

Beyond Knowledge and Skills Best Practices for Attending to Dispositions in Teacher Education Programs

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Introduction

While public discourse about education has long focused on teacher quality, there has been a noticeable trend recently in the popular media toward identifying and disseminating the “secrets” of good teaching. In 2010, Amanda Ripley of *The Atlantic* asked “What Makes a Great Teacher?” Ripley draws on data released by Teach For America (TFA) in an effort to understand the factors that “tend to predict [teacher] greatness” (p. 1). These data link 20 years’ worth of student test scores to current and former members of TFA’s teaching corps and isolate those teachers whose students showed the greatest gains. As Ripley explains, TFA cites effective teachers as those who consistently reevaluate classroom procedures; involve parents and families into the planning process; maintain a focus on student learning; and utilize backwards design when planning lessons and units. Three years later, Ripley (2013) penned *The Smartest Kids in the World*. Shifting her focus internationally, her book follows three American students receiving education abroad and examines the ways that other countries are able to get education “right.”

Most recently, Elizabeth Green (2014) has taken up this mantle. In

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her book, *Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works (And How to Teach It to Everyone)*, Green interviews leaders in the field of teacher education in order to understand what makes the best teachers tick. Green initially recalls her own educational experience and hypothesizes that effective educators possess an innate set of knowledge and skills that cannot necessarily be taught. Based on her research, she concludes that good teachers are made, not born. Akin to Ripley and TFA's assertions, Green does frontload the importance of things that teachers should know and be able to do rather than focusing on the ways that teachers' beliefs affect their respective classrooms.

Along these lines, much public attention is given to the importance of teachers' knowledge and skills. But what of teacher beliefs? Teachers' beliefs and actions in practice are more commonly referred to as their "dispositions" (Katz & Raths, 1985; Schussler, 2006). Scholars (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Grossman, 2005; Nieto, 2000; Schussler, 2006; Villegas, 2007) argue that if teacher dispositions are not challenged during the preparation period, they will have implications for practice regardless of what teachers learn in their respective education programs, especially if teachers' dispositions are deficit-laden. In order for teaching programs and, ultimately, teachers, to be successful, they must directly address teachers' prior assumptions about teaching and learning. Furthermore, schools of education need to understand how pre-service teachers' beliefs might manifest in the classroom. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) agrees. As an institution, NCATE is responsible for accrediting approximately 650 teacher education programs across the nation. Any school of education that seeks NCATE accreditation must attend to teacher dispositions (Borko, et al., 2007). In 2000, NCATE listed dispositions amongst its accreditation standards (ibid). For the purposes of this article, I term dispositions as the union of one's beliefs and actions, which are inherently adaptable and bolstered through deliberate reflection.

Yet, questions about dispositions in teacher education abound. Why is it important to attend to pre-service teachers' dispositions? How can schools of education effectively attend to the dispositions of prospective educators? Most importantly, what is a disposition as it relates to teacher education? To best address these questions and offer a set of strategies for engaging with pre-service teachers' dispositions, this article is organized into two sections: Dispositions Defined; and The Role of Teacher Education in Attending to Dispositions.

Dispositions Defined

In 1985, Lilian Katz and James Raths first introduced dispositions as critical to teacher education. In this seminal piece, they define a disposition “as an attributed characteristic of a teacher, one that summarizes the trend of a teacher’s actions in particular contexts.” Similarly, the idea of a disposition as a “characteristic” is echoed in other definitions, as Damon (2007) contends that a disposition is a “characteristic that is embedded in temperament and disposes a person toward certain choices and experiences that can shape his or her future.” Characteristics function as a system of beliefs that are predictive of behaviors and related actions. In fact, when surveying additional definitions of the dispositions construct, the notion of action is quite prevalent.

Therefore, dispositions are not solely structures, or characteristics, in a person’s mind. They require interaction with the environment in order to come into being, as they represent the intersection of one’s characteristics and *actions*. Utilizing action as a lens, dispositions are “tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs” (Schussler, 2006); similarly, the notion of action pervades the definitions of myriad dispositions scholars (Borko et al., 2007; Dottin, 2010; Johnson & Reiman, 2007, Oja & Reiman, 2007; Villegas, 2007). Ultimately, it is the intersectionality of characteristics and actions that define one’s disposition.

It is important to note that some critics, such as Burant, Chubbuck, and Whipp (2007), take umbrage with the connection between beliefs and observable behaviors, as they claim that it is almost impossible to draw a connection between one’s interior values and behavior. Drawing on Noddings (1984/1988) and Delpit’s (1995) work on caring pedagogy, the authors offer the example of two teachers with the same disposition of care who exhibit vastly different pedagogical styles. While one teacher shows care by being warm and nurturing, the other does so by being demanding and strict. Since, to the outside observer, the intention behind these behaviors could be construed as vastly different, cultural and contextual understanding is of paramount importance when assessing teacher dispositions (Burant, et al., 2007; Sockett, 2009). However, it is important to note that these critics do see the value in attending to dispositions in teacher education.

Morals and values also impact the ways that dispositions are understood and employed. While morals dictate one’s understanding of right from wrong, values help one assess something’s relative importance. Parsing out the moral element of dispositions, Schussler et al. (2008) explain that dispositions “encompass awareness of one’s own values, the

inclination to think through the ramifications behind one's values...[as] teacher candidates begin their teacher education programs with an extensive value system in place" (p. 108). Similarly, Sockett (2009) defines dispositions as "virtues," or behaviors associated with one's moral standards, and believes that a teacher's actions are guided by these qualities. However, he is quick to clarify that dispositions as virtues are also guided by cognition; regardless of a teacher's moral stance, she must assess each situation and rectify what she sees with her value system. For example, Sockett explains that while a teacher may claim to be committed to tolerance, she would not be likely to tolerate violence as a means of experiential learning. Since no two candidates are the same, their respective values may also differ. Therefore, it is important for teacher educators to provide a means for pre-service teachers to determine what it is they value, why they value what they do, and how their values inform their practice.

Finally, inherent in the definition provided thus far is the idea that dispositions are adaptable. Through reflection, teachers have the opportunity to revise their thinking, thus altering their respective dispositions. It is important to note that while some researchers posit that dispositions are observable and inherently adaptable (Oja & Reiman, 2007; Schussler, 2006; Villegas, 2007), others view dispositions as fixed, stable traits (Wasicsko, 2007). Diez (2007) provides a useful structure for examining the two positions often posited in disposition debates, terming them the "entity" view and the "incremental" view. As she explains:

...the notion that dispositions might be addressed as stable traits, an 'entity' perspective, is present both in the development of screening instruments and in reviews of research studies...[while] others see dispositions in a more 'incremental' way, as developing over time, influenced by context, experience, and interaction. (Diez, 2007, p. 391)

However, the entity view is problematic; this perspective breeds homogeneity in education by assuming that dispositions are unalterable, easily identifiable personality traits (Burant et al., 2007). Thus, the use of dispositions as a means of determining entry to schools of education is troublesome, as it supports the belief that dispositions can never be altered, regardless of the experiences one encounters in his or her lifetime (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Burant, Chubbuck, & Whipp, 2007; Damon, 2007; Villegas, 2007). Dispositions as related to assessment will be further explored in a subsequent section of this article.

When defining dispositions, one final consideration is how dispositions relate to knowledge and skills. The end goal of a teacher education program is to fuse requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions in a man-

ner that allows teachers to function as thoughtful, effective practitioners (Wasicsko, 2007). Since dispositions, knowledge and skills are listed as three distinct entities, it is important to understand each concept as well as the way they work in concert.

Much has been written about the importance of knowledge as related to teaching. Shulman's (1987) work describes the complex knowledge base that teachers draw on in their practice. This includes areas such as content knowledge and knowledge of general pedagogical practices. Additionally, he was the first to identify pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as a distinct body of knowledge for teaching. In his words, PCK is "the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). Scholars also stress the importance of cultural knowledge, as teachers should understand how children learn and develop in different contexts (Burant et al., 2007; Delpit, 1995; Noddings, 1984; Villegas, 2007).

In addition to knowledge, skills such as the ability to utilize school resources, diagnose learning difficulties, re-direct students, and manage classrooms, are all essential to good teaching, as they allow the educator to create a learning environment that best addresses the individual needs of her students (Villegas, 2007). So where and how do dispositions fit into this picture? While it is clear that teachers must develop their knowledge and skills in order to be effective in the classroom, dispositions provide a lens for understanding how knowledge and skills intersect with one's beliefs about teaching, learning and students (Schussler et al., 2008).

Interestingly, dispositions are inherently tied into a teacher's knowledge and skill base, as the development of one area affects the growth of another (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006; Diez, 2007; Schussler, 2006; Wasicsko, 2007). Essentially, they shape how a teacher receives new knowledge and skills. Diez (2007) clarifies this point by providing an example of a teacher who enters her program not believing that all children can learn. As the author goes on to explain, the teacher's "judgment was formed in the absence of the knowledge and skill available to an educator; given a deeper knowledge of child development and teaching strategy, the candidate's disposition may well be changed" (p. 392). Ultimately, by expanding upon her knowledge and skill base, a teacher can alter her disposition. This finding further emphasizes the problematic nature of the entity perspective on dispositions, as what might have been previously construed as an undesirable disposition was merely the result of a lack of adequate knowledge.

The Role of Teacher Education in Attending to Dispositions

Why Schools of Education Should Attend to Dispositions

As previously discussed, the definition of dispositions is largely based on the perspective of the teacher education program; this point of view ultimately defines whether a pre-service teacher's disposition will be utilized as a screening tool or an opportunity for discussion, reflection and growth. Operating from an incremental perspective, scholars (Oja & Reiman, 2007; Schussler, 2006; Villegas, 2007) believe that schools of education have the ability to attend to—and possibly alter—pre-service teachers' dispositions. In order to achieve this aim, teacher education programs must consider whether they scaffold reflective exercise for teachers and provide spaces for these prospective educators to deliberately reflect on their dispositions. Jobling & Moni, 2004; Schussler, 2006).

It is critically important for pre-service teachers to study their respective backgrounds, and unearth their unexamined beliefs about teaching, learning and students. The majority of teachers are White, upper-middle-class females who have not been asked to consider their dispositions regarding race, class and disability (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Talbert-Johnson, 2006; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Even if these teachers have interactions with learners from diverse backgrounds, exposure without the space to process these encounters can reinforce negative stereotypes regarding student ability, thus doing more harm than good (Major & Brock, 2003; Wiggins et al., 2007). From a student's perspective, a teacher's negative disposition can negatively affect his or her self-concept and general attitude toward schooling (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

From the teacher's perspective, unexamined dispositions can lead to low expectations regarding students' ability to succeed, ineffective remediation practices, and likelihood to blame the students' home environments for his or her behavioral problems and academic aptitude (Dee & Henkin, 2002). Another example of the ramifications of unexamined beliefs regarding diverse learners is disproportionality, which is the overrepresentation of students of color in special education (Artiles, 2008; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Harry, Klinger, & Cramer, 2007; Townsend, 2002). In these cases, teachers who are not aware of their dispositions are likely to mistake a lack of English-language proficiency for deficits in cognitive ability and unnecessarily refer a child for special education services.

Finally, teacher dispositions can affect issues of retention. Researchers (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Hanushek et al., 2004; Ingersoll, 2003) find that teachers working in schools primarily comprised of minority and/or low-income students have higher attrition rates than peers teaching in

schools serving wealthier, White students. In fact, Greenlee and Brown's quantitative analysis of teacher retention in high need schools (2009) directly links a teacher's disposition toward minority students to their ability to find success in this school environment and remain stay there.

Schools of education must provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to attend to their dispositions (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Nieto, 2000; Schussler, 2006; Villegas, 2007). If these prospective teachers are not provided with an opportunity to engage with their dispositions and address their preconceptions, they are less likely to do so after they leave their teacher education programs (Villegas, 2007). As previously stated, this is exceedingly problematic if their beliefs are deficit-oriented.

Since pre-service teachers will one day lead their own classrooms, researchers (Breese & Nawrocki-Chabin, 2007; Schussler, 2006; Villegas, 2007) stress the need for these educators to consider how they will react to complex situations when the structures and related expectations of the teacher education program are removed. Teachers must be cognizant of their reactions to students, and students' reactions to them, while in practice; thus, they must be able to recognize their dispositions and know how to reflect on these ways of thinking. By developing this awareness, teachers are able to act thoughtfully and purposefully when encountering scenarios that challenge their understanding of teaching and learning (Schussler, 2006).

A number of empirical studies validate this claim, as they specifically investigate how teacher education programs utilize various methodologies to address teacher dispositions (Kidd et. al, 2008; Reiman & Peace, 2002; Schussler et. al, 2008; Sherin & Han, 2004; Van Es & Sherin, 2002). These studies are discussed in more detail in the subsequent section. The data show that when attending to teacher dispositions, much of the work involves dissecting the foundation of teachers' beliefs about teaching, learning and students. In order to do so, teacher educators must be able to engage prospective teachers in conversations related to their respective dispositions.

In order to better understand how schools of education might specifically address the experiences of pre-service teachers as related to their dispositional awareness, the following sub-section will explore various methodologies employed by teacher education programs and provide empirical support for these practices. More specifically, this sub-section discusses the use of narratives, case studies, surveys and use of video materials as types of methodologies for studying teacher dispositions.

***How Schools of Education Can Attend to Dispositions:
Methodologies***

Unlike methods, which focus on the technical aspects of research, methodologies offer teachers the ability to “articulate and examine the theories embedded in [one’s] teaching practice...which need to go hand in hand with changes in [one’s] understanding of what it means to teach” (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995, p. 21). Essentially, the philosophical nature of a methodology, versus the scientific aspect of a method, connects practice to theory. Methodology is especially important when considering the dispositions construct, as pre-service teachers must be made aware of their personal theories of teaching and learning in order to make them explicit and, in some cases, allow them to reconstruct their thinking (Villegas, 2007). It is important to note that while methodologies can be utilized by teacher education programs that maintain an incremental view of dispositions, they can also be used by schools of education that operate from the entity perspective. The critical difference is how teacher educators use the information garnered by the methodology. As such, the following methodologies could apply to either orientation.

One such example of a methodology is the use of narratives to explore one’s disposition. Narratives include life histories, autobiographical sketches, or identification of personal theories or values and assumptions (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Schussler, 2006; Villegas, 2007). Researchers believe that these narratives hold the most power when they are composed upon entry into a school of education. As Bullough and Gitlin (1995) explain, one writes about the past in order to shape the future. For pre-service teachers, “what they teach will be filtered through and made more or less meaningful based upon a set of biographically assumptions or preunderstandings” (p. 40). Since narratives are constructed from particular social, political and economic contexts, they allow prospective teachers to recognize how their conceptions of teaching and learning guide their actions in the classroom. Theoretically, narratives offer teachers a starting point for reflection; by making tacit knowledge explicit, a pre-service teacher has an understanding of how her beliefs about education intersect with her actions in the classroom (Richardson, 1990).

Kidd et al. (2008) used a qualitative analysis of narratives as a means of exploring 19 pre-service teachers’ dispositions at the end of their tenure in a two-year Master’s program. The 10 plus page narratives asked the prospective teachers to detail the principles that guide their teaching, both upon graduation and into the future. The researchers analyzed these narrative data in order to determine the pre-service

teachers' views of culturally diverse classrooms as well as the elements of the teacher education program that the pre-service teachers found most influential. Data reveal that dispositional shifts were largely affected by critical reflection.

While narratives do hold promise when attending to teacher dispositions, they are criticized for linking "observable actions to articulated belief statements without the underlying dispositions being clearly named...and this approach either erases any meaningful distinction between dispositions and behaviors or simply returns to content-laden belief statements" (Burant et al., 2007, p. 403). Rather than providing a space for pre-service teachers to question and alter their initial dispositions, Burant et al. (2007) believe that initial understandings can be further reinforced. Furthermore, narratives hold more promise when coupled with classroom observations and follow-up interviews. Along these lines, two limitations of Kidd et al.'s study include reliance on pre-service teachers' self-reporting and the fact that narratives were utilized at the end of the program versus the beginning. Ultimately, while Burant et al. note that the amount of time faculty must spend on such a process is considerable, they do believe that the composition of narratives is a worthwhile endeavor.

Another methodological means of studying one's disposition is through the use of case studies. While instructors draw on educational case studies that explore a variety of situations involving teaching and learning, those involving teacher-student interactions are most typically utilized. Educational case studies "provide opportunities for candidates to observe and unpack actual events, including teachers' instructional decisions and the consequences of those decisions" (Schussler et al., 2008, p. 108). Case studies offer a complex view of an event without dictating a correct response; it is up to the pre-service teacher to interpret and analyze the situation. Additionally, case studies can raise a number of valuable questions related to teaching, learning, and students, such as: *What would she have done in that particular case? What assumptions does the sample educator have about teaching and learning, and does the pre-service teacher agree or disagree with the sample teacher's response? Why or why not?* (Wasicsko, 2007). When a pre-service teacher analyzes the case, she is inherently drawing on her disposition, as this is the lens that she employs in order to examine the given case (ibid).

Schussler et al.'s (2008) qualitative study analyzed the use of case studies on pre-service teachers' dispositions ($n = 30$). Participants were all White, and mainly female ($n = 23$) versus male ($n = 7$). The researchers compared participant pre-and post-course responses to a sample student teaching case. They utilized a web-based discussion board where

students offered case-related responses, as well as audio recordings from class discussions related to the case. Based on their analysis of the data, Schussler et al. found that when pre-service teachers who encountered students of different ethnic or racial backgrounds, they lacked the ability to question their assumptions in action. As a result, they appeared to impose their values and situated perspective, especially when analyzing the case. The authors believe that this finding speaks to the idea that case study used in isolation (i.e., in one course) is ineffective; they believe that in order to better facilitate dispositional development, cases must be paired with other assignments and activities across a program. This finding is of particular importance in relation to dispositions, as it also confirms assertions (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Talbert-Johnson, 2006; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007) that it is critical for pre-service teachers to engage with their dispositions as related to diversity.

Although case studies provide ample opportunity for pre-service teachers to explore their dispositions, it is important that instructors choosing said cases examine the timeliness of their selection, as changes in legislation or verbiage can mitigate the methodological effectiveness of the case. Moreover, when using case studies to attend to teacher dispositions, it is critical that teacher educators provide spaces for pre-service teachers to engage with the case on multiple levels, as the purpose of a methodology is to articulate the connections between theory and practice. As noted in analysis of Schussler et al.'s (2008) study, if the case is read and interpreted in isolation, teacher educators lose the opportunity to challenge teachers' assumptions about teaching, learning and students.

In addition to narratives and case studies, surveys are also utilized as methodology to attend to dispositions. According to Creswell (2009), "a survey provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (p. 145). Survey examples include the Defining Issues Tests (DIT & DIT-2) and the Professional Dispositions Rating Form (Beverly et al., 2006; Johnson & Reiman, 2007). Both iterations of the DIT are projective multiple choice tests that present prospective teachers with five vignettes. Each vignette deals with a moral dilemma and the teachers are asked, and subsequently rated on, how they would solve these hypothetical issues. While the DIT uses sample scenarios, the Professional Dispositions Rating Form measures pre-service teacher dispositions based on a behavior checklist.

Reiman and Peace (2002) integrated surveys into their quasi-experimental study of 13 teachers. The purpose of the study was to determine whether peer coaching had a statistically significant effect on participants' dispositions. Eight of the participants were selected

for the experimental group. As such, they participated in seven months of peer coaching and collaborative inquiry. The comparison group was comprised of the remaining five participants; their intervention was limited to seven months of involvement in monthly school leader meetings. The researchers utilized the DIT and measured participants' pre- and post-intervention responses. They found that there was a statistically significant difference in moral reasoning between the experimental and comparison groups, as the experimental group exhibited gains in moral thinking. In addition to supporting the use of surveys in relation to dispositional analysis, findings from this study also support the incremental view of dispositions, as participant dispositions changed over time.

Although the purpose of surveys is to reduce subjectivity when measuring professional dispositions, when assessing dispositions through this medium, critics feel that they "foist...ideological beliefs that the students disagree with" but are ultimately forced to adhere to" (Damon, 2007, p. 366). As previously stated, one of the main issues is how this tool is utilized by schools of education. While some institutions use surveys to screen candidates (Wasicsko, 2007), others use them to facilitate conversations around teacher dispositions (Beverly et al., 2006; Johnson & Reiman, 2007). In order to employ surveys as a methodological versus a pedagogical tool, pre-service teachers must be allowed to reflect on their initial survey responses and consider whether their choices reflect their respective theories of teaching and learning. For example, the DIT offers myriad opportunity for later discussion; as with case studies, if a survey is used and then set aside, it cannot be utilized as a dispositional tool for pre-service teachers. Whether participants in Reiman and Peace's (2002) study had the opportunity to reflect on their change in disposition is unclear; thus, it is possible that the DIT was not utilized at its optimal level.

Video materials are also used to initiate discussion related to teacher dispositions. Videotaped segments of classroom teaching can facilitate discussion around an example of teaching that all students can jointly view and analyze or offer a pre-service teacher the opportunity to view her own lesson (Grossman, 2005). At the beginning of their tenure at Alverno College, pre-service teachers are asked to reflect on the dispositions of example teachers prior to conducting their own self-analysis; they use these observations to develop dispositional awareness and connect the behavior that they observe to the disposition it is intended to represent (*ibid*). Thus, videos provide pre-service teachers with the ability to examine, and subsequently reflect on, the practice of teaching.

Researchers (Breese & Nawrocki-Chabin, 2007; Grossman, 2005; Schussler, 2006; Sherin & Han, 2004; Van Es & Sherin, 2002) posit that

the benefit of video technology as a means of attending to dispositions is that teachers can visually assess whether their beliefs and actions correlate while in the classroom. After viewing their practice, some pre-service teachers noted the dissonance between their self-perceived disposition and their observable action (Breese & Nawrocki-Chabin, 2007). Ultimately, this forces pre-service teachers to engage in reflection on- and in-action, as they must critically examine these points of dissonance (Schon, 1983).

Miriam Sherin's research on video as a methodological tool provides additional empirical support for attending to dispositions through this medium. Sherin and Han's (2004) qualitative investigation of teacher learning ($n = 4$) via video clubs found that the practice of watching one's teaching allowed educators to focus on different, and sometimes overlooked, aspects of practice. More specifically, videos provided teachers with a lens to understand and analyze student thinking in a complex way. Similarly, a qualitative study by Van Es and Sherin (2002) examined the ways that the Video Analysis Support Tool (VAST), a software self-designed by the researchers, allowed teachers seeking alternative certification ($n = 12$) to notice and interpret their classroom interactions. Six teachers participated in the experimental group, which involved use of VAST, and the remaining comparison group ($n = 6$) had no exposure to VAST. Additional data included 2 teaching analyses composed by participants. Van Es and Sherin found that VAST provided teachers with a sophisticated means of analyzing and reflecting on their teaching, whereas participants who did not utilize VAST tended to focus on chronological descriptions of classroom events. From a dispositional standpoint, the ability to critically reflect on and evaluate their practice is essential, especially as related to teachers' dispositions toward teaching, learning and students.

Although there are many benefits to the use of video as a methodology, there are certain limitations that must be considered. When viewing a sample lesson for the first time, prospective teachers must determine the disposition without input from the sample teacher (Damon, 2007). Even if this process is explicitly scaffolded by a teacher educator, teacher educators must be wary of assumptions about race, class, and culture when ascribing dispositions to example teachers (Burant et al., 2007; Delpit, 1995; Noddings, 1984; Villegas, 2007). Thus, schools of education must take these considerations into account when they employ video technology as a methodology.

Ethic of Caring: A Novel Way to Think About Dispositions

A novel dispositions-based methodology relates to the nature of the environment where the pre-service teachers are instructed. A cornerstone

of the dispositions construct is the creation of a space where prospective educators feel comfortable sharing their beliefs about teaching, learning and students. Additionally, these spaces should provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to process what they encounter during the preparation period (Schussler, 2006; Villegas, 2007). This begs the question: What classroom conditions must be created so that pre-service teachers are able to deconstruct their beliefs and assumptions?

In response to this query, research (Bialka, 2012) shows that environments that foster an “ethic of caring” enable pre-service teachers’ dispositional development. As Noddings (1988) explains, an ethic of caring is premised on a moral orientation to teaching. In essence, educators who work within an ethic of caring value student voice and recognize the potential for the mutual growth of the student and the teacher. When defining what it means to “care,” the Thayer-Bacon and Bacon (1996) offer:

By caring, we mean being receptive to what another has to say, and open to possibly hearing the other’s voice more completely and fairly. Caring about another person...requires respecting the other as a separate, autonomous person, worthy of caring. It is an attitude that gives value to another by denoting that the other is worth attending to in a serious or close manner. (p 257)

Like Noddings, the authors purport that caring is based on mutual trust, acceptance, and recognition of the voice of the other. Thayer-Bacon and Bacon also acknowledge that the issue of caring is personally and politically sensitive; for these reasons, they note that many researchers avoid discussion of this topic. However, when examining the larger research base on the ethics of care, studies (Eyler, Giles Jr., & Braxton, 1997, Fall; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Straits, 2007) show how that positive faculty-student interactions have a statistically significant positive effect on student motivation and learning.

In the higher education classroom, an ethic of caring can be attended to in numerous ways. First, course instructors can explicitly state during the first class session that students’ prior and current experiences are valued. Instructors can then integrate students’ input and insight in order to enrich class discussions. Providing a place for students to act as knowledge-holders rather than knowledge-seekers imbues students with a sense of agency. This can be achieved through the course of general classroom conversation or through a structured activity, such as a “KWL.” This three-column graphic organizer asks what an individual “Knows,” “Wants to know,” and what he or she has “Learned” as related to a lesson or unit. It is often utilized as a means of gauging students’ prior knowl-

edge and interest in the content that they will encounter (Stephens & Brown, 2000). Empirical data (Author, 2012) suggest that KWLs have a positive effect on pre-service teachers' dispositional development.

The purpose behind the KWL is twofold. As it relates to an ethic of caring, instructors in higher education can have students complete a KWL that asks them what they "Know" and "Want to know" as related to the course. For example, in a survey of special education course, an instructor could ask what pre-service teachers "Know" and "Want to know" about special education. This offers insight into students' understanding of and questions related to course content uses student interest to guide course instruction and discussion. In addition to reinforcing an ethic of caring, when KWLs are used as a means of uncovering prospective teachers' dispositions regarding teaching, learning and students, they can document their initial beliefs and provide the opportunity for subsequent, constructive reflection. It also provides the pre-service teachers with a pedagogical strategy that they can employ in their own classrooms; classroom teachers can use KWLs in order to activate students' prior knowledge and gauge what they want to know as related to the lesson or unit. Finally, university instructors and classroom teachers can use the "What I Learned" section of the KWL to assess student understanding.

Finally, both university instructors and classroom teachers can get to know their students as individuals, as positive student-teacher interactions are one of the hallmarks of caring instruction (Straits, 2007). This stance can occur in subtle ways, such as greeting each student when they enter the classroom, as well as in more overt ways, such as following up on a comment or question that a student posed in a previous class session. University instructors can model these means of interactions for pre-service teachers and then explain the meta-lesson behind these purposeful exchanges. This is most critical for fostering an ethic of caring, as students must feel comfortable sharing themselves, and developing a trusting relationship (Noddings, 1988).

As previously stated, NCATE (2008), an organization responsible for accrediting teacher education programs, outlines the professional dispositions required of teacher candidates. According to NCATE Standard 1: Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions, a target goal is for candidates to "demonstrate classroom behaviors that create caring and supportive learning environments" (p. 20). In order to effectively attend to this goal, it is useful for teacher educators to create a classroom environment that pre-service teachers can emulate. While each of these caring-based methodologies work in concert to create a space for prospective educators to engage with their dispositions, they also serve a pedagogical purpose, as they offer concrete strategies

for pre-service teachers to employ in their own classrooms (Bialka, 2012).

Conclusion

Dispositions are the union of one's beliefs and actions, which are inherently adaptable and bolstered through deliberate reflection. This definition assumes an incremental perspective on dispositions, which maintains that they can change over time. While the contrasting entity perspective on dispositions and associated research adds to the conversation related to dispositions in teacher education, it is limited in scope. By failing to address the fact that teacher beliefs can change, teacher education programs that utilize this orientation are screening out potentially effective teacher candidates (Burant et al., 2007).

Those who utilize an incremental lens recognize that initial pre-service teacher dispositions may be the result of a lack of knowledge or related experience; as such, programs operating from this perspective seek to engage prospective educators in conversations about the origins of their beliefs (Pugach, 2005). In order to function effectively, reflective, incrementally-oriented teacher education programs must be transparent when attending to teacher dispositions and provide adequate space for pre-service educators to engage with their conceptions of teaching, learning and students as they relate to their actions in the classroom (Schussler, 2006; Sockett, 2009; Villegas, 2007; Woolfson & Brady, 2009).

Along these lines, schools of education may employ any number of methodologies in order to attend to pre-service teachers' dispositions; narratives, case studies, surveys, video technology and an ethic of caring in the classroom all offer different entrées into addressing pre-service teacher dispositions. While these methodologies allow a prospective teacher to engage with her beliefs about teaching, learning and students as related to her actions in the classroom, it is important to consider the limitations of each approach; current research shows that each methodology functions more effectively in when used in tandem with another (Schussler et al., 2008). Given the paucity of research surrounding several of the aforementioned methodologies, future research can shed additional empirical light on the validity of these measures. In sum, it is necessary for schools of education to provide spaces for prospective educators to attend to their dispositions before entering the field. If pre-service teachers are not given the opportunity to question the decisions they make, and understand the principles underlying their choices, it is unlikely that they will do so once they are in practice.

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