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Diagnosing Potential: Preservice Teachers' Understanding and Expectations of Students with Learning Disabilities

Diagnosing Potential: Preservice Teachers' Understanding and Expectations of Students with Learning Disabilities

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Volume I

A thesis submitted for the degree of
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Faculty of Education

June 2008

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis reports the original work of the author, except as stated.
It has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

Stuart Woodcock
June 2008

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ABSTRACT

The current study was conducted to investigate preservice teachers' understandings and expectations of students with learning disabilities. Attributional responses that teachers construct result in differing teacher affect, evaluative feedback and expectation of future performance. Once these understandings and expectations are embedded they are less likely to change over the span of a teaching career. This study therefore examined preservice teachers' attributional responses to boys with a learning disability who had failed a class test. Preservice teachers' attitudes towards students with learning disabilities, and their teacher efficacy were also explored in relation to their attributional responses. The instructional strategies that preservice teachers report they would use for students with learning disabilities were also considered.

Six hundred-sixty-seven preservice primary and secondary school teachers within New South Wales were studied across four University Campuses. Five kinds of instruments were administered to the subjects of the study: a demographic questionnaire, an attributional vignettes questionnaire, an attitudes questionnaire, a teacher efficacy scale questionnaire, and, an instructional strategies questionnaire. Each University within New South Wales is required, by the Department of Education and Training (DET), to include a compulsory inclusive education subject within their course design. To investigate the influence that the compulsory inclusive education subject has on preservice teachers, the study included preservice teachers who had and had not completed the subject.

The results of the study showed that preservice teachers form a negative attribution cycle about students with a learning disability, which is in stark contrast to the positive attribution cycle that they form about students without a learning disability. The findings show that preservice teachers view students with a learning disability more from a medical model viewpoint that emphasises deficits. Thus, they are generally more positive towards students with a learning disability, less frustrated, more sympathetic, and have lower expectations of their future performances.

Philosophically, their educational view towards students with a learning disability is driven by ability, rather than effort, which is in contrast to their view towards students without a learning disability. Preservice teachers also report they would use more teacher-centred instructional strategies for students with learning disabilities, in comparison to using higher cognitive level instructional strategies in a student-centred environment for students without a learning disability. The application of teacher efficacy to this study suggested that preservice teachers who believed, and were confident in their own teaching abilities, were more likely to have a greater academic focus on classroom instructional strategies and outcomes. Similarly, preservice teachers with a greater positive attitude towards students with a learning disability had higher expectations of these students and reported greater use of higher cognitive level instructional strategies in a student-centred environment.

Finally, the study suggests recommendations and implications for practice and future research in regards to understandings and expectations of students with learning disabilities.

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APPENDICES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLD	Association for Children with Learning Disabilities
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ALDA	Australian Learning Disability Association
AMOS	Analysis of MOment Structures
AUSPELD	Australian Federation of Specific Learning Difficulties Associations
BD	Behaviour Disorders
CEEBI	Character Education Efficacy Belief Instrument
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMIN/DF	Ratio of Minimum Discrepancy to Degrees of Freedom
CR	Critical Ratio
CSU	Charles Sturt University
DET	Department of Education and Training
df	Degrees of Freedom
Diff Att	Attitudes towards Differentiation
DPS	Differentiated Practices Survey
DV	Dependent Variable
GLS	Generalised Least Squares
GTE	General Teacher Efficacy
ISQ	Instructional Strategies Questionnaire
IV	Independent Variable
LD	Learning Disability
LD Att	Attitudes towards Students with a Learning Disability
LDFailFS	Independent Dimension Variable with Factor Loadings for Expectation of Future Failure towards Students with LD.
LDFeedFS	Independent Dimension Variable with Factor Loadings for Feedback Given to Students with LD.
LDFrustFS	Independent Dimension Variable with Factor Loadings for Frustration towards Students with LD.

LD Strat	Higher Cognitive Level Instructional Strategies for Students with LD
LDSympFS	Independent Dimension Variable with Factor Loadings for Sympathy towards Students with LD.
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
MI	Modification Indices
ML	Maximum Likelihood
MQU	Macquarie University
η^2	Partial Eta Squared
NACHC	National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children
NJCLD	National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities
NLD	Non-Learning Disability
NRCGT	National Research Centre for the Gifted and Talented
NSW	New South Wales
PGFI	Parsimonious Goodness-of-Fit Index
PTE	Personal Teacher Efficacy
RMSEA	Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation
RMSR	Root Mean Squared Residual
SEM	Structural Equation Model
SIPFQ	Social Interaction Program Features Questionnaire
SOP	Survey Of Practices (Instrument)
SPSS	Statistical Program for the Social Sciences
SRMSR	Standardised Root Mean Squared Residual
SRW	Standardised Regression Weight
TAS	Teacher Attribute Survey
TES	Teacher Efficacy Scale
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
TSES	Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale
UOW	University of Wollongong
VET	Vocational Education and Training
χ^2	Chi Square

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