Teacher Contract Non-Renewal: What Matters to Principals?

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This quantitative study investigated the relationship between teacher dispositions, subject content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and reasons that school principals recommend non-renewal of teachers' contracts. Nearly 2,000 school principals in 13 states completed an emailed survey.

In deciding whether to non-renew a teacher contract, principals reported that they observed most a lack of pedagogical content knowledge from ineffective teachers and that they prioritized the importance of instructional skills. Ethical issues received greatest importance. Principals identified teacher integrity, honesty, and dependability as important teacher dispositions.

The study's findings are important for the planning of teacher and principal professional development initiatives and hiring selection decisions. Knowing how to accurately ascribe variance in student learning has potential for improving student outcomes, particularly with the emphasis on value-added teacher evaluations.

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Quality teaching is the crucial component needed for student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2007; Marzano, 2006). More specifically, both subject content knowledge (SCK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) are essential components of successful teaching. What is less clear, however, is the association among teacher contract non-renewals, teacher dispositions, subject content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. In this quantitative study, nearly 2,000 school principals in thirteen states responded in three general areas: a) ineffective teacher behaviors, b) the importance of specific dispositions, and c) criteria for teacher contract non-renewal.

Teachers enter the teaching profession with at least four knowledge bases: their disposition, knowledge of pedagogy, subject matter knowledge, and context. One presumption is that teachers begin professional preparation with some level of subject content knowledge and as they learn to teach they transform and begin to develop pedagogical content knowledge. More than 50 years ago, James Conant (1963) argued that strong subject content knowledge with limited exposure to pedagogical knowledge constitutes a sufficient basis to prepare teachers. A search of the literature finds no shortage of supporters advocating the deregulation of teacher certification to allow college graduates who lack course work in the field of education to qualify for teaching certificates based on their content knowledge alone (Hess & Finn, 2004; Podgursky, 2005). Podgursky (2005) confidently reported, "the most basic academic requirement is knowledge of the relevant discipline" (p. 75).

Subject Content Knowledge

Subject content knowledge refers to the concepts and constructs within an academic field and the relationships among them. Subject content knowledge includes knowledge of a subject area or discipline as well as knowledge of the substantive and syntactic structures of the discipline (Schwab, 1964). Shulman (1986) stated that subject matter knowledge "is the comprehension of the subject appropriate to a content specialist" (p. 26). This view includes conceptualizations of how the field is organized and questions which guide inquiry. Without knowledge of the aforementioned structures within a field, teachers may misrepresent and impact the level of classroom discourse.

Arzi and White (2008) found that the "required school curriculum is the single most significant factor affecting teacher content knowledge" (p. 242). This impact manifests itself through the curriculum that teachers previously learned as school students and the curriculum that teachers currently teach. These factors determine priorities for new subject matter learning. Content knowledge does not begin or end in the university, but rather is a complex interactive process.

Subject content knowledge is often measured by the number of university subject-matter course credits for both pre and in-service teachers (Arzi & White, 2008). Yet, this characteristic of university-based teacher subject content learning has modest effects on student achievement (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). According to Arzi and White (2008), this view of earning subject matter credits "conceptualizes teacher knowledge as a unidimensional static entity, ignoring variety within and changes that it may undergo over time…beyond the boundaries of tertiary institutions" (p. 222). They noted that the school curriculum serves as both knowledge organizer and source of teacher subject content knowledge. They also suggested a three phase model which represents how teachers acquire subject content knowledge: "phase one includes the acquisition of academic details, phase two is curricular aggregation, and phase three is

characterized by intra and inter-disciplinary linking and pattern construction" (p. 245). They claimed that the lines between the phases are not sharp and that transitions are gradual. They suggested that phase two is probably a point where pedagogical content knowledge begins. It was Shulman (1986), who succeeded in linking SCK and PCK.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Shulman (1986) connected previously disparate views regarding subject content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge by noting that there are missing questions about the content of lessons taught. Related, more content knowledge is useless without the instructional skills (or pedagogical knowledge) to deploy it. Shulman (1986) drew attention to the value of both subject content knowledge and knowledge of pedagogy. Zeidler (2002) noted that the analysis of several studies leads to the inference that teacher subject content knowledge is a necessary but insufficient condition for the transfer of central ideas (p.31).

A prevailing view is that teachers must possess a level of general pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of teaching in areas such as knowledge and skills about learning, knowledge of general principals of instruction, and knowledge and skills about classroom management. All of these underscore the importance of teachers' pedagogical knowledge for student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Doyle, 1986). Shulman (1986) said that pedagogical knowledge "goes beyond knowledge of subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for teaching" (p. 9). Content in this sense refers to its teachability. In essence, (PCK) relates to the idea that teachers must be aware of students' common misperceptions and subject specific difficulties and knowledge of useful representations and appropriate instructional techniques for teaching the content (Shulman, 1986).

Pedagogical content knowledge lacks a precise definition in the literature (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008). Attempts at definitions appear so broad that the concept seems to include nearly everything a teacher might know in teaching a concept. Many definitions, directly or indirectly, describe the attributes that PCK would encompass. Definitions include "the intersection of knowledge of the subject with knowledge of teaching and learning…" and "that domain of teachers' knowledge that combines subject matter knowledge and knowledge of pedagogy"… or "the product of transforming subject matter into a form that will facilitate student learning" (Ball et al., 2008, p. 394). Nilsson (2008) said that pedagogical content knowledge is a "way of understanding the complex relationship between teaching and content through the use of specific teaching approaches and is developed through a process rooted in classroom practice" (p. 1283). Geddis and Wood (1997) called PCK a "broad category of those kinds of knowledge involved in pedagogical transformations of subject matter" (p. 612). They included the learner's prior concepts, subject matter representations, instructional strategies, curriculum materials, and curricular saliency. Curricular saliency refers to the teacher's understanding of the role and place that the topic fits into the curriculum.

Pedagogical content knowledge application is the activity of a teacher shifting focus from a general conception of content to a more detailed level. This begins with some method of organizing content in a progressive or logical order. PCK has "become a way of understanding the complex relationship between teaching and content through the use of specific teaching approaches and is developed through a process rooted in classroom practice" (Nilsson, p. 1283).
Gess-Newsome (1999) reviewed studies on teachers' knowledge and beliefs about subject matter and the relationship to teaching. She took the position that there is a distinction between an

integrative and transformative model of teacher cognition. With the integrative view, PCK does not exist and teacher knowledge is explained by the intersection of subject matter, pedagogy, and context. Knowledge from all three domains is integrated as needed. In the transformative model, PCK is a well-structured and easily accessible form through which something new and different in the way the three domains combine; consequently the new knowledge itself is transformed into PCK.

Grossman (1990) conceived of pedagogical content knowledge as composed of four central components: knowledge and beliefs about the purposes for teaching a subject at different grade levels; knowledge of the students' understanding, conceptions, and misconceptions of particular topics in a subject area; knowledge of curriculum materials available to teach a particular subject matter; and knowledge of instructional strategies and the skill to implement them. As Shulman noted (1986), teachers must also draw upon knowledge that is specific to teaching particular subject matters. In effect, this represents the dimension of subject matter knowledge for teaching. Within this realm we see the most useful forms of representation of concepts, analogies, illustrations, and demonstrations, among others (Shulman, 1986, pp. 9-10).

Torff and Sessions (2009) stated, "The test-score research suggests that teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge both appear to be positively associated with student outcomes, but which has the greater effect remains in dispute." (p. 129). Two studies by Torff and Sessions (2005; 2009) found that the most frequent causes of teacher ineffectiveness were deficiencies related to pedagogical knowledge. Deficiencies in subject content knowledge were the least common perceived cause. Results suggest that lack of pedagogical content knowledge is the most common underlying cause of problems of teacher quality.

Dispositions

Much current interest in dispositions stems from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2011) and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Principles (INTASC, 2011) mandates to incorporate dispositions into teacher candidate assessment. Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2007) claimed that NCATE standards have set the stage for a major debate about the role of dispositions in teacher preparation. The change from NCATE to the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) does not appear to have changed the emphasis on professional dispositions (CAEP, 2013).

For over seven decades, the importance of teacher candidate dispositions is evident in the literature (Albee & Piveral, 2003). A prevailing view is that effective teaching requires teacher knowledge, skills, and appropriate dispositions (Danielson, 2002). Due to the limitations of measurement tools, integrating dispositions into teacher education programs has lacked widespread systematic and intentional effort (Albee & Piveral, 2003). NCATE (2011) describes dispositions as "the values and commitments" that define teacher performance. NCATE standards call for dispositions that are consistent with the idea of "fairness" and "the belief that all students can learn." NCATE refers to dispositions as teacher behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities that affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own professional growth. When dispositions gained popularity in the 1990's, they were supposed to be a way to address the less tangible aspects of teaching (e.g., commitments, values, and beliefs). Inevitably, these aspects of teaching encompass moral sensibilities and inherently describe a moral activity (Schussler & Knarr, 2013). Importantly, dispositions embrace the why of teaching decisions, not just the what.

Character-related Dispositions

There are numerous and divergent efforts in the literature to describe teacher dispositions. Because definitions and conceptions of dispositions fall into several broad, general categories, it is useful to look at dispositions on a continuum that ranges from concepts that are not unique to teaching (character-related) to those that are essential components of effective teaching (competence-related).

Some researchers refer to dispositions as certain temperaments, attitudes, beliefs, and personality characteristics. These might best be described as character-related dispositions (Jung & Rhodes, 2008). This point of view tends to hold the personal characteristics of individuals as their dispositions rather than their competencies as professionals. This interpretation is furthest removed from the teacher's classroom dispositions, due to its general nature. The character-related viewpoint is of dispositions as values, beliefs, personalities, morals, and ethics contrasted by professional competencies which exist in areas such as technology, assessment, instruction, or leadership. The character-related dispositions include characteristics such as meeting deadlines, respecting differences, and good citizenship. None of the aforementioned characteristics are particularly unique to the teaching profession yet they are essential to effective teaching (Jung & Rhodes, 2008). Teacher education programs or school principals cannot likely help teachers become better people or to change their character-related dispositions, but they can influence awareness and promote a self-assessment reflective component of professionalism.

A similar character-related conception of dispositions often includes a moral or ethical aspect, characterized by descriptors such as "fairness, being democratic, empathy, enthusiasm, thoughtfulness, and respectfulness" (Rike & Sharp, 2008, p. 151). Because dispositions are often viewed as beliefs, personal values, and commitments, they also may be conceptualized as components of a moral compass and ethical strand that provides direction to teacher decision-making over time. A similar view is to look at dispositions as a dimension of personality. According to Damon (2007), disposition development mirrors personality development. Damon calls dispositions a "deep-seated component of personality going back to the origins of our temperaments…" (p. 367). Although certain character-related dispositions are prerequisites of effective teaching, alone they still fall short of ensuring teacher competence in the disposition realm. Schussler and Knarr (2013) referred to dispositions as an element of "moral sensibilities" which encompass "the inclination to think through assumptions and ramifications behind one's values… and the responsibility one has to care for others as a teacher" (p. 75).

Another view is of dispositions as a pattern of behavior. Katz and Raths (1986) provided a useful explanation, calling dispositions "the trend of a teacher's actions across similar contexts" (p. 2). More than mere mindless habits, dispositions are viewed as employing a conscious pattern of behavior that is directed to a goal (Katz, 1993). Similarly, Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2007) said that dispositions are "predictive patterns of behavior" (p. 361). A related conception of teacher dispositions is of a reflective practitioner. Reflective practice falls into the realm of a disposition as an area of expected or desired teacher competence. A mechanically competent teacher falls short of the archetype expert who has developed the desirable intellectual disposition to reflect (Goodlad, 1990). Dispositions are acts that are chosen in a particular context and at a specific time, that when called upon require skillful behavior. Or conversely, a disposition may include failure to act or to employ the knowledge or skills that the teacher possesses. Simply possessing a disposition does not ensure that it will be employed for the benefit of students. Although character-related teacher dispositions provide a necessary

foundation for teacher success, they alone are insufficient. When viewed as competence-related framework, however, teacher dispositions have the potential to become useful and powerful.

Competence-related Dispositions

Competence-related dispositions, unlike character-related, can be more readily observed and influenced by school principals. Training and relevant educational experiences can be used to advance dispositional aspects in the practice of teaching. Rather than observing a teacher's personality to see if the person is collaborative, a teacher can be led to employ collaborative work in classroom settings through professional learning and principal expectations. In addition, describing dispositions in more of a competence-related framework provides a better opportunity to assess pre-service and in-service teacher performance (Jung & Rhodes, 2008). In addition, competence-related dispositions are likely more genuine and are less likely to be faked or contrived, whereas a character-related issues might be deliberately hidden.

A genuine benefit to viewing dispositions as competence-related is the improved opportunity to identify and evaluate specific desirable teacher dispositions. Competence related dispositions manifest themselves as teaching behaviors and strategies which are most often observable. Jung and Rhodes (2008) proposed that dispositions can be generalized toward any instructional strategy by the teacher's: 1) willingness and intention to embrace the recommended strategy, 2) belief in the value of the strategy including a positive attitude regarding its use, 3) intention to increase the capability of the strategy, and 4) confidence in using the strategy (p. 656). This framework moves from the mindset of dispositions as an abstract character of personality to dispositions as an element of effective teaching. Additionally, assessment of dispositions becomes more palatable as it progresses beyond a teacher's personality characteristics to the measurement of specific teacher competencies.

Schussler, Stooksberry, and Bercaw (2010) provided a useful structure for understanding dispositions in a classroom setting. They refer to intellectual, cultural, and moral dispositional domains. Intellectual dispositions entail the learning expectations that teachers establish for all students, including what and how to teach, beliefs about how students learn, and an understanding of one's role as a professional. This domain includes areas such as pedagogy and content. The intellectual framework requires continually reflecting on one's practice, a behavior which principals can observe and measure.

The cultural disposition domain refers to the teacher tendency and desire to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. This includes the teachers' inclination to make necessary modifications to meet the needs of diverse learners and includes an awareness of their own culture and its effect on their teaching. Related, teachers also need to be aware of the students' culture and its effect on learning. This domain includes areas such as "knowing your students" and "meeting students where they are at" and motivating students by making the content relevant. Although not easy to measure, principals have a reasonable chance to gauge cultural dispositions.

Moral dispositions involve the inclination to think through one's moral values and how one relates to others. In practice, this domain may manifest itself in areas such as handling inappropriate behavior, motivating students, and grading fairly. As the teacher supervisor and leader of instruction, the school principal is best positioned to help teachers reflect on moral dispositions.

The school principal can practically and legally examine these competence dispositions in practice (as described by Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010). A school principal who consistently monitors classroom instruction denotes each teacher's "dispositional trend" with respect to planning, interactions with students, collegiality, and interest in their own professional growth. This trend provides a window to the teacher's level of effectiveness with students, and affords a reasonable basis to determine, in part, teacher contract non-renewals (Nixon, Dam, & Packard, 2010).

Teacher Contract Non-Renewal

Review of the literature regarding common elements related to teacher contract non-renewal quickly leads to criteria that are often designed in state legal systems and to concepts that bear some relationship to SCK, PCK, and dispositions. Teacher contract non-renewals are legal procedures that are defined in courts, by hearing examiners, through state statutes, and by means of master contracts and local policies and procedures. All states differentiate between the requirements for ending the employment of teachers depending on their tenure status. Most importantly, a tenured teacher must be afforded certain procedural rights prior to dismissal or termination. These rights generally include notice of the grounds for the action and the opportunity for a hearing. Depending on the statutory protections of the state granting tenure, tenured teachers often must be provided with names of witnesses, the power of subpoena to compel production of documents and testimony of witnesses, the right to counsel at all stages of the process, and the right to appeal. Non-tenured or probationary teachers are considered "at will employees" and not generally afforded the same due process rights as tenured teachers. They may have their contracts non-renewed without cause at the option of the employer, upon proper notice of the intent not to renew by the employing school board at the end of any contract year.

Even though probationary teachers may have their contracts non-renewed without cause, emblematic reasons exist for both tenured and probationary teachers. The most common legal reasons are defined in state statutes and often include incompetency, insubordination, immorality, good cause, reduction in force, and contract violations. The legal reasons manifest in behaviors such as excessive absenteeism and tardiness, neglect of duty, abusive language, administering corporal punishment, unethical conduct, sexual misconduct, abuse of a controlled substance, theft or fraud, misuse of a school computer, criminal misconduct outside the work setting, and conduct unbecoming a teacher (Lawrence, Vashon, Leake, & Leake, 2005). It's possible to link these legal reasons to PCK, SCK, and dispositions, but they appear most difficult to connect to SCK. Incompetency and good cause, however, could be for SCK reasons.

The first legal reason for contract non-renewal, teacher incompetence, is viewed as a pattern of behavior rather than a single event. Alexander and Alexander (2009) defined incompetence in the context of fitness to teach, noting that "fitness to teach is essential and contains a broad range of factors…lack of knowledge of subject matter, lack of discipline, unreasonable discipline, unprofessional conduct, and willful neglect of duty" (p. 796). McCarthy and Cambron-McCabe (1987, p. 395) similarly defined incompetency as "lack of ability, legal qualifications, or fitness to discharge the required duty." Rossow and Parkinson (1992) noted that removing a teacher for incompetence requires repeated evaluations and attempts to remediate deficiencies. The courts view incompetence as needing a "multiple deficiencies requirement" which involves principal time and documentation.

Another legal reason for contract non-renewal is immorality. Immorality has been viewed as a course of conduct that offends the morals of the community (Van Berkum, Richardson, Broe, & Lane, 2008). The standards of dismissal for immorality are vague, often leaving a principal in the difficult position to evaluate whether teacher actions are immoral. Typically, a case of morality might involve teacher dishonesty or sexual misconduct. These may best be considered character-related dispositions.

Another common statutory reason cited for teacher contract non-renewal is insubordination. Insubordination is the willful disregard, or refusal to, obey reasonable directives. Often insubordination manifests itself in teacher behavior such as absenteeism and tardiness. Generally, teacher actions over a period of time that are not corrected may be interpreted as insubordination. This is frequently one of the easiest legal grounds to show to a court or hearing examiner, as insubordinate behavior might be more apparent than a more subjective instructional deficiency. Classifying insubordination as a character-related disposition is probably most valid.

Good or just cause means that there is a legitimate or real cause or basis to non-renew a contract. Good cause is distinguished from a whim or arbitrary decision—because the principal, acting in good faith, develops a defensible, reasonable ground for the action. Many state laws provide this general provision due to the reality that no statute can cover all possible reasons for a contract non-renewal. All three areas (SCK, PCK, & disposition) could fall under the good and just cause standard.

Reduction in force typically refers to "downsizing" and includes processes that lead to an overall reduced number of teaching positions. A teacher contract non-renewal as a result of a reduction in force is normally the result of either a decline in revenue or student enrollment. In these cases the school district is typically obligated to provide documentation regarding the financial hardship of the district.

A teacher contract non-renewal is an intricate legal process, which is understandable given the significance to the involved individuals and students. Several of the emblematic reasons have face value with respect to teacher dispositions, SCK, and PCK. Insubordinate behavior and immorality are two common reasons for contract non-renewal that might also be related to teacher character dispositions. In fact, in reviewing the list of common reasons for contract non-renewal it is relatively easy to conceive of both character-related and competence-related reasons that school principals recommend non-renewal of teacher contracts. As the understanding of dispositions continues to evolve to include competence rather than just character, additional relevance and the relationship of dispositions to contract non-renewal will likely be more evident.

Teacher Evaluation and Race to the Top

Any teacher contract non-renewal involves an evaluation process. In 2009, the Race to the Top (RTTT) legislation offered large federal financial grants to states that were willing to pursue aggressive school reforms that included teacher evaluation (RTTT, 2009). The legislation calls for "recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals"… and "improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance…" (RTTT, 2009, pp. 2, 4). The legislation defines an effective teacher as one "whose students achieve acceptable rates (e.g., as least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth…teacher effectiveness is evaluated, in significant part, by student growth" (RTTT, 2009, p. 12).

Similarly, in 2011, the U.S. Department of Education created a flexibility program that offered states waivers from sanctions from No Child Left Behind (Popham & DeSander, 2014). In return for the waivers, states often promised to pursue new school reforms which included tougher teacher evaluation systems (Steinbrecher, Cosbey, & Thorstensen, 2014). Many of the recent reforms of teacher evaluation processes have included value-added modeling (VAM), which requires a substantial element of a teacher's evaluation be based on student performance scores (Paige, 2012). According to Scherrer (2012), VAM improves accountability systems by moving past status models as VAM has the potential to isolate teacher effects on student learning. Because the value-added modeling is relatively new to most teachers and principals, and has unproven reliability, an already complex and difficult task for school principals to determine methods for teacher contract non-renewals has become more cumbersome (Paige, 2012). In addition, other challenges with VAM include determining growth as all students start at different places on a scale, the term value-added does not have a universal definition, and states are using a variety of growth models (Franco & Seidel, 2014). In the present study, data were collected from school principals in the first years of implementation of RTTT; therefore we presume that the impact of the legislation had not yet been felt by school principals. We anticipate that the impact of teacher evaluations tied to value-added modeling and contract non-renewal will continue to grow over time.

The study answered three overarching questions:

1) Which behaviors do principals report observing most frequently from ineffective teachers?

2) Which teacher dispositions do principals report are most important to success in the classroom?

3) Which teacher criteria are most important to school principals in deciding whether to recommend contract non-renewal of a non-tenured teacher?

Research Methods

Participants

Principal email addresses were accessed in the 13 selected states using either state department of education websites or third party websites. Emails were sent by state and region in a 30 month period in several cycles from 2010 until 2012. The databases were imperfect, however, because they typically contained data a year or two old, leaving recently appointed principals out of the population. Additionally, school district filters and spam controls prevented some principals from receiving the email. Also, some school district policies forbid research participation without specific permission. Additionally, some of the email addresses were not accurate or had changed as 1,850 emails were returned to the researchers as undelivered. The response rate was just over 14%, as 13,500 emails were sent and 1,935 school principals from Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Montana, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Utah, and Washington completed the survey. Participating states were selected based on several factors, including their regional proximity, demographic representation, and public availability of school principal email addresses.

Table 1
Participating Principals by State

State	Frequency	Percentage
Alabama	113	5.8
Colorado	156	8.1
Georgia	242	12.5
Idaho	71	3.7
Illinois	277	14.3
Indiana	238	12.3
Iowa	139	7.2
Montana	48	2.5
North Carolina	160	8.3
Ohio	265	13.7
South Carolina	67	3.5
Utah	89	4.6
Washington	70	3.6
Total	1935	100

Forty-eight percent of participants identified that they were located in a rural school, 33% in a suburban school, and 19% in an urban setting. Fifty-six percent said that they had less than 10 years of experience as a principal, 33% between 10 and 20 years of experience, and only 11% had more than 20 years' experience as a principal. Forty-nine percent reported that they were elementary principals, 16% middle school, 21% high school, and 15% other. Ninety-seven percent of the respondent principals work in public schools.

Instrumentation

The study's research questions and our interests led to the development of a descriptive survey (Mertens, 2005). The initial survey instrument was piloted as a paper mailed survey with 60 principals in four southeastern states. Revisions to the instrument were made after additional analysis and feedback. The instrument has been modified several times and builds upon eight related studies (Nixon, Dam, & Packard, 2010; Nixon, Packard, & Dam, 2011a; Nixon, Packard, & Dam, 2011b; Nixon, Packard, & Dam, 2012a; Nixon, Packard, & Dam, 2012b; Nixon, Packard, & Dam, 2013; Nixon, Packard, & Dam, 2014; Nixon et al., 2010). Survey development was guided by the design considerations offered by Creswell (2005) and Mertens (2005). While the data are self-reported, respondents have nothing to gain by particular responses so bias has been removed or reduced.

Survey questions and answer choices were created after extensive review of the literature concerning teacher contract non-renewal, teacher dispositions, pedagogical content knowledge, and subject content knowledge. The survey includes 22 Likert-type questions plus an open-ended question. Each respondent provided demographic information regarding their years of experience as a principal, the size and level of school, state information, and whether their school was rural, urban, or suburban. Responses were collected in several cycles, primarily by geographic region. For example, data from the southeastern states were collected in fall of 2010 and winter of 2011,

whereas data from the Rocky Mountain States were collected in winter of 2012. A web survey was used because it can achieve a comparable response rate to mailed surveys (Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000; Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004), and it is substantially less expensive.

Four core survey questions are relevant to this study's research questions, which include 22 possible responses. One survey question asked, "Which behaviors do you observe most frequently from ineffective teachers?" The three answer choices included "lack of subject content knowledge," "lack of instructional skills," and "unacceptable disposition." In another question, principals rated the importance of subject content knowledge, instructional skills, and disposition to contract non-renewal decisions on a scale from 1 to 3. A third question was "Which teacher dispositions are important to success in the classroom;" and included the following answer choices "collaborative," "integrity," "reflective," "knowledgeable," "initiator," "flexible," "relationship-builder," "creative," "honest," "dependable," and "other (please specify)." Respondents were given four answer choices, including "highest importance," "very important," "some importance," and "no importance." A final question asked respondents to "rank order the following possible reasons that might lead you to recommend contract non-renewal of a non-tenured teacher."

Analysis Procedures

Survey results were analyzed and are reported descriptively. Analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22 to generate the frequency of responses and the valid percentages for the reported survey questions.

Results

Ineffective Teacher Behaviors

Principals were asked to respond to a question, "Which behaviors do you observe most frequently from ineffective teachers?" Answer choices were "observe least frequently," "observe second most frequently," and "observe most frequently." The answer criteria were "lack of subject content knowledge," "lack of instructional skills," and "unacceptable disposition."

Table 2

Principal's Observations of Ineffective Teacher Behaviors

Teacher Behavior	Observe Least Frequently	Observe Second Most Frequently	Observe Most Frequently	Mean (SD)
Lack of subject content knowledge	955 (49.3%)	822 (42.5%)	126 (6.5%)	1.56 (.615)
Lack of instructional skills	35 (1.8%)	407 (21.0%)	1477 (76.3%)	2.75 (.473)
Unacceptable disposition	905 (46.7%)	686 (35.4%)	318 (16.4%)	1.69 (.739)

The results demonstrate that principals place strong emphasis and importance on PCK. More than three-fourths of principals selected "lack of instructional skills" as the most observed behavior from ineffective teachers, while less than two percent identified it as least frequently observed. Principals seem torn regarding the frequency of lack of SCK, with a nearly even split between selecting "lack of SCK" and "unacceptable disposition." Interestingly, there was greater variability in responses (SD .739) within "unacceptable disposition" however, as principals responses ranged significantly.

Teacher Dispositions

Principals responded to a survey question which asked, "Which teacher dispositions are important to success in the classroom?" Answer responses included "no importance (1)," "some importance (2)," "very important (3)," and "highest importance (4)." Criteria listed included "collaborative," "integrity," "reflective," "knowledgeable," "initiator," "flexible," "relationship-builder," "creative," "honest," "dependable," and "other (please specify)." Eighty-six principals offered a response to the "other" category. Responses in the "other" category were wide ranging, however a couple of themes were evident. Ten respondents mentioned "attitude" as part of their response; while six mentioned "cares" about students. "Sense of humor" and "relates to people" were also mentioned four times each. Table 3 contains the responses to the identified dispositions (4.0=highest importance).

Table 3

Principal's Identification of Important Teacher Dispositions

Disposition	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Median*	*Range*
Integrity	1922	3.60	.532	4.00	2
Honest	1924	3.54	.565	4.00	2
Dependable	1886	3.53	.538	4.00	3
Relationship-Builder	1924	3.45	.659	4.00	3
Knowledgeable	1926	3.33	.589	3.00	3
Collaboration	1925	3.22	.615	3.00	3
Reflective	1915	3.20	.668	3.00	3
Flexible	1916	3.20	.643	3.00	3
Creative	1915	2.82	.698	3.00	3
Initiator	1908	2.80	.680	3.00	3

Ranges in principal responses from the mean scores are relatively narrow, differing only by .80 from highest to lowest ranking of importance. Results from principal responses place the highest importance on "integrity," followed by "honesty" and "dependable." The low SD scores for "integrity" (.532), "honesty" (.565), and "dependable" (.538) further cement the consensus of the highest importance of these criteria. The lowest mean scores of "creative" (2.82) and initiator (2.80) also had the highest SD.

Teacher Criteria for Contract Non-Renewal

Two sets of questions were constructed to help identify teacher criteria for contract non-renewal. In the first question, principals ascribed the level of importance of certain criteria in deciding whether to recommend contract non-renewal of probationary teachers. Answer choices provided were "subject content knowledge," "instructional skills," and "disposition."

Table 4

Criteria for Teacher Contract Non-Renewal Identified by Principals

Criteria	Least Important	Important	Most Important	Mean (SD)
Subject content knowledge	602 (31.8%)	1011 (53.3%)	282 (14.9%)	1.83 (.662)
Instructional skills	53 (2.8%)	459 (24.0%)	1399 (72.2%)	2.70 (.514)
Disposition	1224 (63.9%)	448 (23.4%)	242 (12.6%)	1.49 (.709)

"Instructional skills" was the most often selected criterion reported in deciding whether to recommend contract non-renewal, as nearly three-fourths of principals identified the criterion as "most important." The comparably low SD (.514) for instructional skills further demonstrates a consensus regarding its place as highest importance. SCK was identified as important, with "dispositions" identified as least important by more than three-fifths of principals.

Results from a related second question are in Table 5, which includes the results from the rank order responses of principals. Respondents were asked to rank order seven criteria, ranging from "most likely" "second most likely" and so on as criteria which would lead them to recommend a contract non-renewal.

Table 5

Principal's Reasons Which Lead to Contract Non-Renewal by Number of Responses

Reasons	Mean and (SD)	Most unlikely	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Very Likely	Second most likely	Most Likely
Absenteeism/ tardiness	2.27 (1.4)	709 (36.6%)	404 (20.9%)	278 (14.4%)	194 (10.0%)	100 (5.2%)	30 (1.5%)	19 (1.0%)
Classroom management	3.80 (1.5)	101 (5.2%)	300 (15.5%)	363 (18.8%)	385 (19.9%)	369 (19.1%)	185 (9.6%)	61 (3.2%)
Ethical violations and inappropriate conduct	6.30 (1.3)	17 (0.9%)	34 (1.8%)	41 (2.1%)	85 (4.4%)	118 (6.1%)	318 (16.4%)	1172 (60.5%)
Incompetence	5.67 (1.2)	14 (0.7%)	36 (1.9%)	79 (4.1%)	133 (6.9%)	319 (16.5%)	796 (41.1%)	437 (22.6%)

Professional demeanor	2.77 (1.5)	413 (21.3%)	413 (21.3%)	357 (18.4%)	247 (12.8%)	175 (9.0%)	69 (3.6%)	10 (0.5%)
Insubordination	4.26 (1.6)	91 (4.7%)	204 (10.5%)	272 (14.0%)	372 (19.2 %)	469 (24.2%)	298 (15.4%)	122 (6.3%)
Lack of student achievement	3.61 (1.6)	229 (11.8%)	259 (13.4%)	344 (17.8%)	430 (22.2%)	313 (16.2%)	161 (8.3%)	71 (3.7%)

"Ethical violations and inappropriate conduct" was the strong consensus choice as "most likely" reason, with nearly 61% of principals selecting it. "Incompetence," which could be a function of SCK, PCK, or dispositions, was selected by 41% or principals as the "second most likely" reason. "Insubordination" was the third most likely response (24%). Interestingly, the criterion "lack of student achievement" (22%) was selected as the fourth most likely reason to recommend contract non-renewal.

Discussion

Teacher Behaviors

Principals selected lack of instructional skills as the most common behavior that they observe from ineffective teachers, as nearly 77% of principal respondents identified this criterion as the most frequently observed. This finding elevates the importance of teacher pedagogical knowledge and supports the findings of Torff and Sessions (2005; 2009) regarding the importance of PCK. Interestingly, principals seem torn regarding the importance of SCK. Perhaps the issue of SCK is somewhat bifurcated, meaning that for certain subjects, SCK is deemed more essential. Due to the well-known difficulty of selecting and hiring effective teachers in math and science areas, principals may well feel pressured about the importance of SCK. The results of our query into ineffective teacher behaviors clearly points to the fact that principals view pedagogical and instructional factors as the reasons for teacher ineffectiveness. However, when one breaks down the general criteria more specifically as we have done in research question three (survey question four), character-related dispositions assume a more prominent place in respondent selections. Seemingly a "flawed" character leads more quickly to a termination than a competence-related issue.

Teacher Dispositions

Principals identified a preference for those dispositions that can be readily branded as character-related. Integrity, honesty, and dependability, each arguably a character trait, were the highest rated dispositions. Each also had the lowest SD, leading us to conclude that there was a relatively strong consensus for these three criteria. This finding suggests that principals view dispositions as a characteristic of personality and that they tend to define their importance as a function of personality rather than professional competence. Conversely, we note the lower importance ascribed to the dispositions that are more performance related, such as knowledgeable, relationship builder, creative, and initiator. While not surprised, the relative low importance given to creativity and initiative, which arguably are important elements of effective teaching, perhaps expresses the current preference for teachers who can help students perform well on standardized tests and who can follow and implement structured curricular programs closely. It

again seems to reinforce principals' preferences for character-related issues in contract non-renewal issues.

It should be noted that the relatively narrow range of mean scores (2.80 to 3.60) and the range of SD (.532 to.698) reflect principals lack of ability to strongly discriminate in their answer selections. Principals may be saying that there is some level of importance to each of the criteria, which leads us to question if we might find a better method of probing principal responses in this area.

Teacher Criteria for Contract Non-Renewal

Using results from Table 4, consistent with Torff and Sessions (2005; 2009) findings, principals selected instructional skills as the most central criterion in contract non-renewal considerations. Almost 73% of principals selected the criterion as most important. Dispositions were the consensus choice as the least important criterion for teacher contract non-renewal.

Table 5 includes several interesting results. These results include a mixing of criteria, some of which might be best classified as a PCK area (e.g., classroom management), SCK (e.g., incompetence), and disposition (e.g., ethical violation). In previous questions, principal responses were less likely to select disposition and to a lesser extent principals minimized SCK. The forced rankings of specific criteria in survey question four led to more importance attributed to the criteria that are arguably more dispositions-like.

Conclusions

Issues related to teacher contract non-renewals, teacher behaviors, dispositions, subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are complex and interrelated. From the perspective of teacher contract non-renewals, this study affirms the literature that each is consequential. Expertise in both subject content and pedagogy must be woven together, yet overall, principals in this study selected pedagogical content knowledge as the most relevant criterion for teacher contract non-renewal issues. As noted by Torff and Sessions (2009), the only way to genuinely determine the most consequential criteria is to improve the teacher evaluation process to ascertain whether teacher effectiveness is best attributed to dispositions, subject-content knowledge, or pedagogical content knowledge. Attempts to better understand the variance in weight for criteria that impact student learning and teacher contract non-renewals are worthwhile pursuits. Given the recent introduction of value-added teacher evaluations, we cannot be certain whether the teacher evaluation process is valid or reliable. In fact, we must question the extent to which the instruments measure what is intended and whether principals are proficient in using them. These are potential areas for future investigation.

As found in this study, teacher deficiencies are most evident in pedagogical content knowledge. This finding suggests several important propositions. The implication of this finding for teacher preparation, teacher selection, and professional development suggests the need for pedagogical emphasis compared to subject content knowledge. It also calls into question alternative teacher certification programs which emphasize the importance of subject content knowledge at the expense of the pedagogical content knowledge. It seems logical to suppose that more alternative certification routes may lead to additional teacher contract non-renewals and further attrition in the profession. The finding also raises questions about teacher certification renewal requirements which reward teachers for additional courses in the subject content areas.

Similarly, a legitimate question includes whether policies such as No Child Left Behind's definition of highly qualified teachers was on target.

Only 13% of principals reported that a teacher's disposition is the most important criterion in determining whether to recommend contract non-renewal. Given the importance of dispositions by NCATE (CAEP) and teacher preparation programs, this low percentage seems incongruous. The incongruity may be explained by the vague and murky understanding of dispositions, and the lack of precision of instruments designed to assess teacher dispositions. Ironically, when we offered principals specific choices to rank the importance of various criteria to the contract non-renewal process, disposition choices were given high importance. Digging deeper, there is evidence in this study that principals place more importance on dispositions (primarily character-related) than they may even know. Each principal who completed the questionnaire had a unique understanding and denotation of dispositions, but evidently a preponderance of the respondent principals viewed dispositions through the eyes of a teacher trait or personality characteristic (character disposition), rather than as a competence-related criterion. The character view probably led to principals seeing less relationship between effective teaching and dispositions than for other answer choices (instructional skills and subject content knowledge). It seems apparent that the construct of teacher dispositions is less well developed than SCK and PCK; therefore much more investigation is needed in this area.

The need to continue to work to develop methods that validly and reliably assess teacher dispositions is evident. Following the suggestions of Jung and Rhodes (2008), to conceptualize dispositions as instructional strategies provides a useful starting place for that conversation. In time, teacher competence dispositions may be viewed very similarly to the body of skills and strategies that we expect from teachers, and may be viewed as something akin to "teacher professional responsibilities." Subject content, pedagogy, and teacher dispositions each contribute to the variance in student outcomes. Continuing to consider these relationships and attributing relative weights to their importance is a worthwhile endeavor, particularly as value-added teacher evaluations become more common. Finally, we expect the importance of "lack of student learning" to take a larger importance as RTTT and new teacher evaluation processes expand throughout the country. Because of the RTTT requirement to tie evaluations to student growth, we are confident that principal responses will be changing as will the principals' needs for support in the teacher evaluation and contract non-renewal process.

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