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Making sense of dispositions in teacher education: Arriving at democratic aims and experiences

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Introduction

Dispositional aims are found in many teacher education programs and they embrace numerous laudable ideals. These ideals often stand for a wide variety of goals and tend to be abstract in nature, which may make them vulnerable to attacks. For example, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (Shibley, 2005) criticized teacher education programs for liberal bias and imposing a politicized litmus test for pre-service teachers. This was largely due to the amorphous dispositional goals containing social justice language and because many dispositional goals, as high inference constructs, are largely left to the discretion of teacher educators. If teacher educators are predominantly liberal, as Shibley suggests, then dispositions can act as a vehicle to advance political and ideological agendas. George Will's *Newsweek* piece (2006, January 16) also criticized an umbrella of dispositional statements in teacher education programs. Specifically, he found problematic any aim of promoting "social justice," or preparing pre-service teachers to be change agents who "recognize individual and institutionalized racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism," "break silences," and "develop anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-sexist community [sic] and alliances" (p. 98). In sum, Will called for teacher education programs to focus on content knowledge as the programmatic anchor rather than on developing teachers who are capable of transforming societal inequities or promoting components of a particular political ideology. Given the growing surge in criticism over the perceived political overtones, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) decided to drop social justice language from accreditation standards (Wasley, 2006, June 6).

Yet, through their website, NCATE asserted that critics incorrectly "alleged that NCATE has a 'social justice' requirement," as social justice does not appear in their standards. Rather, NCATE stated, references to social justice are only in the glossary as a definitional reference to dispositions. NCATE also clarified their requirements for teacher education schools and departments, which are to provide assessment data of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, including dispositions that "value fairness and learning by all students," and encourage these institutions to "develop additional dispositions that fit their mission" (NCATE, 2006a). NCATE gives some typical examples of dispositions independent of mission, including preparing caring teachers, life-long learners, collaborative partners, and reflective practitioners, all of which are assessable in school settings. But because dispositions, which often contain strands of social justice and morally-oriented aims and purposes, are largely up to the discretion of institutions, the potential for bias and indoctrination is quite real. NCATE's flexibility on this score endows institutions with *dispositional authority*, as it were, but this opens the door to distorted or politicized visions of dispositions.

Given the all-important charge of developing dispositions and the general lack of either guidance or imposition from NCATE, we first explore what different teacher education programs mean when they speak of dispositions. By establishing some concrete categories, we can engage in a dialogue on dispositions more intelligently. We then make the case for developing *certain kinds* of dispositions in teacher education, and how this is an obligatory undertaking for every program, regardless of institutional mission, given their larger mandate of preparing teachers not only to create democratic modes of living (Dewey, 1916) within their classrooms, but also to teach within a pluralistic and multicultural society. Finally, to that end, we offer a specific approach within a department of teacher education, which provides programmatic examples of how these dispositional purposes might be attained in non-politicized ways that complicate, rather than indoctrinate, through the method of deliberation.

Dispositions in Teacher Education Programs

Educational discourse abounds with references to the omnipresent trinity of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. But what do we mean by dispositions? Both K-12 and teacher education programs alike are sometimes confused by this slippery aim. Sometimes, dispositions are referenced in association with skills. For example, critical thinking skills include the ability to justify beliefs through analysis, evaluation, and interpretation in reasonable,

effective, careful, and serious ways, but these skills are powerless if certain dispositions are not in place. Attending to ideas while employing these skills necessarily requires that pre-service teachers have open-minded and non-prejudicial dispositions. Thinking skills ultimately depend upon dispositional components to ensure knowledge transfer across domains and the *willingness* to apply those skills (Wright, 2002). Halpern (1998) cited five dispositions that drive critical thinking: engaging and persisting in complex tasks, suppression of impulse, open-mindedness and flexibility, willingness to abandon nonproductive strategies, and awareness of the realities that require change so that thought can translate into action (p. 452). These dispositions are quite similar to those Dewey (1933) claimed as part and parcel of the character of intelligent thought: open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, readiness, and responsibility. Dewey suggested that there should not be a separation between principles of logic and moral qualities. Rather, we need to “weave them into unity” (p. 34). Dispositions are also required for higher-order thinking and problem solving, including being inquisitive, organized, analytical, confident, judicious, tolerant, and intellectually honest (Facione, 1990, in Kakai, 2000). We might also think of dispositional pseudonyms, such as orientations, habits of mind, and inclinations (Claxton & Carr, 2004).

Dispositions are needed for critical thinking, to be sure, but what of the vast array of dispositions needed for socially and morally informed teaching? When consulting almost any school mission statement or conceptual framework for a teacher education program, one can easily find the usually normative and sometimes moral components that the institution advances. Although laudatory, the problem with these sorts of missions is their vague language concerning dispositional expectations. Therefore, this section attempts to cinch together the sometimes divergent and wide-ranging dispositional purposes which numerous teacher education programs advance. Again, NCATE does not “expect institutions to inculcate candidates with any particular social or political ideology” (NCATE, 2006a), but rather relegates this charge to institutions and their unique missions, which ultimately results in a great deal of variance.

After reviewing dozens of dispositional statements from programs throughout the country, we found that, in the main, teacher education programs aim towards three main dispositional groups: personal virtues, educational values, and societal transformation. Arriving at these three categories was a frustrating endeavor. For example, many colleges and universities list the dispositions they have chosen in haphazard ways that often overlap and are somewhat confusing. Others tend to list saccharine and axiomatic platitudes that are too abstract to have any meaning within instruction and assessment. Still others provide a checklist, seemingly designed for student teaching coordinators’ quick assessment of a pre-service teacher’s civic and social being. Yet when synthesized into these three categories, dispositions seem a bit more palpable for conscious integration into teacher education curricula. This synthesis provides an analytical lens for investigating the available spaces where ideological and political ends sometimes reside.

Personal Virtues

The first dispositional category includes all of the virtuous commitments, behaviors, and orientations that teacher education programs either hope to instill or maintain. Preparing future teachers to be caring, honest, respectful, sensitive, prudent, and having a sense of the common good encapsulates timeless virtues that are rarely contested. For example, Miami University’s Department of Teacher Education (Miami University, n.d.) expects professional conduct toward colleagues, whereby pre-service teachers do not “willfully make false statements about a colleague or the school system.” Purdue University’s (2004) College of Education expects pre-service teachers to avoid being “frequently late or absent” and failing to “complete assignments, duties, or tasks on time.” This category includes the expectations held by teacher education programs which desire admitting and producing teacher candidates who have the attributes of a good, upstanding, thoughtful, and moral person. Because these dispositions are often in keeping with the expectations of the university or college, as well as those of society, they are largely non-controversial and uncomplicated. They are, in many respects, habits, manners, and traits that are agreed upon as necessary conditions for an effective teacher, and they contain little or no political or ideological charge.

Educational Values

Diversity and variation hold prominent positions in most teacher education dispositional statements as axiomatic educational values. Many institutions hope to cultivate a general respect for diverse student abilities and beliefs, as

well as the diverse religious, cultural, and communal practices and values among students, parents, and community members. Other dispositional aims related to diversity and variation include sensitivity for difference, ability to work with diverse stakeholders, and an appreciation of viewpoints unlike their own. For example, the University of Akron (n.d.) expects appreciation of “individual variation” and the “diverse talents of all learners,” while fostering “culturally sensitive communication.” Hiram College’s (2006) dispositional statement stresses respect of “individual differences” and the development of “appropriate learning opportunities for diverse students.”

Some teacher education programs contain a checklist for their students, which seems to serve as a mechanism for documenting pedagogical failures rather than fulfilling the ideals found in mission statements. We grouped some of the checklist items with other institutional affirmations of intuitive fundamental beliefs as educational values. Educational values include pre-service teachers finding *value* in equal access to education, the belief that all students can learn, reflection, critical thinking, a dedication to learning, collaboration with colleagues, life-long learning, professional growth, and an expansive series of democratic values. For example, Appalachian State University (2006) expects pre-service teachers to “reflect on and actively use feedback from mentors, evaluators, and instructors” and “engage in reflective self-analysis about their own teaching performance.” The University of Toledo (2006) stresses pre-service teacher commitments, including “all children can learn at high levels,” supporting “continuous learning,” and engaging in “professional discourse about subject matter knowledge and children’s learning of the discipline.”

Societal Transformation

Many teacher education programs also consistently reference dispositions that enable societal transformation, and these often tend toward politically normative assumptions. Here we include goals of justice, social justice, creating change agents, creating equity, and any implied responsibility for disrupting structures of inequity or marginalization. For example, George Mason University’s Graduate School of Education (2005) expects that students will leave the program with commitments to democratic values and social justice, including “understanding systemic issues that prevent full participation,” “an awareness of practices that sustain unequal treatment or unequal voice,” and becoming an “advocate for practices that promote equity and access.” The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2006) also promotes equity, which they describe as the “state, quality, or ideal of social justice and fairness.” In addition, UNC-Chapel Hill states that decisions “grounded in equity must establish that a wide range of learners have access to high quality education,” which speaks to an active involvement of pre-service teachers engaged in undermining structures of inequality.

Although much of what is contained within these three categories appears to be non-political, the particular treatment of the dispositions in teacher education programs is where either balance or mischief can occur.

Dispositions and Democratic Aims

Some of the dispositions contained within the three categories of personal virtues, educational values, and societal transformation are statements about ends, while others concern means. For example, expecting that pre-service teachers engage in reflective analysis cannot be construed as political or ideological. Rather, it is a means-oriented disposition that a particular school of education wishes to privilege. Conversely, recognizing institutionalized racism is an ends-oriented presupposition that is, in some ways, a politically charged disposition. It implies inequity and a need for change in advance of evidence collection or reflection. Given this cleavage, we propose to make the case for procedural, deontological, and means-based dispositions that do not purport or assume an end goal *a priori*. Therefore, dispositions we defend in this article are not of the prescriptive, declarative, virtue-centered, or character-focused kinds that often come to mind. Rather, we contend that most of the aforementioned dispositions that are worthy of inclusion in teacher education programs should have their roots within intelligence (Dewey, 1910/1960; Durkheim, 1925/1961).

Because all education which develops the “power to share effectively in social life is moral” (Dewey, 1916, p. 360), there is a philosophical need to address morality, as well as a need to respond to public demands that schools not abandon the moral development of its future citizenry (Pritchard, 1996). As students negotiate public and private beliefs, as well as traditional and modern beliefs, they engage in a diverse set of epistemological structures

resulting in a set of tentative and evolving moral commitments, both accommodating to private moralities and situated within a nation's civic ideals (Bull, 2006). Inherited and established, 'settled beliefs' from any ideological orientation are prejudices or prejudgments, as conclusions are accepted without the aid of reflective mental activity (Dewey, 1933). Because students hold these beliefs within teacher education programs, we need to ensure that they become well-versed in the method of inquiry and have ample opportunities for reflection. Dewey's (1960) work on reflective morality harnesses the powers of reflective thought and applies it to customary values and assumptions. Deep and protracted reflection on educational issues can help develop a widening of the imagination with regard to social relations, which is in many respects the essence of morality. Ultimately, a reflective morality involves a struggle of incompatible beliefs within a dynamic environment with the ultimate progression towards a consciousness where the "existence of a persistent self and the part it plays in what is externally done" is realized (Dewey, 1960, p. 15).

The process by which pre-service teachers develop democratic responsibilities that fit within the personal virtues category, such as compassion, self-control, wholeheartedness, open-mindedness, patience, compromise, and tolerance for ambiguity, is less than straightforward. Teaching any of these head-on, through a dispositional frontal assault, would certainly lead to disappointment. For example, studies such as Hartshorne and May's (1928), clearly demonstrate the failings of didactic moral instruction. Other techniques, such as reading morally-oriented stories, also have little efficacy (Narvaez, Bentley, Gleason, & Samuels, 1998). Rather than attempt the development of dispositions through transmission or direct instruction, dispositions can effectively arise as habits when pre-service teachers have consistent exposure to certain kinds of learning experiences in their programs.

Given the challenges associated with meeting the important and significant work of fostering dispositions in teacher education, we are providing a generative path for other teacher educators that includes a program-specific approach to developing means-based, non-political, and democratic dispositions. This approach harnesses the power of deliberation to foster a number of personal virtues, educational values, and transformative attitudes. It is also responsive to both Dewey's sociomoral orientation and the criticisms levied against teacher education programs concerning ideological transmission. As a result, we hope to reclaim the extraordinarily important dispositional spaces of teacher education through the persistent use of deliberation.

Cultivating Dispositions through Deliberation

Fostering democratic and justice-oriented dispositions is a central charge of teacher education and also a cornerstone for any content area allegiant to the mission and purpose of education. Here we explore how program areas can foster dispositions when they are consciously conceived and horizontally articulated within teacher preparation experiences. Independent of discipline, pervasive learning experiences for pre-service teachers could certainly employ one specific approach: the consistent application of deliberative experiences.

Deliberation helps develop habits and attitudes consonant with educational values, democratic virtues, and societal transformation in non-political ways. In the core of a methods class and other program-specific courses, pre-service teachers can engage in deliberative approaches to work with colleagues, develop curriculum, solve problems, govern a classroom, and most prominently, as an instructional strategy. In all of these instances, deliberation can provide a process general enough for most any content area, yet firmly aligned with honoring the spirit of institutional, unit, and program area missions. Also, because deliberation is decidedly means-based, it is responsive to NCATE's dispositional charges in non-inculcative ways. When multiple program areas employ deliberation throughout the curriculum, the resultant effect is a unit-wide conscious attempt to foster dispositions.

Personal virtues. The use of deliberation can also address and develop an array of personal virtues. Frequent use of deliberation within instructional practice draws on and fosters the core virtues of respect, prudence, responsibility, wholeheartedness, skepticism, tolerance for ambiguity, and open-mindedness. Parker (2003b) noted that reciprocity, exchange, imagination, inclusion, listening, talking, challenging, protraction of doubt, reframing, and dialogue are essential components of democratic education that are released within deliberative work. Deliberation also fosters additional virtues, including civility, self-discipline, civic-mindedness, compromise, patience, persistence, compassion, and generosity.

conclusions, and collective judgment (McCutcheon, 1995; Reid, 1999). Pervasive deliberative experiences beget caring attitudes due to the array of perspectives, protracted consideration of alternative viewpoints, and development of empathy through deeper understandings of others. Future teachers learn to be respectful of divergent viewpoints when they realize that all perspectives, including their own, lead to fallible understandings and conceptualizations of the issue. Deliberation also develops sensitivity, given the need for patience and respect within the process, as well as a sense of the common good due to the constant consideration of ends and consequences. Envisioning outcomes for diverse stakeholders while entertaining multiple perspectives complicates and challenges any shortsighted or impulsive thoughts about the common good that an individual might have held prior to a deliberative experience.

Educational Values. Deliberative processes draw on and enhance many of the aforementioned educational value dispositions, including dedication, collaboration, self-analysis, reasoning with colleagues, professional dialogue, discussion, negotiation, consensus, and reflection. Deliberation can also spark an interest in diverse ideas, as those who engage in deliberation learn to seek out discrepant and divergent viewpoints in order to problematize and enhance tentative solutions. The process draws on different worldviews and helps bring about solutions that single individuals could not possibly imagine, neither as being possible, nor as occurring in their minds (Cohen, 1999). As a result, pre-service teachers learn about the value of diverse representation and the inclusion of all stakeholders when formulating curricular or policy decisions. Deliberation is closely aligned with inquiry, problem-based learning, and issues-centered learning, and it is situated within a constructivist epistemology. Deliberation works from and for democratic communities and the extent to which decisions are made by drawing on multiple experiences and interpretations, the greater the promise for forging a solution which is equitable, just, and satisfactory for all.

The confluence of difference in equitable and non-dominant settings, inherent in deliberative processes, brings forth autonomy and tolerance from the multiple realities and perspectives made available to the group. Sifting and winnowing through diverse ideas reinforces the humility of listening, as individuals learn that “no one person has all the information relevant to a decision and nor can any individual predict the various perspectives through which a range of people perceive ethical and political matters” (Enslin, Pendlebury, & Tjiattas, 2001, p. 124). Frequent use of deliberation within instructional practice fosters the core educational attitudes of open-minded listening and cherishing of diverse experiences. Reframing pre-service teacher beliefs and the expansion of social knowledge resulting from reasoning through and across difference takes place during this process and leads to challenging and revaluing different perspectives and ideas (Young, 1993). In short, deliberation leads to an honoring of diversity and variation, not just by ‘tolerating’ difference, but also by employing unique views and experiences to enhance understandings and rethink solutions.

Parker (2003a) suggested that “discussion-based decision making by the participants themselves, within and across their political, ideological, and cultural differences, on what to do about the problems they face in common” (p. 99) is a core feature of deliberation. Having rich dialogue and discussion within deliberation should lead to a phase of negotiation and consensus building, which is also a core educational value. This process involves compromise and deference, as well as the ability to relinquish individual preferences and interests in some situations (Cohen, 1999). Compromise and humility are cultivated when competing normative interests of multiple people are brought to the surface, given the resultant conflict stemming from beliefs, attitudes, and understandings which must be reconciled (McCutcheon, 1995). The desirability of each alternative solution that arises must be “rehearsed” and “felt out” by a diversity of stakeholders. The clear advantage of this technique is revocability and retrievability of ill-formed solutions enacted in thought and group dialogue, which redirects group members to contemplate alternative solutions. Dewey (1922) suggested that:

Deliberation is not to supply an inducement to act by figuring out where the most advantage is to be procured. It is to resolve entanglements in existing activity, restore continuity, recover harmony, utilize loose impulse and redirect habit . . . Deliberation has its beginning in troubled activity and its conclusion in choice of a course of action which straightens it out (p. 139).

Quite similar to Dewey’s (1933; 1960) remarks on reflective thinking, deliberation is in many ways a group form of the method of intelligence. As a result, pragmatic and democratic attitudes are applied to practical problems in a public forum when multiple individuals are working toward unified ends while vocalizing individual reflective

processes and acting out the reflective enterprise externally.

For example, by positioning pre-service teachers to deliberate in small groups and produce statements on butcher paper about what they, collectively, think the aims of their discipline should be, they foster the deliberative collegiality that mirrors future demands within their schools. Having these pre-service teachers sign their statements and share them with the class further enhances a sense of ownership, challenge, and vibrancy of thought. These experiences underscore the desirability of educational values, including reflection, critical thinking, a need to continue learning, finding ways to collaborate with colleagues, and intellectual growth.

Societal transformation. Societal transformation is the trickiest of the three categories, primarily because an underlying politically normative teleology is anathema to deliberation. As a result, societal transformation often invites the most prominent attacks on dispositions in teacher education. Pure procedural justice involves just processes with unknown outcomes (Holmes, 1993), which intertwines with deliberation as curriculum-making, instruction, and democratic life. As a form of procedural justice, deliberation can offer a *method* for equitable transformation of society (Young, 1997). It does not presume an agenda prior to or independent of the interrogation of evidence and beliefs. The act of deliberation develops the attributes needed for agents of change who may discover and disrupt purported structures of inequality, oppression, racism, intolerance, and prejudice. The inclusion of a wide-variety of stakeholders and the protracted reflection within a group ultimately help to advance self-development and self-determination whereby pre-service teachers are able to develop and exercise their intellectual and political capacities within the spirit of procedural justice (Young, 1990).

Deliberation is predicated on pre-service teachers formulating ideas, finding solutions, and bringing to light the non-recurring nuances of a particular circumstance (Cohen, 1999), and it refines pre-service teachers' sense of justice, equity, and awareness of inequality. The process involves instances of dialogue and debate directed toward deciding the best course of action among all possible alternatives, judging a variety of hypotheses, and critically examining alternatives (Parker, 2003a). It is not linear or step-by-step, but rather a complex, dynamic, and reflective process that identifies what is desirable and seeks to attain a product derived from consensus (Schwab, 1970).

Societal transformation is linked to social justice, which often includes a focus on the numerous distributive problems of societal goods (Reisch, 2002). Proposed solutions to distributive inequities attract politically-oriented excoriations primarily because the end is already defined, as opposed to the procedural method, which is applicable to innumerable situations. NCATE (2006b) suggests that dispositions should be left to program, unit, and institutional authority, and because justice is very much dependent on context, including locality, region, and nation, deliberation as a form of social justice can fit within a variety of particular and contextualized circumstances.

For example, asking pre-service teachers to read about topics such as the hidden curriculum (Giroux, 1988) and deliberate about the hidden curriculum of their own methods class, their classrooms as high school students, and the classrooms of their field experiences, can result in shared understandings about the legitimacy of theory and an exposure to instances of justice or injustice in classrooms, as well as a responsibility for reflecting upon possible structures of inequity or marginalization. In this way, deliberation does not indoctrinate or inculcate, but rather problematizes and complicates so that future teachers are aware of the possibility for instances of oppression, sexism, homophobia, and classism, but not assume their existence in particular situations *a priori*.

Conclusion

Dispositions and social justice in teacher education invite attacks because, in many instances, they claim both procedural and distributive variants of justice. The thrust of the problem is largely reducible to a means-versus-ends debate, one that is not only philosophical, but educational, societal, and political. A focus on the former brings about citizenship, moral education, and social justice in a democracy. The latter is the stuff of political and ideological machinations, as well as an inherently undemocratic method of education.

This paper advances the line of inquiry concerning the pervasive use of deliberation in the macrocurriculum and wherever norms, controversy, or problems are found. Examining, uncovering, and resolving the real problems of

society encourage justice in procedural terms, as well as the development of deliberative problem solving skills needed for controversial issues. A conscious and deliberate design of teacher education learning experiences (Hlebowitsh, 2005) relying upon deliberation can help elevate dispositional aims and goals to a position of privilege and do so in such a way that does not indoctrinate but invites agreement from diverse stakeholders.

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Misco and Shiveley: Making Sense of Dispositions in Teacher Education: Arriving at De

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