibility to literature on the model minority stereotype for students, scholars, and policymakers.

Sara McCubbins is a doctoral student at Illinois State University, where she engages in educational research, and serves as project/office manager for the Center for Mathematics, Science, and Technology. She received her M.S. in chemistry education at Illinois State and holds a teaching certificate for secondary chemistry and English, as well as middle level science and language arts. She has published numerous books on topics relating to interdisciplinary project-based curriculum and performance-assessment based curriculum. Her interests include curriculum development, professional development for teachers, university and community outreach, analyzing the role informal science plays in scientific knowledge acquisition, and student attitudes towards science.

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**What makes a Star Teacher?**