Book Review
Teaching as a Moral Practice:
Defining, Developing, and Assessing
Professional Dispositions in Teacher Education
Peter C. Murrell, Jr., Mary E. Diez, Sharon Feiman-Nemser,
& Deborah J. Schussler (Editors)

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The field of education has been accused of lacking a morally grounded sense of the meaning of teaching (Fenstermacher, 1999) because for many years it has focused on testing and accountability (Chieppo & Gass 2009; Harper, 2008). The education industry does not decry the need for accountability; however, it frowns at the notion that external bodies should dictate its standards of operation and thereby infringe on its autonomy (Hurst & Reding, 2008). Given the dynamic nature of education, the external articulation of a singular fundamental purpose of teaching infringes on the *in-situ* multidimensionality and often contradictory perspectives that teachers must work with, which make for ongoing questioning, reflecting, research and consequently new knowledge. The collective efforts of scholars in the field (e.g., Apple, 2004; Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Neito; 2000; Sleeter 2001; Thompson, 1992) speak to their goal of developing models for measuring competence and effectiveness as well as restructuring schools, improving classroom practices, and developing curricula that optimize student academic performance within the realities of classrooms.

In their edited volume *Teaching as a Moral Practice: Defining, Developing, and Assessing Professional Dispositions in Teacher Education*, Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, and Schussler (2010) call readers'

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attention to the centrality of dispositions in teacher preparedness by describing the embodied personal experiences of teachers and the challenges faced by colleges and universities in their efforts to conceptualize, develop, and assess dispositions in teacher education programs. This book is divided into nine chapters, using a narrative approach, illustrated by a series of cases. The introduction, which presents an overview of the collection and establishes clear conceptual definitions of dispositions within the context of the book, begins with a brief history and different conceptions of dispositions. The editors of this volume, in their introduction, describe how seven different teacher education programs addressed the challenges in confronting disposition in teacher education. The next eight chapters each explores a different disposition accompanied by a brief background of what triggered the case presented, who the participants were, the processes and resulting products. The intent is to determine how teachers' dispositions inform their classroom and pedagogical practices.

The learning and growing self that is the focus of this collection gives me the confidence to call for this book's inclusion as one of the foundation texts in all teacher education programs for the benefit of both teacher educators and preservice teachers. Murrell, et al (2010) have taken on the topic of "dispositions," which many educators would agree is no easy task due to its complexity and the political and ideological divide that it tends to generate. For example, there is no clear consensus on the meaning, purpose, or use of the term disposition to describe teachers' attitudes towards students and how it informs their classroom practice. Murrell et al. (2010), in their foresight, recognize the need for clarity on this term—what it means, where it comes from, and its role in teacher education—and use this book to invite teacher educators and their students to collaboratively and reflectively participate in new ways to see dispositions and construct meaning from personal experiences. The editors and authors of this book explicate the concept of dispositions and, using a nuanced approach, help readers understand and appreciate the inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of moral, ethical, content knowledge, skills, and teaching/learning environments in developing professional educators. The editors note that, "Candidates come to us [teacher educators] with values and beliefs that constitute a moral filter; whether or not the teacher is aware of them, those values and beliefs function in teacher decision making" (Murrell, et al., 2010, p. 18).

It is safe to say that the concept of dispositions is complicated, multidimensional, and interdisciplinary. Given our democratic orientation in the United States, the main title of the book—*Teaching as a Moral Practice*—has the potential to turn readers away or acknowledge the bravery of the authors in daring to combine the words *moral* and *teach-*

ing in the same phrase in their discourse on teacher education. For these reasons, even though this collection comprises a series of chapters written by a variety of authors—including teachers, teacher educators, and students—this book has achieved not only thematization of the notion of dispositions in teacher education, but more importantly, it helps the readers to add depth and breadth to their overall understanding of disposition and dispositional practices of teachers. The relationship between teachers' dispositions and their classrooms and pedagogical practices continues to be a major subject for both debate and research because a "teacher's moral stance stems from one's profoundly personal beliefs … and what is right and what is wrong" (Murrell, et al., 2010, p. 12). And though research findings support the notion that teachers' beliefs inform classroom practices, which in turn effect student academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Neito, 2000; Pajares, 1992; Sleeter, 2001), teacher education programs continue to gloss over this idea when it comes up in discourses regarding the need to establish core beliefs that ground admissions into teacher education programs (Harper, 2008; Harrison, 2006; Murrell et al., 2010).

The topics covered in the book can be grouped into three broad thematic foci. Chapters One, Two, and Three: *Dispositions in teacher education—Starting points for consideration* (Diez & Murrell, 2010), *Humanization in education* (Salazar, Lowenstein, & Brill, 2010), and *Disconnection as a path to discovery* (Johnson, Evers, & Vare, 2010) unpack some developmental challenges that triggered the need for the institutions represented in those chapters to address how work environments threaten teachers' professional and moral stance. These chapters outline the major tensions in teacher education policy and practice and emphasize how teacher-educators, those of us involved in the formal preparation of teachers, can begin to turn the trend from *status quo* to redesigning teacher education programs that acknowledge the social and political contexts in which teaching, learning, and schooling have been located historically (Cochran-Smith, 2008). The collection acknowledges critics' apprehension and simultaneously recognizes the role of social, situational or cultural contexts as compasses through which teachers' personal and ethical stances are revealed. The personal vignettes used to contextualize the experiences, multiple pathways to teacher licensure in addition to the assessment tools used for self-reflection in this collection humanizes dispositions and highlights opportunities for the use of performance assessment to nurture the growth of teacher candidates.

This effort of unpacking dispositions reinforces the urgency for teacher educators to move beyond existing dominant standards and intentionally build on the strengths of teacher candidates to help them develop

skills and identify appropriate dispositions and knowledge needed to serve the academic and sociocultural needs of the current diverse student populations. Discrepancies between different licensure programs' espoused values and actual field performance of teachers is the theme of Chapters Four, Five, and Six. These chapters address the need for revision of the structure, curricula, and pedagogy of teacher preparation programs. *Moving from reaction to reflection* (Laine, Bauer, Johnson, Kroger, Troup, & Meyer, 2010), *Learning from getting it wrong* (Fallona & Canniff. 2010), and *Putting dispositions in the driver's seat* (Hollon, Kolis, McIntyre, Stephens, & Bttalio, 2010), remind me of a research paper entitled "What we didn't learn because of who would not talk to us" (Groger, Mayberry, & Straker, 1999). These pieces describe experiences that became entry points into new learning and new knowledge as a result of critical reflection on challenges encountered in the pursuit of ways to foster equity in teacher education programs.

Together, these chapters discuss the significance of establishing core moral dispositions that align with courses and assessment tools that prepare teachers for challenges in classrooms. These chapters support the need for a clear definition of dispositions and critical reflection on moral stance as it relates to teacher education, followed by how the stance is enacted. Enacting a common dispositionally-focused mission in teacher education would increase clarity in understanding of dispositions that are grounded in the philosophical, moral, and ethical beliefs of teacher education programs.

The final section, chapters Seven and Eight, *Finding a tipping point* (Fischetti, Imig, Ndoye, & Smith, 2010), and *Making the path by walking* (Katsarou, 2010), describe the challenges that incorporating new federal and state mandates, ranging from the No Child Left Behind Act to the current president's program, Race to the Top, pose for educational institutions (Soland & Kuhn, 2010). Going through the NCATE accreditation process and working with in-service teachers became catalysts for developing assessment tools. In this case the tool, *Development of Ethical and Caring Actions in Urban Teaching* (Katsarou 2010), ensures that preservice teachers are adequately prepared and equipped to engage in critical self-reflection about their own skills, knowledge, and dispositions in urban teaching contexts. The tool serves as a framework for ongoing dialogue between mentor and mentee and facilitates monitoring as well as nurturing the mentee's knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In the spirit of practicing what we teach, I personally found Section II of the tool (Critical Self-Reflection) an excellent starting point for understanding and assessing dispositions. This is significant because it addresses the philosophical grounding for examining the concept of teacher dispositions

and provides thoughtful examples of emerging perspectives on teacher dispositions. This final section of the book presents guiding and essential questions for both teacher candidates and cooperating teachers, encouraging both sides to reflect and self-asses and show how conceptualizing dispositions is as much a process as it is a final product.

The power of this book lies in its clarity of presentation, its empirical base and the real life experiences represented in the vignettes. It provides an almost "how-to" approach in its analysis of the significance of conceptualizing, developing and accessing preservice and in-service teachers' dispositions as part of their training. This approach not only demystifies the perplexity surrounding the notion of dispositions but reveals an entry point for teachers to reflect, self-assess and develop personal frameworks for understanding and using dispositions as major components in the professional development of "caring, competent, capable and ethically centered teachers" (Murrell et al 2010, p. xi).

The diversity of the authors demonstrates the importance for a shared set of moral dispositions that must be part of teachers' professional identities. This shared emphasis within a teacher preparation program is mandatory across different learning platforms, conceptual frameworks, and mission statements in order to prepare effective teachers and leaders for diverse learners—indeed, for all learners.

The editors do not leave their readers with the illusion that accomplishing this task is a linear or easy process. By explaining the pathways that each university followed, the editors provide readers with not only broader perspectives on different dispositions; they challenge readers to self-reflect on their own personal moral, ethical, and leadership dispositions as professional educators. The book accomplishes its stated goal of using the seven cases presented "to point a new direction that advances the understanding of dispositions in teaching and teacher preparation" (Murrell et al 2010, p. xii) and takes readers from inquiry into practice. Though all the universities may have presented their cases in an almost formulaic manner, a closer look at the details of each case reveals the uniqueness of their cases and helps readers understand why each institution focused on the disposition that they chose. I cannot claim to have done justice to this collection; I therefore urge educators to not only read the book but to consider it a must-read for their preservice teachers and/or teacher candidates.

Full Reference for Reviewed Book

Peter C. Murrell, Jr., Mary E. Diez, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, & Deborah L. Schussler (Editors). (2010). *Teaching as a moral practice: Defining, developing, and*

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