Teacher Dispositions in Teaching Reading: Implications for Professional Development of Teachers in Rural Schools

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Teacher disposition ranges from specific observable behaviors to teacher characteristics, beliefs, values, and perceptions. This study uses the Bourdieusian concept of habitus as theoretical framework for understanding teacher disposition. Habitus influences a person's characteristics, behaviors, and beliefs in dealing with the realities around them. In the study, teacher disposition was equated with teacher perceptions. The 102 participants gave 233 best practices grouped into instructional content/procedures (44%) and instructional conditions/resources (56%) categories. The top responses under instructional content/procedures were identified as "bottom-up" procedures that break complex linguistic tasks into their component skills. Under instructional conditions/resources, participants mentioned positive teacher characteristics, planning the lessons well as reflected in the lesson plans, and home/parental involvement their best practices. The teachers in the study favored skills-based, bottom-up procedures in teaching reading and expressed confidence in the role of teacher characteristics such as patience, enthusiasm, passion, caring, and dedication in enhancing students' learning.

Examining teacher dispositions in teacher education is relatively a new phenomenon. Current definitions describe teacher dispositions as a **continuum ranging from specific observable behaviors to teacher personality characteristics, beliefs, values, and perceptions** (Diez and Raths, 2007; Wasicsko, 2007). Teacher behaviors are the observable activities of teachers during class activities or with students while teacher characteristics are the attributes of teachers that are demonstrated during class activities or with students. Teacher perceptions are the values, attitudes, and belief systems that influence teacher behaviors and teacher characteristics.

Raths (2007) asserted that an effective teacher must possess an appropriate set of dispositions that "summarizes the trend of a teacher's actions in particular contexts" (p. 155). He enumerated the words associated with disposition such as "the teacher realizes, appreciates, has enthusiasm for, believes, respects, is sensitive, values, and recognizes" (p. 156), implying that disposition represents beliefs, values, and perceptions. Darling-Hammond and Bartz-Snowden (2005) explained that a good teacher in every classroom must have knowledge of who his/her learners are within social contexts, an understanding of the content and skills to be taught, and an understanding of teaching as informed by assessment and supported by a productive environment. Knowledge of the learner, content, pedagogy, and disposition provide a teacher with a framework for understanding, planning, and implementing curriculum and instruction across subject areas.

This study uses Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" as the theoretical framework for understanding teacher dispositions (Maton, 2010; Swartz, 1997; Bourdieu, 1979b; 1987).

Habitus and Dispositions as Theoretical Frameworks

Habitus refers to a person's **set of lasting, deeply internalized transposable schemas and dispositions that developed as a product of socialization since birth**. It shapes a person's individual actions, aspirations, expectations, attitudes, and perceptions consistent with the social, political, economic, historical, and cultural conditions under which it was produced (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu (1979b; 1987) postulated that an individual's *habitus*, though fairly resistant to change, generates new practices, perceptions, and aspirations that are consistent with the original social realities under which they were produced (Maton, 2010). However, *habitus* also "adjusts aspirations and expectations according to the objective probabilities for success or failure common to the members of the same class for a particular behavior" (Swartz, 1997, p. 105). Individuals react and adjust to varied social situations or *"fields"* which comprise a network of social contexts where people occupy certain dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of social, cultural, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1979b; 1987). Teacher dispositions in teaching reading could be analyzed through this Bourdieusian lens.

The Teaching of Reading

The International Reading Association (now called International Literacy Association) through its publication, *Reading Today*, presented its annual survey of current and relevant topics in teaching reading. In 2010 and 2011, it cited adolescent literacy, comprehension, and response to intervention as highly relevant topics. For both years, relevant topics included differentiated instruction, new literacies/digital literacies, political/policy influences on literacy, and vocabulary/word meaning. Phonics and phonemic awareness were both listed as outmoded (Cassidy, Ortlieb, and Shettel, 2011; Cassidy and Cassidy, 2010). **Determining preferred and relevant topics in teaching reading is influenced by one's *habitus* or dispositions as referred to in this study**.

Dispositions regarding literacy are affected by social, cultural, political, historical and economic contexts. The *Philippine Education for All 2015* implementation report cited persistent issues of low passing grades, lack of particular language skills, and poor teacher performances that resulted to inadequate preparation of a number of Filipinos for gainful employment. Reports of declining achievement rating in the English language subjects

from 66.27% in sixth grade to 51.80% in second year high school and in the Filipino subjects from 69.15% in sixth grade to 51.27% in fourth year high are alarming (Department of Education, 2013).

Diaz de Rivera (1993) asserted that the poor reading performance of children may be attributed to the lack of pre-service courses that should prepare elementary school teachers to teach reading. Supporting Diaz de Rivera's claim, Pado (2004) in a survey of 500 first grade teachers found that majority of her respondents could not remember any course that prepared them to teach beginning reading. Villanueva (2004) likewise found that the teachers who were already teaching literacy had little or no knowledge of the concepts crucial to the teaching of literacy. Before 2004, the undergraduate elementary and secondary teacher education curricula did not include reading courses. The need to improve pre-service training of teachers led to the institution of Developmental Reading 1 and 2 as required reading courses in the current teacher education curriculum (CHED, 2004).

Research has shown that the teacher's reading ability is not enough to prepare him or her to teach reading. Knowledge of human development and the reading process are important (Callahan, Griffo and Pearson, 2007) as well as pedagogical content knowledge (Phelps, 2009). Teachers who understand the reading process give more time to explicit instruction in reading. In contrast, teachers who have low reading knowledge, do not spend as much time in explicit reading instruction, resulting to lower levels of reading achievement among their students. The longer the children stay with such teachers, the worse they perform in various reading measures (Plasta, Connor, Fishman and Morrison, 2009).

Understanding the lackluster performance of Filipino youth in national achievement tests warrants an investigation of the direct and indirect roles teachers play in education. Teacher behavior, characteristics, and thinking processes are influenced by one's beliefs (Hsiao and Yang, 2010). Beliefs are personal truths based on past experience and education and they can be very

subjective. They are "intertwined with affect and not based on evaluation of evidence". What teachers perceive to be good practice will be "informed by the manner in which we [they] construct knowledge, the learner and learning, the teacher and teaching, as well as the socioeconomic context" (Avis, Orr, and Tummons, 2010). As mentioned earlier, *habitus* or individual dispositions and behaviors are influenced by social structures outside the person but pervade the person's consciousness. Teachers, as part of the broader society or *fields*, could unconsciously perpetuate beliefs, relationships, and practices held by that society.

Research Locale

The island province is located at the center of the Philippine archipelago. It has six municipalities and 218 barangays. Its population of 227,828 is spread over 95,258 hectares of agricultural land (NSCB, 2014). Agriculture and fisheries are the main industries in this small province. In terms of income, the province is classified as fourth-class with poverty incidence among families estimated at 29.4% in the first semester of 2012 (NSCB, 2013). According to the 2000 National Census, the highest educational attainment of more than half of the heads of families in Municipalities A and B, where the research participants came from, is elementary education.

Apart from school libraries, the island has one provincial library in its capital and three municipal libraries (National Library of the Philippines, n. d.). There used to be one in Municipality B but it has stopped operations according to residents in the area. Furthermore, there were also very few available newspapers in the market – Manila Bulletin, Philippine Star, PM and Ngayon. Newspaper vendors said that they sell around two to four newspapers daily to office employees. Others just glance at the headlines without purchasing (L. Saguid, personal communication, February 13, 2012).

Research Participants

A total of 102 teachers and daycare workers from Municipality B (76%), Municipality A (15%) and

other towns (9%) participated in the study. Majority of the participants came from Municipality B, which ranked second in the number of households living below the poverty threshold and ranked first in the number of families experiencing food shortage in the province (PEP-NET, 2008).

Among the 102 teachers were 96 females and 6 males, whose ages ranged from 18 to 60 years old. When categorized according to grade levels taught, 19 were in daycare, 26 in kindergarten, 20 in first grade, 9 in second grade, 8 in third grade, 4 in fourth grade, 3 in fifth grade, 3 in sixth grade, 5 in multigrade, and 5 in special education. Most of the teachers have taught from three to five years. Only 8 of the 102 teachers were trained under the new Teacher Education Curriculum that required them to take Developmental Reading 1 and 2.

Almost all of the teachers (89%) reported that they enjoyed reading. However, when asked for their favorite reading materials, 16% of them mentioned books in general without specifying the type of books; 10% read the Bible; while 4% said newspapers. Few were able to name the genre of books they enjoyed reading such as mystery and romance. Reading among teachers appeared to be job-related and reading for pleasure was not mentioned as part of their routine. Other favorite reading materials included magazines, teacher's manuals, textbooks and reference materials such as encyclopedia and dictionaries. The reported lack of libraries and newspapers indicated few opportunities for teachers to access non-work related reading materials.

Methodology

The study employed the narrative inquiry research method (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006; Chase, 2005), in gathering teachers' beliefs, values, and perceptions or the overall teacher dispositions. "Voices" of teachers were captured and heard in the survey. Voice as a research construct is not only a linguistic activity. It also reflects an individual, ideological, social, and cultural accomplishment which can be used as a lens for understanding learning processes (Sperling and Appleman, 2011). Specifically, the study sought to

explore teacher perceptions on effective ways of teaching reading and writing and sectors in the community they believed to be mainly responsible for students' literacy development. To do this, an open-ended survey questionnaire was distributed to 102 teachers from the day care level to the sixth grade level prior to a one-day workshop on teaching reading. Themes that emerged from the survey responses revealed teacher dispositions in teaching reading. The other elements of teacher disposition such as behavior and characteristics were inferred but not observed.

Results

Literacy development: whose responsibility is it?

More than one-third of the teachers thought that literacy teaching was mainly the school's responsibility, followed by non-government agencies and private organizations. One third grade teacher said,

> "The school is the primary sector that helps in the area [of literacy] with the help of teachers. Mass media also has a part because children are exposed to it daily… new technology [too] such as mobile phone, computer, internet etc... Non-government organizations and local government units have programs in each barangay. They give trainings, seminars and meetings."

Teachers were aware of the low educational achievement among household heads. Census data indicated that most of the household heads have only completed elementary education and the prevailing high school completion rate was 47.5%. Given these circumstances, teachers were likely to believe that literacy is within the domain of formal education. Only 20% of the participants considered the importance of the family in literacy development. A Kindergarten teacher described the role of the family,

> "… the family can help develop the child's ability to read and write, since this is where he initially learns. The child grows up with his family. The next is the school, with the help from

teachers, reading materials and real objects that are used to improve the knowledge of children. Media also helps."

Teachers have referred to media and technology as playing an important role in the development of reading and writing. The use of cellular phones and the popularity of Facebook among the young have presented a functional purpose for acquiring literacy.

Best way to learn to read.

When asked for the most effective strategies in teaching reading and writing, the 102 teachers gave 233 strategies which could be grouped into instructional content (44%) and instructional conditions (56%) categories. For reading, the survey participants opined that word recognition skills, mechanics of handwriting and penmanship and drills were very important. Some of the strategies named were the Marungko Approach (synthetic phonics) and the introduction of the word families in teaching word recognition in English following the Fuller technique. Since many of the participants were daycare to first grade teachers, these strategies are commonly used. However, even the teachers from the upper grades responded in a similar manner. A teacher in the third grade narrated,

"In my opinion and based on my teaching experience, children easily learn to read and write through the teacher's guidance and patience in teaching the sound of the letters of the alphabet, using pictures, teaching simple words to complex phrases and sentences and stories. Children love to read when the story is illustrated. They love stories that are related to their experience, those with heroes, fantasy and where they get moral lessons."

The children's comprehension of stories is aided by pictures. Teachers opined that the use of realia and audio-visual aids were as important. Only 5 % mentioned meaning-based strategies and vocabulary development.

"For me, the most effective ways to develop children's ability to read and write are to provide them with interesting materials to read/write, and regular reading of short stories with illustrations that catch their attention. Encouragement from parents and teachers [are important]. Giving rewards after fulfilling reading or writing tasks [also work]." – A Grade 4,5,6, teacher

A fifth of the teachers noted the family's influence on children's literacy development. Teachers expect parents to help their children with schoolwork. A teacher from the intermediate grades said,

"A teacher's effective teaching is further enhanced by parents who teach and assist their children at home. Learning/ teaching is not solely the responsibility of the teacher. Teachers and parents work together to help children improve in reading."

Unfortunately, it was common knowledge among teachers that many of the parents have elementary education or have dropped out of high school. Parents may feel inadequate to help their children with schoolwork and may need support to be able to fulfill the teachers' expectations of parental involvement in their children's literacy development.

Table 1 presents the most effective strategies in teaching reading and writing as perceived by the teachers. The strategies are grouped into instructional content and procedures category and instructional conditions and resources category. The high-ranking responses under *instructional content and procedures* can be classified as "bottom-up" procedures that facilitate reading through the acquisition of a series of hierarchical skills and are intended to make learning to read easier by breaking complex linguistic tasks into their component skills. Some of these bottom-up procedures include the focus on sound-letter relations, forming syllables, and forming words. Only five participants mentioned comprehension/

Table 1.

Teachers' most effective strategies for teaching reading and writing

Categories of strategies	Number of Teachers and Percentage (n = 102)
Instructional Content and Procedures	
Content	
Word recognition skills/decoding	39 (38%)
Mechanics of handwriting and penmanship	20 (20%)
Comprehension and meaning-based strategies	5 (5%)
Reading readiness and concepts of print	4 (4%)
Good study habits	3 (3%)
Vocabulary	1 (1%)
Procedures	
Drills	27 (26%)
Modeling of reading	2 (2%)
Remedial reading instruction	1 (1%)
Instructional Conditions and Resources	
Positive teacher characteristics	30 (29%)
Audio-visual aids/realia/lesson plans	29 (28%)
Appropriateness of lessons and materials to students'age/interest/readiness	12 (12%)
Availability of books	17 (17%)
Providing opportunities for reading and writing	16 (16%)
Giving of praise and rewards	1 (1%)
Students good physical and emotional health	2 (2%)
Home/parental involvement	20 (20%)

meaning-based strategies and one mentioned vocabulary development -- two relevant topics on the International Reading Association popular topic list in 2010 and 2011.

Under the category *instructional conditions and resources*, the survey participants placed teacher characteristics, audio-visual aids/lesson plan, and home/parental involvement on top of their *best practice* list. It can be inferred from the responses that the teachers from this island province favor phonics and other linguistic skills-based procedures in teaching children to read. In addition, 20% of the teachers thought that writing was synonymous to penmanship and not writing as composing or putting the pupil's own ideas on paper. Hence, writing the correct letter forms and having legible handwriting were perceived to be important drill activities. Providing opportunities for reading and writing, having books to read, and home involvement were viewed as necessary prerequisites to the development of reading and writing.

Interestingly, the teachers also expressed confidence on the role of teacher characteristics in facilitating the teaching of reading. Professional teacher dispositions such as patience, diligence,

resourcefulness, and enthusiasm were associated with effective teaching reading and writing. Being motivated, encouraging, cooperative, hardworking, loving, respectful, and attentive were likewise valued by teachers are necessary qualities of a teacher. An example of the primacy of teacher characteristics is as follows,

> "Consider the children your own, love them wholeheartedly. Through this they will realize that you care for them. You may use any strategy with the children after showing your love for them. There are many different strategies but if you show them love, they will learn …" – A first grade teacher

Discussion

Research findings indicate the limited access of teachers and local community members to different types of books and literacy-related materials. Very few teachers were able to give strategies that went beyond word recognition skills. To aid comprehension, teachers thought that pictures would help instead of engaging the students in a variety of higher-order thinking skills or other metacognitive, elaboration, organizational, and other process-oriented comprehension strategies (Gunning, 2010). The International Literacy Association has maintained that comprehension and vocabulary strategies remain to be relevant topics in teaching reading. The teachers' view of reading may be indicative of the nature of pre-service training they received. Majority of them are graduates of the old teacher education curriculum that did not require them to take Developmental Reading subjects.

Teacher orientation was more affective than cognitive or skill-based. The teacher disposition in teaching reading lacks the balance of skills-based procedures and meaning-based comprehension strategies. The resulting professional dispositions may simply reflect the teachers' lack of knowledge and skills in teaching reading. Given that the local economy is dependent on farming and fishing, teacher dispositions reflect the community's regard for literacy; it is not a prerequisite for participation in the local industries. Here, the use of

Bourdieusian concepts of *fields* and *habitus* in understanding the data and the themes emerging from this study seem helpful in describing and explaining the way teachers in that rural community approach the teaching of reading. The community's less cognitively demanding local industries, inadequate access to reading materials and books, low socioeconomic status of most community folks, and level of parental education -- mostly elementary level and incomplete high school backgrounds of parents, contribute to the teachers' dominant notion that literacy is mainly the school's responsibility and that effective strategies in teaching reading focus on word recognition through drills.

The teacher dispositions regarding reading that emerged in the study, while authentic and sincere, pose risks when analyzing and evaluating their potential educational outcomes. If teachers are unable to think beyond decoding and word recognition skills and fail to consider vocabulary development, comprehension, literature response, and other meaning-based strategies, it is inevitable that students will find reading tasks difficult. Students will fail to reach the level of reading proficiency that allows them to read independently and critically. The resulting poor performance of students may ultimately lead to the lack of power, voice, and educational attainment among the residents of this island province, may continue to support the inequalities among its citizens, and may perpetuate poverty in the province.

Finding lifelong learning solutions

Teachers are resilient professionals who find solutions when confronted with the lack of resources necessary for teaching and learning. One important aspect of a teacher is his/her ability to care. This ethic of care, a teacher characteristic gleaned from the teachers' responses, seemingly makes up for the inadequate or lack of knowledge and resources. However, this does not mean that efforts towards the provision of much-needed resources should be shelved. Libraries and other sources of books have to be provided. Remedial and enrichment programs to address parents' literacy should be implemented to enable parents

to truly help their children. Research has shown the positive impact of parent education on children's health, educational attainment, and future income (Sabates, 2008).

Non-government organizations and local government units must address the challenge of providing the necessary resources to support literacy. They can also initiate community programs that could focus on adult literacy.

In-service training for teachers is important as the pre-service curriculum may not fully take into consideration the dire circumstances facing teachers in the field and may not be able to fully prepare the teacher to teach reading and writing. The effects of the inclusion of the required reading courses in the teacher education curriculum will be known in the years to come since the first batch of teachers under this curriculum would just have graduated within the last eight years.

Since Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education has been institutionalized as a fundamental educational policy and program in the Department of Education (DepEd, 2009), the Department of Education initiated efforts to equip teachers to teach literacy through school learning action cells (DepEd, 2015). The Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program is but one of recent efforts to address the training needs of teachers.

The advent of social media and wireless communication has revitalized the need to be literate. These are authentic avenues for using written language. While it is true that there are very few newspapers available and that the traditional industries of the province do not require high levels of literacy, technology has awakened the islanders' interest in reading and writing to enable them to use these technologies.

Professional Development for Teachers: Reflection, Adaptation, Disposition

Revisiting the themes that have emerged in the study, it becomes obvious that teachers have to find ways to reorient their dispositions in teaching reading. Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden's research on teacher preparation shows that beginning teachers need knowledge of subject

matter and curriculum goals, knowledge of learners and their development in social contexts, and knowledge of pedagogy, assessment and classroom management to be successful with their students (2005). There is an abundance of literature focusing on teacher learning as a vehicle for achieving these needed competencies.

Improving dispositions in teaching reading entails learning how to engage in reflection as a professional development process. In order to take intelligent actions about their teaching reading or any subject matter, teachers ought to have critical understanding about the instructional contexts, their own backgrounds, and their students' abilities. Rodgers (2002) presented a four-phase reflective cycle as the framework for practicing reflection: learning to see; learning to describe and differentiate; learning to think from multiple perspectives; and learning to take intelligent action. As part of reorienting teacher disposition in teaching any content area, teachers must learn to see their weaknesses and strengths, describe and differentiate them, think solutions to problems using different set of lenses, and take appropriate, relevant, and intelligent actions (Lalas and Solomon, 2007).

Aside from teacher reflection, teachers will benefit from reviewing current research regularly as part of their professional development. Since the participants in the study teach young children who speak a primary language other than English, another area of interest for professional development is the notion of adaptation pedagogy. Adaptation pedagogy integrates cognitive development and contemporary social justice perspectives as a theoretical and practical solution to making academic content comprehensible to English language learners (Lalas and Solomon, 2007). It also integrates the cognitive developmental perspectives of Piaget and Vygotsky by employing hands-on experiences, recognizing individual differences and children's learning at different rates, using developmentally appropriate activities, and fostering student learning through interaction of the learners with the teacher and peers (Gunning, 2010).

Finally, since teacher disposition is influenced by broader societal factors, another professional development topic should include an honest and frank discussion about poverty and learning (Noguera, 2011). Schools, community organizations, government agencies, religious groups, and other charitable civic formations must collaborate in addressing this economic and social reality. Research has demonstrated that poverty limits the expression of talents and small reductions in family poverty result to increases in positive school behavior and improved academic performance (Berliner, 2005). It is important to understand that successful professional development in high-poverty schools for teachers who are challenged by the social, economic, and cultural realities of the community, similar to the teachers in the study, must offer excellent classroom management skills training, a balanced literacy framework, and a metacognitive approach to instruction. It must also emphasize higher order thinking skills, teach basic skills in meaningful contexts, and use a range of formative assessment tools (Kennedy, 2010). Developing teachers' ability to teach literacy should not just be limited to those teaching in the lower grades. Teachers in the intermediate grades benefit from an understanding of the reading process and comprehension strategies to enable their students to handle content area reading.

In conclusion, teacher disposition is an important factor in making teaching and learning effective. It is the behaviors, characteristics, and perceptions teachers possess and demonstrate as they work with students. Lifelong learning teachers must take the initiative to reorient their disposition as well as their knowledge and skills in order to be effective teachers and advocates for students. A teacher with an excellent disposition in teaching reading involves all students in worthy meaningful, purposeful, and comprehensible activities while promoting the recognition of the value of each individual and creating a learning environment that is democratic, just, equitable, and caring.

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