

A Retrospective Look at the Clinical Disconnect in Teacher Education

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Introduction

A serendipitous finding yielded during the accreditation processes carried out by TEAC over the past several years was that ratings of teacher candidates performances in the classroom tended to have a zero or even a slightly negative correlation with academic measures including grades, scores on state licensure tests, and other similar measures. (Murray, Rath, & Ramineni, 2006).

Since our first report, we conducted a survey of studies in teacher education that were carried out as many as 80 years ago to see if a similar “disconnect” was observed. This report summarizes our findings.

Wonderment

What would explain a consistently weak relationship between measures of academic accomplishment and ratings of teaching accomplishment? Here are several we have heard as we have shared our findings with colleagues in teacher education.

a. Doing well in college classrooms has very little to do with working effectively with pupils in classrooms. They are two separate and distinct “factors” embodied in our candidates – the ability to get high grades in college is one and the ability to relate effectively and teach efficaciously is another. It is no surprise that the measures are not related.

b. The observed low correlation coefficients are a function of measurement problems and not of true relationships between these important constructs. Because grades are becoming more and more “inflated,” there is very little variance among our candidates in college grades – one of the sources of the academic measures reported in the original report (Murray, Rath, & Chaitanya, 2006). In addition, the ratings of candidates in student teaching are also likely inflated. Further, it is extremely difficult to assess the reliability of grade point averages. If they are unreliable, then the error found within the measures would surely reduce the estimates of relationship (correlation coefficients) between the constructs.

c. The low observed correlation coefficients might be accounted for by the fact that the relationship between these variables is not linear, but instead curvilinear. That is, perhaps candidates with lower academic measures can’t perform well in the classroom because they lack the subject matter knowledge and allied pedagogical content knowledge to do the job. On the other end of the continuum, perhaps the extremely able scholars have difficulty coping with struggling learners – and become impatient and

thereby ineffective. This downturn at either end of the range of academic performance measures may account for the coefficients near zero.

d. The low relationship might reflect the fact that teachers need a certain level of academic attainments to succeed in the classroom. After that level is reached, additional attainments in the academic area make no difference. This view reflects a “tipping point” argument. The low correlations may suggest that once the tipping point is reached, the curve flattens out yielding low level correlations.

There may be other explanations – all worthy of exploration.

For this paper, we explored the second explanation – the one dealing with grade inflation. We assumed that grade inflation was not such a problem 60 or 70 years ago. We made an effort to find studies published more than 50 years ago that related academic performance measures with ratings of student teachers.

Method

We found that the *Journal of Experimental Education* published a most remarkable monograph in 1948 entitled, “The Measurement and Prediction of Teaching Efficiency: A Summary of Investigations.” In this monograph, approximately 130 researches found in the literature at that time were summarized. We identified nineteen studies in the set that correlated the ratings student teachers received on their teaching with overall college grade point average. Those 19 studies are the focus on this meta-analysis.

The following methodological notes are important:

a. As perhaps was the habit in the early days of teacher education research, every study reported many correlation coefficients. We restricted our analysis to the relationships between two variables – rating of teaching in student teaching placements and overall college GPA’s.

b. We subtracted the publication date of the researches we used in this analysis from 2000 to give us an index of “age of study.” So, a study published in 1930 would have been coded 70. The average “age of study” of the set of studies we analyzed was 65.9 with a standard deviation of 6.7. These were “old” studies.

c. The sample sizes of the studies we are using in this analysis ranged from 19 to 1156. The average sample size for the 19 studies was 250 with a standard deviation of 292. The means we report subsequently were not weighted by sample size.

d. The correlation between the reported correlation and either “age of study” or “sample size” was negligible and non-significant. The estimates were -.12 and .03 respectively.

Finding

The average correlation over the 19 studies between measures of academic attainment (college grade point average) and ratings of teacher efficacy in student teaching was .32.

Discussion

The average correlation between academic attainment and ratings of student teacher efficacy we found in this study is considerably higher than the average correlation of .05 reported in the Murray, et.al, 2006 paper. This finding may indeed suggest that grade inflation, not so prevalent 70 years ago, may play a role in “shrinking” current efforts to assess the relationship between these variables.

If one assumes that how well teacher education candidates do in college ought to say something about how well they do in the classroom, one might ask, “How strong should the relationship be?” Perhaps .30, explaining roughly 9% of the variance in teacher efficacy by academic attainment, is about as good as could be expected. We don’t yet have a way of even speculating at what the correlation “ought” to be.

References

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