Diagnosing potential: preservice teachers' understanding and expectations of students with learning disabilities

Stuart Woodcock

University of Wollongong

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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

Stuart Woodcock, B.A. (hons), QTS. Bton, M.Ed. (Special Education) UOW.

Volume I

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Wollongong

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
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge, with deep appreciation, Associate Professor Wilma Vialle, principal supervisor, University of Wollongong and Associate Professor Deslea Konza, associate supervisor, Edith Cowan University, for their valuable encouragement and guidance throughout my doctoral studies. Wilma and Deslea willingly offered support and critique at all stages of the doctorate. Their faith in me and this research shall never be forgotten.

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I am also grateful to the academic staff, and students, at the University of Wollongong, Charles Sturt University, and Macquarie University who were involved in or supported this study. Without their assistance, the research presented would not have been possible.

I wish to express appreciation to Beverley Lambert for the profuse hours that she spent proof-reading this thesis. I am most grateful for the support and comments I received. Thank you.

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Finally, I wish to acknowledge the support of staff of the Faculty of Education – Charles Sturt University. The support gained from the Faculty since 2004 has been unmeasurable, for which I am truly appreciative.
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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<td>ACLD</td>
<td>Association for Children with Learning Disabilities</td>
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<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALDA</td>
<td>Australian Learning Disability Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMOS</td>
<td>Analysis of MOment Structures</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUSPELD</td>
<td>Australian Federation of Specific Learning Difficulties Associations</td>
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<td>BD</td>
<td>Behaviour Disorders</td>
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<td>CEEBI</td>
<td>Character Education Efficacy Belief Instrument</td>
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<td>CFI</td>
<td>Comparative Fit Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMIN/DF</td>
<td>Ratio of Minimum Discrepancy to Degrees of Freedom</td>
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<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>Critical Ratio</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>Charles Sturt University</td>
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<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
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<td>df</td>
<td>Degrees of Freedom</td>
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<td>Diff Att</td>
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<td>DPS</td>
<td>Differentiated Practices Survey</td>
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<td>DV</td>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
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<td>GLS</td>
<td>Generalised Least Squares</td>
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<td>ISQ</td>
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<td>IV</td>
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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
$\eta^2$  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
$\chi^2$  Chi Square
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