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**LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO**

**THE INTERSECTION OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY  
AND TEACHERS' DISPOSITIONAL FITNESS:  
A DELPHI STUDY**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

**BY**

**MARIA ELIZABETH STIMPSON**

**CHICAGO, IL**

**MAY 2010**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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Most of all, everyone needs the comfort and understanding that comes from having special people in their lives. I, therefore, want to express my sincerest gratitude to my wonderful family. Thank you so much for your constant

love, supportive guidance and for showing me on so many occasions how people should be treated. I feel honored and privileged to be a member of this family – to be your daughter, your sister, and to have been your granddaughter, too.

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And now for a very special thank you to the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program for awarding me with the doctoral fellowship that has supported me in this wonderful learning endeavor. Thank you for presenting me with an opportunity that had been unavailable to the two generations of educators in my family – those who instilled in me an appreciation for moral intellect and an ethic of care and hard work, and who exemplify all that is excellent in teaching and in life. Thank you DFI for allowing me to carry out their legacy.

And, to all the educators who taught and mentored me, and to those who gave this non-prototypical university instructor a chance to discover her life's work, your open-minded optimism has meant more to me than mere words can express. To the students and teachers whom I have taught, thank you for your gifts of appreciation and for your contributions to our own positive classroom communities.

Finally, as it is written in the book that has sold more copies than any “The last shall be first.” I, therefore, thank God who is first in my life and who makes all good things possible.

A mother is a gift from God  
and I am especially grateful  
to my mother, Gloria Marie Price Stimpson.  
You are my inspiration and such a wonderful person and role model.  
I love you dearly.

This is probably one of the most dangerous things facing mankind today; a use and training of intelligence excluding moral sensitivity.

*~Kenneth B. Clark  
Educational Psychologist*

## **PREFACE**

“Most of all, I want to be inspired.” Those words, excerpted from my favorite contemporary movie, echo the passion that has driven my writing of this manuscript. As I sat at my antiquated computer analyzing and composing hour after hour, preparing this manifesto on the nexus of positive psychology and teacher dispositions, I had ample opportunity to reflect on the positive classroom communities of my past and how inextricably intertwined they were with the dispositional fitness of my former teachers, especially those from my junior high school. Habits of kindness, social and intellectual competence, and professional ethics were evinced not only by a majority of those teachers, but also by the administrators and parent volunteers at my junior high school. This combination truly epitomized what I have come to call a positive classroom community.

I believe that positive classroom communities exist when leaders are inspired to create them and contribute to them each day. When we aspire to combine our intellectual knowledge, pedagogical skills, and positive teacher dispositions, we can become powerful links in the educational chain that can impact the lives of others, and ourselves, indefinitely. As teachers, we never truly realize the extent to which our influence extends. The teachers who have so inspired us, we can't always pay them back, but we can pay it forward by



creating the kind of positive classroom communities for our students that they created for us.

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## **ABSTRACT**

U.S. educators of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have witnessed renewed attention given to the importance of teacher dispositions as a component of the requisite tripartite of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In this Delphi study, two previously unaligned constructs, positive psychology and teacher dispositions, were synthesized for the purpose of: a) identifying the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities, and b) suggesting observable behaviors that are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness in positive classroom communities. Using the Positive Teacher Dispositions Index (PTDI), a panel of educators, consisting of classroom teachers, university faculty, and educational administrators selected 18 teacher dispositions as most compelling in a positive classroom community. Delphi panelists also recommended observable behaviors as exemplars of teachers' dispositional fitness. The results substantiate the high level of favorability and integrative compatibility between positive psychology and teacher dispositions. Implications suggest a potential exigency for grade-appropriate dispositions and a need to extend the minimal dispositional assessment requirement for teacher-candidates by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) beyond the dispositions to be fair and to believe that all students can learn.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you have been asked to create a science of “watchology.” You have two watches that both have had the unfortunate trauma of being left in the pocket of a pair of jeans as they churned and tumbled through the washer and dryer. One watch has suffered the worst possible fate – it no longer tells time. The other has emerged from the traumatic event still ticking. Which watch will you want to use in developing your new theory of watchology?... Clearly the working watch will help you understand watches better than the broken one. What does watchology have to do with psychology? Quite simply, in psychology as in watchology, it makes sense to start with what works. (King, 2005, p.7 & xvi)

More than two decades ago, a spotlight shone on this nation’s educational institutions, highlighting not what was working but illuminating that which was not working in America’s educational system. Chronicled in the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, were the academic deficits of young American students in literacy, math and science (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Today, to that list of deficiencies we could add a not-so-complimentary litany of social ills reflective of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, such as cyber-bullying (Carvin, 2008; Hinduja, & Patchin, 2008), school shootings (National Institute of Justice, 2002), and the various acts of aggression displayed in endless loops on YouTube.

The current educational zeitgeist in most schools is reactive, one in which the tendency is for school personnel to address problems after the problematic behavior is experienced (Akin-Little, Little, & Delligatti, 2004). Though realization of the need for service-delivery that is proactive and strength-building is dawning (Akin-Little, Little, & Delligatti, 2004; Chafouleas & Bray, 2004; Shapiro, 2000), the prevailing educational archetype of most schools mimics the disease model of medicine and mental health – waiting for the pathology to appear before treating it. We need to look no further than the increasing presence of metal detectors in schools across the nation for an example of an intervention that is ineffective at treating the underlying pathology that has necessitated its use (Dedman, 2006).

A report that is conducive to the current educational zeitgeist, treading the seas of negativity, is beyond the purview of this monograph for in the spirit of positive psychology, that path is antithetical to this author's trajectory. Instead, the author's intent is to follow the direction of Seligman, who followed in the theoretical footsteps of those before him (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961). The quest is to seek a balance of power in the attention given to pathology versus wellness by moving away from a deficit-driven course toward a path that is strengths-building. By focusing on what works and what makes life meaningful, we can put out fires – so to speak – before they even start (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).



Nearly one decade ago, Martin Seligman, while President of the American Psychological Association (APA), developed an overarching theory accompanying the term 'positive psychology' to unite scattered lines of previous and sometimes disparate research (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). His main concern was not in studying or treating the experiences and conditions that make life miserable, but those that make life meaningful and worthwhile. And, in so doing, he began the new scientific discipline of positive psychology, "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p.104).

The three original pillars underpinning positive psychology are: 1.) positive subjective experience and emotions, 2.) positive individual traits, and 3.) positive institutions and communities. To date, the first two pillars have produced a plethora of empirical studies. The third pillar, however, has been only minimally explored (British Psychological Society, 2007; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2005).

Schools have the potential to be (and in some cases are) positive communities. And, although adults still tip the scales as participants of choice in positive psychological research, there is a growing trend toward conducting research with children and youth (Miller & Nickerson, 2007). Schools, however, as microcosms of the larger societal macrocosm, are inhabited by young and old, children and adults, students and teachers. Positive psychology must then

attend to these dynamics, that is, the interaction of students and teachers, and their rapport with one another if it is to strengthen the third pillar of positive (classroom) communities.

As positive psychology makes its way into schools, much of the focus remains concentrated on service delivery through school psychology and counseling professionals (Miller & Nickerson, 2007; Shapiro, 2000). The single-mindedness of this application has proven beneficial to students with externalizing disorders involving aggression, inattention, impulsivity, and rule breaking (Jenson, Olympia, Farley & Clark, 2004) but true primary prevention necessitates that programs reach out to students before externalizing behaviors are manifested in those students. Teachers, as the instructional leaders, set the tone of their classrooms and have a direct impact on all students and on the classroom climate created via their interactions. It is the teacher, then, who plays the leading role in positive psychology if the core principles of positive psychology are to exist in the classroom.

Cultivating a positive classroom psychology is contingent upon more than teachers' knowledge and skills, and may very well depend upon the dispositions of teachers. Long before the term "dispositions" entered the teacher-education discourse in the mid-1980s (Benninga et al., 2008), Dewey (1910/1997) declared that students react and mirror the attitudes and dispositions of their teacher. Following in the footsteps of Deweyan philosophy, a renewed interest in dispositions has emerged within associations such as the National Council for

Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 1992). Since 2002, the National Network for the Study of Educator Dispositions (NNSED) has held an annual conference to promote the importance of teacher dispositions in the preparation of future educators (Honawar, 2008).

Teacher dispositions, though difficult to define and even more difficult to assess, have been defined and redefined by NCATE (2008) as “Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and nonverbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities.” Although the definitions and meanings of dispositions are myriad, regardless of construal, dispositions are manifested in positively supportive behaviors that are conducive to student learning and development. Effective teaching occurs when teachers know their subjects, have excellent pedagogical skills, and possess the dispositions that encourage learning and growth in students. If any of the aforementioned criteria are left to chance, effective and responsible teaching will not occur (Wasicsko, 2008).

### **Statement of the Problem**

We have an urgent need in this nation to attend to our “gross academic product” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103). If we fill the chasm created by a shortage of teachers over the next decade with 2.4 million effective teachers we can accomplish what Lickona (1992) considered the two main goals of education – to help students become knowledgeable and to help them become good people.

Over the years, myriad commissioned reports have called for greater accountability of students and teachers, and for the rigorous use of standardized testing to measure knowledge that has been gained, but what about goodness?

In the past, teacher education programs established standards for knowledge, skills and competencies as if academic content were enough, remaining cavalier about dispositions as if positive psychological growth is a natural byproduct of academic programs. We have since learned, however, that teacher dispositions form the basis of the critical, the creative, and the cooperative culture that teachers bring to the classroom (Keiser, 2005). Without such teacher dispositions, the type of learning and growth that is essential to a productive and meaningful life will not exist (Wasicsko, (2008).

Surely knowledge, skills and dispositions are the hallmarks of effective teaching. The problem, though, is in understanding dispositions, identifying them and integrating them into classroom communities. Now is the time for a gross academic product that synthesizes academic competence with dispositional fitness so that all students experience both the knowledge and goodness inherent in positive communities and institutions. These are the considerations that will inform this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study will be to synthesize teaching dispositions and positive psychology through the identification of the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities.

The research questions guiding this study will be: (1.) What are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community? and (2.) What observable behaviors are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community?

A Delphi study will solicit expert opinion from a panel of teachers, teacher educators and administrators who will be expected: (1.) to identify the teaching dispositions that are most compelling to the cultivation and maintenance of a positive classroom community, and (2.) to recommend observable behaviors that are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness in a positive classroom community.

The Delphi method has value because it produces a consensus of the best judgments of informed persons without the bias of leadership influence or committee dynamics (Hudson, 1974). This methodology is widely accepted in many industry sectors, including education (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1986; Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007). In this study, the Delphi construct of iterative rounds allows for the assimilation of data from educators knowledgeable in the field who may have varying perceptions on the essentials of teacher dispositions based on their own experiences, but all of which fit together like the pieces of a puzzle. The proverb of the blind men who meet an elephant for the first time comes to mind:

As each observes the elephant from his particular experience, each comes away with a different conviction of what the elephant must be like. The man who felt the trunk was certain an elephant must be like a snake; the man who felt the side was certain an elephant

must be like a wall; the man who felt the leg was certain an elephant must be like a tree trunk; the man who felt the ear was certain the elephant must be a fan; the man who felt the tusk was certain the elephant must be a spear; and the man who felt the tail was certain the elephant must be like a rope. (Benninga et al., 2008, p. 7)

Unlike the six men in the proverb who went their separate ways, Delphi experts will be expected to pool their expertise via the researcher in this study so that a more complete image or consensus about the many dimensions of teacher dispositions within a positive classroom paradigm can be formed.

### **Dissertation Overview**

This chapter has presented the rationale for the development of this Delphi study. Presented first was an introduction to the potential confluence of positive psychology and teaching dispositions in the formation of positive classroom communities. Next, a statement of the problem was addressed as the clarion call for a gross academic product that synthesizes academic competence with dispositional fitness. Finally, the purpose of the study, to synthesize teaching dispositions and positive psychology through the identification of essential teaching dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities, was stated. Also presented were the research questions informing this study and the chosen methodology.

Chapter Two will present a review of the literature relevant to the research purpose of this study. Organization is provided in three parts: positive psychology, teacher dispositions, and the intersection of positive psychology and teacher dispositions.

Chapter Three is comprised of three sections on the Delphi method. The first two sections explain the Delphi method's history, and descriptive characteristics and techniques. The final section delineates the Delphi method apropos for the investigation currently under study. The rationale for panel size, panel selection criteria, instrument design, procedure, and data analysis are provided.

In the subsequent chapters, Chapter Four will present the results of the Delphi data collection, both quantitatively and qualitatively. And, in the final chapter, Chapter Five, key results will be discussed and synthesized, and possible implications, conclusions and recommendations for practice and future research will be posited.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The objectives of this study will be: (1.) to identify the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities and (2.) to recommend the observable behaviors that are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness in positive classroom communities. This chapter begins with an introduction to positive psychology – a burgeoning movement that provides the theoretical framework for this study. Highlighted here are the historical lineage and foundational pillars of positive psychology, and the current status of positive psychology in the classroom.

The second section of this literature review introduces the concept of professional teacher dispositions as an explicit obligation of teacher educators. Highlighted here are the historical foundations of teacher dispositions, and the “feisty debate” that has ensued over the interpretation and assessment of them (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007, p.359).

The final section of this literature review addresses what can happen when positive psychology and dispositional fitness intersect. Emphasis is placed on the theoretical premise of positive psychology as an interacting conceptual network of positive experiences and emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions and communities. The logical justification for a synthesis of



positive psychology and teacher dispositions suggests that both are facilitators of the dispositional fitness that is conducive to positive classroom communities.

## **Positive Psychology**

### **Historical Profile**

The new scientific study of positive psychology “resides somewhere in that part of the human landscape that is metaphorically north of neutral” (Peterson, 2006, p. 4), and as such it is the study of human functioning and flourishing and a full range of capacities and strengths that make life meaningful and worthwhile. The perception of newness – that the alignment of positive psychology with optimal function and human strength is something new – is actually a misnomer. Positive psychology echoes the essence of the philosophical, the educational, and the psychological underpinnings that preceded it (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman, 2005).

In philosophy, one can look to Aristotelian logic for a questioning of the meaning of happiness and an understanding of the good life. And, education’s contributions can be found in William James’ writings on healthy mindedness in 1902 (Gable & Haidt, 2005) and in the envisioning of an educational Utopia by Neill (1992).

Perhaps one of the most distinguished pioneers of positive psychology was Abraham Maslow. As a key figure in humanistic psychology, his coining of the phrase “positive psychology” in the 1950s preceded Martin Seligman’s popularization of the term in 1998 (Peterson, 2006). A commitment to the

studying of healthy personality by Maslow and also Carl Rogers was based on their conviction that people are born with a tendency toward self-actualization (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961). Despite these early contributions to the positive conditions of human nature, studies of disorder and distress outpaced those of the fully functioning until Martin Seligman, with a little help from some likeminded colleagues, decided that it was time to change the trajectory (Seligman, 2005).

As President of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1998, Martin Seligman proffered positive psychology as we know it today. It is a psychology that starts with the assumption that human goodness and optimal functioning are just as authentic as disease and distress; one that recognizes the need for studying enabling conditions rather than simply nullifying the disabling ones; one that shifts the goal, so that it is not simply a matter of moving individuals from ailing negativity to neutral normality, but also a matter of shifting the attentional focus to the opposite end of the continuum – that region metaphorically north of neutral. Today's positive psychology, as the brainchild of Martin Seligman, began when he questioned not only how we proceed from negative five to zero, but also how we arrive at positive five (British Psychological Society, 2007).

In a valiant endeavor to address these issues, Seligman outlined what he originally designated as the three pillars of positive psychology: positive subjective experience and emotions, positive individual traits, and positive communities and institutions. Each of these tiers serves to categorize the field of

positive psychology into related levels (Seligman, 1998; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Pillar One, the level of positive subjective experience and emotions, pertains to quality of life and interests in positive states concerning an individual's past, future and present. Positive subjective experience and emotions directed toward the past involve well-being, contentment, and satisfaction; those directed toward the future involve hope, optimism, and spirituality; and those pertaining to the present involve flow, joy, flexible attention, pleasure, ebullience and communion (British Psychological Society, 2007; Seligman, 1998; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Pillar Two, the level of positive individual traits, is defined by human strengths of character, talents, interest and values (Seligman, 1998; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Building on this line of inquiry is a diagnostic manual entitled, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook of Classification* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), which identifies 24 distinct strengths clustered around the six virtues of wisdom and knowledge, courage (overcoming opposition), love, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The overarching concern at this level pertains to the study and interest in the positive individual and in the understanding of the "good life" (Seligman, 1998, ¶ 31 ).

Pillar Three, the level of positive communities and institutions, pertains to the study and interest in the civic virtues and entities (i.e., schools, businesses,

legislative bodies, families and societies) that promote and sustain human flourishing. The primary concern at this group level is in the collective qualities and values that move individuals toward better citizenship through responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance and work ethic (Seligman, 1998; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

This current study will focus primarily on the potentially healthy interaction and the facilitative aspect of positive classroom communities at the juncture where positive psychology and dispositional fitness intersect. But first, a look at the current status of positive psychology in the classroom is provided.

### **Positive Psychology in the Classroom**

In what ways can we envision the infusion of positive psychology into the classroom? The question is a continuing one because although positive psychological research is trending toward children and youth (Miller & Nickerson, 2007), research implications and findings related to school-aged children have remained “largely unsynthesized” (Huebner & Gilman, 2003, p. 100).

As more research studies evolve, much of the focus remains concentrated on service delivery through school psychology and counseling professionals (Miller & Nickerson, 2007; Shapiro, 2000). If the intention is to develop positive classroom communities, then delivery systems must branch out and encompass more than just the students with externalizing disorders; stand-alone programs must be designed and utilized to include the enhancement of well-functioning

students; and teachers must be encouraged to develop their own positive psychology for the classroom (Akin-Little, Little, & Delligatti, 2004).

It is this researcher's opinion that positive psychology's focus should not exist solely as a technique for psychologists (or other mental health professionals) or their clients, patients or students. Instead, it must heed the call to "take positive psychology beyond the confines of the discipline where it began – to link psycho-social strengths to positive health outcomes and, thus, to enhanced functioning of families, communities, and society" (Ryff, 2003, p.157-158), including the classroom. At the head of the class is the instructional leader; the teacher – a new breed of positive psychologist, if you will, who is uniquely positioned to implement positive psychology's pillars one and two (positive subjective experience/emotion and positive individual traits, respectively) into the classroom. Classroom teachers, especially elementary teachers with self-contained classes, have the power to affect the values and character of their students by being effective caregivers, role models and ethical mentors (Lickona,1992).

Researchers, in addition to increasing their recognition of the impact of positive psychology on children in the school, are also noting the function of the adult role model and teacher in the classroom (Chafouleas & Bray, 2004). In an attempt to focus positive psychology on teachers to directly benefit students, Truscott and Truscott (2004), posited the results of a school-based, professional development project, consistent with the tenets of positive psychology, in which

teacher-participants reported not only positive changes in classroom practices but also reported better learning by students. Elements of positive psychology were: (a.) fostering strengths through the development of social climates; (b.) building teacher knowledge and confidence; (c.) decision-making and exercising choice (by the teachers) and (d.) utilizing social context for sustained applications of teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers focused on students' needs and on direct instruction of academic skills. Success was measured through the teacher-participants' reporting of which 78% indicated changes in classroom practices and in teacher confidence, and 89% reported greater achievement by students.

Inquiries from teachers and researchers who ask, "Can an optimistic teacher help a pessimistic student feel less negative about school?" or "How can we make learning a flow experience for our students?" (Fineburg, 2004) are actually incorporating the positive subjective experiences of Pillar One (optimism and flow). When teachers model fairness or justice, they are embodying the positive individual traits of Pillar Two. Once the research is synthesized, which links Pillar One (positive subjective experience) to Pillar Two (positive individual traits) as facilitators of Pillar Three (positive communities), positive psychology will be well on its way to enriching positive classroom communities.

One might characterize Summerhill School in Britain as one very unique community experiment in schooling with many similarities to positive psychology. It began in 1921, continues to this day, and operates on many of the tenets of

positive psychology: a happy and caring environment, an atmosphere of approval and love, a working democratic community, and a climate of freedom (not license). Summerhill children do not need to be taught about racial tolerance because they live in a kind of extended family of inter-racial children from all parts of the world. It is both a boarding school and a day school where living with others harmoniously, and expressing oneself through passionate interest, knowledge and work is a way of life (Neill, 1992). Summerhill is an enlightened, student-centered school that exudes positive psychology even though it has not been aligned, overtly, with the construct. The essence of Summerhill's vocation has been described in the following way:

While Summerhill provides a traditional academic education and is proud of the academic achievements of its pupils, the real benefits of its educational program are more profound. Many children come to Summerhill with emotional problems and go away whole and strong... Warmth, optimism, independence and self-reliance are contagious qualities at the school... In this time of rapid change Summerhill has a formula that could help produce the men and women we will be needing in the future. (Neill, 1992, p. xxiii)

## **Teacher Dispositions**

### **Historical Profile**

The construct of teacher dispositions as it relates to the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching, sparked the interest of teacher education institutions and entered the discourse of teacher education when Lilian Katz and Jim Rath (1985) published *Dispositions as Goals in Teacher Education*, a paper in which dispositions were defined as the expression of frequent, voluntary actions, the implication being that dispositions are all about what teachers do and not

necessarily what they believe. One such voluntary action posited by Katz and Rath was the disposition to experiment with alternative styles of instruction in the classroom, followed by an analysis of the outcomes of the methods used with subsequent revisions where necessary. Another such disposition highlighted the importance of hearing all sides of the story or event before judging children's behavior. The interest engendered by this publication motivated some colleges and universities of teacher education to incorporate moral reasoning and sensitivity to learners into their training programs (Diez, 2007).

This heightened attention to dispositions in teacher preparation, prompted the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 1992) to convene a consortium of leaders from state education agencies to form the INTASC standards writing group which developed a set of model standards for teachers, focusing on knowledge, skills and dispositions, and replacing the more conventional formulation of knowledge, skills and attitudes (Diez, 2007). Included in *The Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing and Development* (INTASC, 1992), were the following 10 principles:

- Principle 1: The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for students.



- Principle 2: The teacher understands how children learn and develop and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, and personal development.
- Principle 3: The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.
- Principle 4: The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.
- Principle 5: The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
- Principle 6: The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.
- Principle 7: the teacher plans instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals.
- Principle 8: The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual and social development of the learner.

- Principle 9: The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.
- Principle 10: The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being. (p. 14 – 33)

Building on INTASC's language, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2002), the largest, officially-recognized teacher education accreditation agency, revised its set of standards for assessing candidates' performances. Central to the NCATE focus of its standards were the knowledge, skills and dispositions of its candidates, with dispositions defined as beliefs and attitudes which must guide the teacher candidates' behavior (Damon, 2007). Further, NCATE (2002) released a comprehensive definition of dispositions in its glossary as:

The values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors towards students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own professional growth... (and) are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice. (p. 53)

NCATE has since removed 'social justice' from its definition due to the controversy stirred by its inclusion; hence, dispositions have been redefined as:

Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and nonverbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive

behaviors support student learning and development. The two professional dispositions that NCATE expects institutions to assess are fairness and the belief that all students can learn. (NCATE, 2008)

### **Deliberating Over Dispositional Fitness**

With the ratification and publication of the NCATE Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education (NCATE, 2002), the development of professional dispositions was recognized as an explicit obligation of teacher educators (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007). Proponents of the inclusion of teacher dispositions in teacher education and accreditation determined that the time had arrived to acknowledge not merely the knowledge and skills needed by teacher candidates, but also that the responsibility for ensuring that all children reach high academic levels reflects the ethical or moral code of teaching as a professional practice. Those same proponents were aware that the profession lacked consensus concerning the morals and ethics of teachers. Debates on the multiple definitions of dispositions and the appropriateness of including candidates' dispositions in the NCATE Standards abounded due to the high-stakes nature of accreditation and the swift transfer of dispositions from the standards into state regulations for teacher preparation (Benninga, et al, 2008).

Deliberations over teacher dispositions continued due to multiple meanings leading to ambiguities in a loosely-defined construct, with dispositions variously construed as: beliefs, attitudes, personality traits, states of being inferred from observed behavior, temperament and virtues (Burant, Chubback, &

Whipp, 2007). And, although there is not total agreement on all dimensions of dispositions, even among proponents, “as a community of teacher educators, we must not lose sight of the larger aim for which the construct of dispositions was created in the first place – to develop the moral and ethical dimensions of the profession of teaching” (Benninga, et. al, 2008, p. 3). Dispositions are as important or even more important than the subject matter and teaching skills taught in teacher education institutions and, to not include dispositions in the preparation of teachers is “unconscionable and dangerous since we need to ensure that teachers are likely to apply the skills that they have learned in our colleges” (Wilkerson, 2006, p. 3).

Through teaching dispositions, educators have taken another step toward viewing education through the lens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sullivan (2004) makes a compelling case for the change that is needed among professionals:

In addition to enabling students to become competent practitioners, professional schools always must provide ways to induct students into the distinctive habits of mind that define the domain of a lawyer, a physician, nurse, engineer, or teacher. However, the basic knowledge of a professional domain must be revised and recast as conditions change. Today, that means that the definition of basic knowledge must be expanded to include an understanding of the moral and social ecology within which students will practice. Today’s professional schools will not serve their students well unless they foster forms of practice that open possibilities of trust and partnership with those the professions serve. Such a reorientation of professional education... requires a positive engagement. (§ 6-7)

## **The Nexus of Positive Psychology and Teacher Dispositions**

### **The Positive Classroom Community**

The positive classroom community is ensconced in positive psychology's theoretical framework. As a positive institution, that is, "an organization or establishment devoted to the promotion of a cause or program, especially one of a public, educational, or charitable character" (Steinmetz, 1997, p. 677), the classroom can aid in the development and display of positive traits, which can facilitate positive subjective experiences, and thereby enhance human educability and well-being. Schools are institutions with the unique characteristics of having students as the crucial members, customers and/or clients who are, in essence, the ultimate goal and product of the school community (Peterson, 2006).

Within the positive classroom community, the focus is not solely on achievement or those who achieve. Excellence is not confused with graduation rates and test scores, or avoidance of negative student outcomes such as violence, suicide, substance abuse or other unhealthy actions (Peterson, 2006). Certainly, these factors are important, but in actuality, the positive classroom is not about what it is not but, rather, what it is.

We've probably seen it more often than we are aware – the pieces of the positive classroom; much like the floor tiles of a room which are its foundation and always there, but often not noticed. Within every classroom of overshadowing wrongs there exists at least something that is right. The positive

classroom community, however, is flourishing with the pieces that complete the puzzle – a work of educational and psychological art and science.

It is possible to envision the positive classroom. By looking to the pioneering work of educational theorists and humanistic-oriented psychologists, we can conceptualize the positive classroom community. Snapshots might capture: (a) the safe haven of the Maslovian hierarchy (Maslow, 1970), a non-threatening bully-free zone where students express themselves comfortably; (b) the open classroom of Kohl (1969) or the educative democracy of Dewey (1910/1997), with the teacher as structuring agent within an egalitarian system; (c) the utopian community of Neill (1992), where children enjoy their work and develop their personal interests; (d) the Rogerian ways of positive self concept – unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness – practiced within the classroom and beyond (Rogers, 1961); and (e) in Lickona character education (Lickona, 1992), where respect and responsibility reside interpersonally, intrapersonally, from the bottom up as well as the top down.

Research has shown that students learn best from adults who are “creative, spontaneous, and supportive; who convey meanings rather than just facts; who possess high self-esteem and see their jobs as liberating rather than controlling” (Cox, 1970, p. 245). Positive classroom communities are believed to be uniquely positioned to promote these strengths of character as they provide the vehicle for their delivery (Clonan, Chafouleas, McDougal, & Riley-Tillman, 2004).

## **Justification for the Study**

Sometimes called life industries, schools are producers of educational practices that have the capacity to make lasting impressions on students across the lifespan and within settings far beyond the classroom (Peterson, 2006). The classroom, however, at the intersection of positive psychology and dispositional fitness is (perhaps) where the most unique opportunity exists. Therein lies the possibility for the promotion of positive human development through positive experience and individual traits, and a classroom community that enables its flourishing.

Once researchers begin to understand how positive psychology and dispositional fitness are intertwined, they can amass supportive evidence that synthesizes the data and implications related to positive psychology and teacher dispositions. One possible connection that can be researched involves positive psychology's valuing of optimism and NCATE's professional disposition -- the belief that all students can learn -- one of only two professional dispositions explicitly endorsed by NCATE (Wise, 2006). If the assumption here is that effective teachers are an optimistic group who believe that all students can learn, then studies of how teachers' optimistic beliefs about their students translate into students' own optimistic thinking and performance can be synthesized.

It should be mentioned that, to date, research has not investigated associations between positive psychology and teacher dispositions (Freeman 2007). The current study will commence as one of the first steps in the

identification and affirmation of teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into classroom communities. Additionally, recommendations of behaviors and expressions that evidence the alignment of teacher dispositions and positive classroom communities will be explored.

The significance of this study lies in its anticipatory beneficence. Inasmuch as the construct of teacher dispositions suffers from a lack of empirical evidence that would ordinarily emanate from a cohesive theoretical framework, this study places positive psychology in the unique position of providing the theoretical framework that the construct lacks. Additionally, the alignment of teacher dispositions with positive psychology provides a lens through which new meaning can be extracted for further clarification and understanding of teacher dispositions, and for the ultimate objective of creating and maintaining positive classroom communities.

The selection of a Delphi methodology for this study, which is premised on the utilization of a panel of credible professionals from primary, secondary and post-secondary schools in the Midwest, lends credence to the study's ability to provide useful, meaningful data not only to the dispositions discourse, but also to the field of applied positive psychology. As the inculcation of teacher dispositions into the requisite triad of knowledge, skills and dispositions solidifies, the identification of dispositions and behaviors that evidence them may be useful in the selection and training of a wide body of teacher candidates and existing



classroom teachers as a means to the cultivation and maintenance of positive classroom communities.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Chapter Three describes this study's methodological approach. The Delphi method has value because it produces a consensus of the best judgments of informed persons without the bias of leadership influence or committee dynamics (Hudson, 1974), and is widely accepted in many industry sectors, including education (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1986; Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007). The Delphi technique was chosen because the purposes of this study will be: (1.) to identify the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities and (2.) to recommend the observable behaviors that are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness in positive classroom communities.

#### **History of the Delphi Method**

The name "Delphi" of the Delphi method is derived from the Delphic Oracle of Greek Mythology. Legend has it that a "chosen one" (Apollo), on the island of Delphi, could predict the future with irrefutable authority. Pythia, the priestess and Oracle of Delphi, would supposedly go into a trance, breathe vapors from a cleft in the rocks, and deliver messages from Apollo to persons who sought her advice (Clayton, 1997; Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 2002). The Delphi

method was originally used singularly to forecast technological developments; therefore, like the oracle, it was used to predict the future (Clayton, 1997).

“Project Delphi,” the original study using the Delphi method, developed by Norman Dalkey and his associates at the Rand Corporation during the 50s and 60s, was used to make predictions for a project sponsored by the U.S. military (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007). According to Dalkey, the goal of this seminal project was to apply expert opinion regarding the estimation of the number of atomic bombs required to reduce the munitions output by a prescribed amount (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). The Delphi method, in which experts in the field were surveyed individually according to a prescribed process, was the technique used by Dalkey to overcome the disadvantages common to committees and smaller groups such as: (a.) domination of the meeting by individuals who may influence the opinions of others due to their aggressive personalities (Dalkey, 1967; Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1986); (b.) group pressure that puts a premium on consensus and concession (Dalkey, 1967); and (c.) the expense and time involved when panelists must travel to a designated meeting place for participation (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1986).

Subsequently, applications of the Delphi method have broadened beyond technological forecasting and have been adopted in various sectors such as education, healthcare, social services, defense, transportation, engineering and

evaluative research (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1986; Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007).

### **Description of the Delphi Method**

The Delphi method was conceptualized to overcome the limitations of committees and small groups (Dalkey, 1967; Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1986). The objective was “to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts” (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963, p. 458). In what remains, perhaps, one of the most practical and profound definitions of the Delphi method, Thomas (1979) captured the essence:

What Delphi is, is a really quiet, thoughtful conversation, in which everyone gets a chance to listen. The background noise of small talk and the recurrent sonic booms of vanity are eliminated at the outset, and there is time to think. There are no voices and therefore no rising voices... Before Delphi, real listening in a committee meeting has always been a near impossibility... Debating is what committees really do, not thinking. Take away the need for winning points, leading the discussion, protecting one's face, gaining applause, shouting down opposition, scaring opponents, all that kind of noisy activity, and a group of bright people can get down to quiet thought. (as cited in Hartman, 1981, p. 497)

More recently, Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn (2007) defined the Delphi method as “An iterative process to collect and distill the anonymous judgments of experts using a series of data collection and analysis techniques interspersed with feedback” (p. 1). Any definition of Delphi will maintain that its flexibility as an investigative instrument and research technique is very well-suited to situations in which the available knowledge about a problem or phenomenon is incomplete (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007).

Three types of Delphi techniques have been delineated by Linstone and Turoff (2002): Classical (also known as Conventional), Policy, and Real-Time. Classical Delphi is a communication process used for achieving consensus among a panel of experts. The procedure offers decision-makers a systematic technique in the collection and dissemination of information through iterative rounds of questionnaires to a panel of experts who respond, individually, to the monitoring team which assimilates, analyzes and summarizes the data (Clayton, 1997). The Policy Delphi differs from the Classical Delphi in that generating consensus among the experts is not the prime objective; rather, the panelists present all possible options relevant to the discussion, for decision-making by the administrators (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). Real-Time Delphi occurs during a conference or meeting, and is sometimes called a “Delphi Conference” (Linstone & Turoff, 2002) during which questionnaires are disseminated, responses gathered and analyzed, and feedback is given to respondents during the course of the meeting. Although there are myriad modifications of the Delphi, all variations are distinguished by three essential characteristics: anonymity of respondents, multiple iterations or rounds, and controlled feedback of group response (Murry & Hammons, 1995).

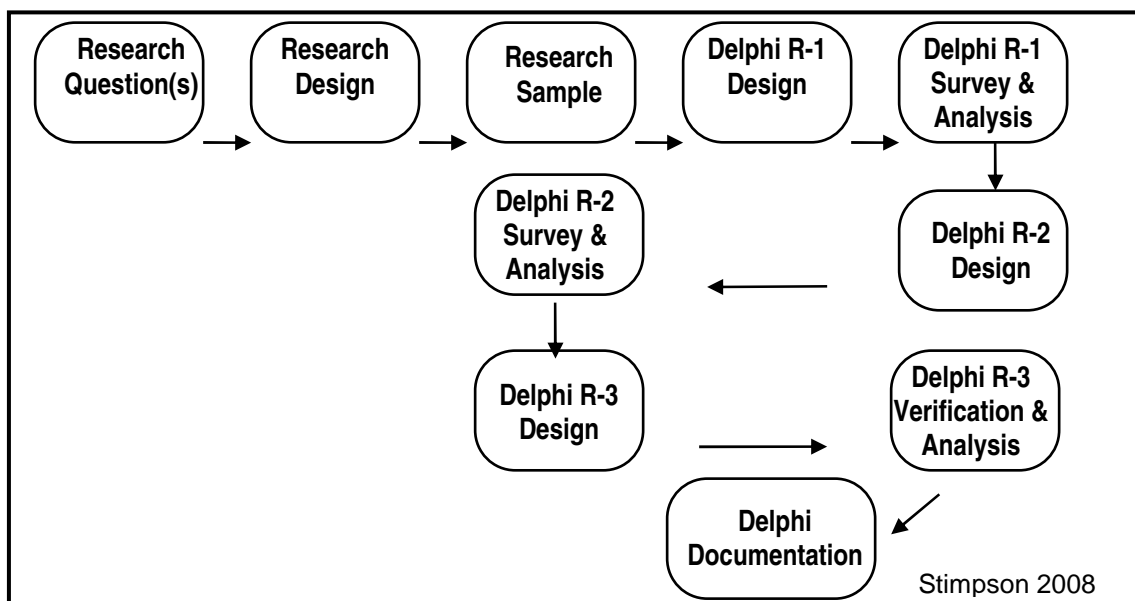
### **Details of the Delphi Method for the Purpose of this Study**

#### **Design of the Study**

The conclusion that three rounds are customary for data collection was determined by Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn (2007) based on their

examination of 40 dissertations and two theses using Delphi applications, although as many as five rounds were noted for some. In keeping with that which is usual and customary, this study utilized three consensus-seeking rounds. An illustration of the typical Delphi sequence for this study is provided in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Typical Delphi Sequence**



### The Delphi Panel

A cardinal aspect in the configuration of any Delphi panel is participant expertise. Surprisingly, however, universal criteria regarding selection or number of panelists do not exist. Instead, common sense, practical logistics, and extant documentation from previous Delphis are relied upon as guides (Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2006).

### Panel Selection Criteria.

“Expertise” and “knowledgeability” are defining criteria of any Delphi panel (Rowe & Wright, 1999, p. 371), inasmuch as the quality of response within a Delphi study is only as good as the panel of experts selected for the process. Therefore, the expectation that Delphi panelists meet specific requirements is a given. In previous studies, some key criteria for panel selection have included: (1.) knowledge and experience in the area under study, (2.) capacity and willingness to participate, (3.) commitment to the time constraints of the Delphi process, and (4.) effective communication skills (Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, 2007). Additional criteria pertaining to expertise in the subject matter, such as professional experience, employment and education, are decided upon by the researcher prior to the commencement of the study (Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2006).

This study utilized purposive sampling, the specific objective of which was to allow the researcher to use personal judgment in selecting the sample she believed would possess the necessary qualifications to make well-informed determinations about the population under study (Fraenkel, 2006). Due to the reality that both the constructs of positive psychology and teacher dispositions are in their (relative) infancy (NCATE, 2002; Seligman, 1998), identification of explicit, measurable criteria for someone to be considered an “expert” in these areas was challenging. Furthermore, mastery of the relevant bodies of knowledge in a given discipline (e.g., education or psychology) does not ensure

that the dispositions to use the principles in a respectable way will be practiced. The actuarial nature of dispositions calls for a summation of observational habits of teachers, attending to what happens within the educational context (Katz & Raths, 1985), and not simply to the attainment of degrees, awards and accolades.

Inasmuch as this study is humanistic in nature, the panel selection process was inclusive of a humanistic, theoretical approach based on holistic observations (Maslow, 1970), in addition to attainment of degrees, years of experience as (K through 12) classroom teachers, and other relevant experiential criteria. Panelists were, therefore, selected in accordance with a combination of specified criteria. (See Table 1.)



**Table 1: Criteria Set for Participant Selection**

| <b>Criteria Set for Participant Selection in the Delphi Study<br/>of Positive Psychology and Teacher Dispositions</b> |   |
|---|---|
| <b>A.</b>   | Participants will be expected to meet the following three qualifications based on credentials and observational details: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>(1) A degree (i.e., bachelor's, master's, or doctorate) in education or psychology.</li><li>(2) A minimum of five years of classroom teaching at the K-12 level.</li><li>(3) Demonstrated positive teacher dispositions in their interactions with students, colleagues and parents that are synonymous with a guiding vision of goodness and dispositional fitness.</li></ol> |
| <b>B.</b>   | In addition to the qualifications listed above, participants will also have one or more of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>(1) University-level teaching experience with pre-service teachers.</li><li>(2) Supervisory experience with student-teacher candidates or in-service teachers.</li><li>(3) Evaluative experience of teacher performance in the classroom.</li><li>(4) Publications in scholarly journals within the discipline of education or psychology.</li></ol>  |
| Stimpson 2008   |   |

Based on the aforementioned criteria, the panel was comprised of present and former: (a.) department chairs in psychology and education; (b.) members of NCATE; (c.) district superintendents; (d.) elementary and high school principals; (e.) "Teacher of the Year" award recipients; (f.) clinical supervisors in education knowledgeable in the assessment of teacher dispositions; and (g.) teachers and academicians who apply an infusion perspective toward positive psychology curricula.

### Panel Size.

Panel size varies in Delphi studies of expert opinion, depending on the study's purpose and complexity – local, state, national, or international (Clayton, 1997; Kennedy, 2002). Although theories of group size vary, with some indicating acceptability of 15 to 30 panelists for a homogeneous population and 5 to 10 panelists for a heterogeneous population, such as teachers, university academicians, school principals, and others with expertise on a particular topic but from varying stratifications (Clayton, 1997), it bears remembering that “there are no hard and fast rules” on the topic of panel size in Delphi studies (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007, p. 10). A panel of 10 to 12 participants was the desirable target for this study, which is in accordance with the findings and recommendations of previous Delphi studies (Clayton, 1992; Dalkey, 1967; Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975).

The population for this study was heterogeneous, comprised of classroom teachers, teacher-educators, and educational administrators with the intention of achieving a generalized and diversified level of expertise (Clayton, 1992), and a “pooling of talents” (Spencer-Cooke, 1986, p. 116) that is found in an “appropriately sampled group of experts or up-to-date, well-informed professionals” (Clayton, 1992, p. 46). Members were expected to shed valuable insight through their experiential lenses as: (a.) elementary classroom teachers, with daily opportunities to bridge theory and practice; (b.) educational administrators, afforded the perspective of visitor, observer, and evaluator; and

(c.) university faculty, with their close connection to theoretical research and to the population of new professionals in their charge. It was anticipated that the heterogeneity and diversity of participants, characterized by differing perspectives, personalities and professional stratifications, would yield data of greater quality than homogeneous groups (Clayton, 1992; Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975).

#### The Delphi Panelists.

The 10 educators who comprised the expert panel in this study included 3 university faculty members, 2 classroom teachers, and 5 educational administrators of which 3 were elementary and high school principals, 1 former deputy district superintendent, and 1 literacy coordinator. Delphi panel member demographics are presented in Table 2.

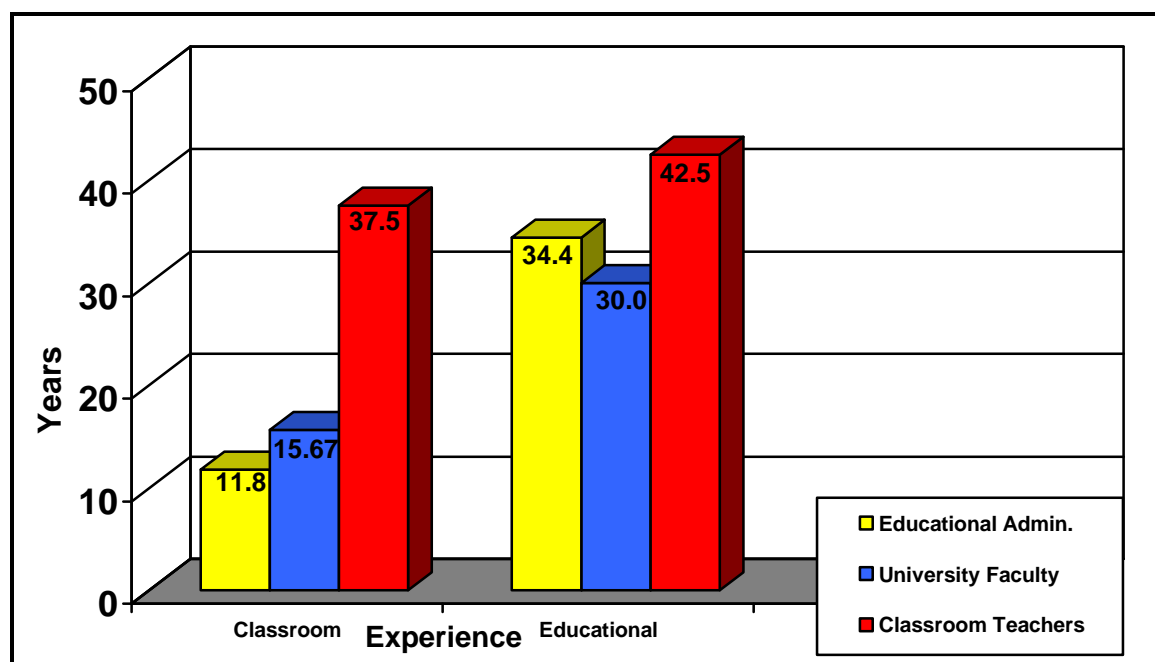
**Table 2: Delphi Panelists' Demographic Data**

|  | <b>N</b> | <b>%</b> |
|--|----------|----------|
| <b>Gender</b>                              |          |          |
| Female                                     | 9        | 90       |
| Male                                       | 1        | 10       |
| <b>Age</b>                                 |          |          |
| ≤ 34                                       | 0        | 0        |
| 35-44                                      | 0        | 0        |
| 45-54                                      | 4        | 40       |
| ≥ 55                                       | 6        | 60       |
| <b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>                     |          |          |
| White                                      | 3        | 30       |
| Latino                                     | 1        | 10       |
| African American                           | 6        | 60       |
| Other                                      | 0        | 0        |
| <b>Highest Academic Degree</b>             |          |          |
| Bachelor's Degree                          | 1        | 10       |
| Master's Degree                            | 7        | 70       |
| Doctoral Degree                            | 2        | 20       |
| <b>Occupation</b>                          |          |          |
| Classroom Teacher                          | 2        | 20       |
| University Faculty                         | 3        | 30       |
| Administrator                              | 5        | 50       |
| <b>Years as a Classroom Teacher</b>        |          |          |
| Range (n= 34)                              | 6-40     |          |
| Mean                                       | 18.1     |          |
| <b>Years in the Educational Profession</b> |          |          |
| Range (n= 27)                              | 23-50    |          |
| Mean                                       | 34.7     |          |

All panelists in this study were well-qualified experts in their field, meeting the previously delineated criteria for expertise, and with a combined total of 347 years of experience in the educational profession and a combined total of 181 years of experience in the classroom proper. Figure 2 depicts the panelists' mean years of classroom experience and experience in the educational

profession as classified by subgroup – educational administrators, university faculty, and classroom teachers.

**Figure 2: Delphi Panelists' Mean Years of Experience by Subgroup**



## Instrumentation

### Item Development.

Development of the survey instrument began with the identification and distillation of documents relative to positive teacher dispositions in extant literature such as journal articles, books, dissertations, and scholarly papers on the topic. To date, only generalized lists of dispositions have been developed by researchers, none of which has specifically addressed the dispositional fitness of teachers in classrooms supportive of the positive psychological paradigm.

Resources used for item construction in this study included: (a.) sources which had been subjected to teacher counsel or committee approval at three Midwestern schools of education; (b.) two explicit dispositions as developed by NCATE (2008); (c.) the Teacher Dispositions Index (TDI) (Schulte, Edick, Edwards, & Mackiel, 2004); and (d.) Usher's (2002) five dispositions based on the earlier work of educator and psychologist, Arthur Combs (1999).

All items gleaned from the previous pre-selected sources were carefully chosen, synthesized and collapsed for redundancy avoidance based on this researcher's specifications that selected dispositions reflect a grounding that is explicitly standards-based and morality-based. This was accomplished by aligning the items with the 10 principles of *The Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing and Development* (INTASC, 1992), and with the following two dimensions developed by the researcher:

- Dimension 1: The teacher understands the importance of being a moral, ethical and professional role model for students.
- Dimension 2: The teacher has an understanding of social justice, its effect on learners and the learning environment, and the fairness, empathy and equanimity that facilitates it.

The two aforementioned dimensions were added to reflect a deeper commitment and inclusivity of the social and morally ethical code of the teaching profession, considered by some as the aim or *raison d'être* for teacher dispositions (Benninga, et. al, 2005).

A final list of 30 items, reduced from an initial list of 80 items, resulted from this process. Those items were formatted into a single instrument of 30 dispositions. The primary advantages associated with the use of pre-selected items in Delphi studies are: (1.) presentation of a credible grounding in previous research; and (2.) general improvement of the initial response rate (Custer, Scarella, & Stewart, 1999).

#### Instrument Design.

This study utilized a Likert-like rating scale, which is widely popularized in surveys and experiments involving attitude measurement research. Likert-like scale construction starts with a series of statements to which participants express degrees of agreement or disagreement. Participant response is generally expressed along a five-point scale (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997; Bordens & Abbott, 2005). Generally, the higher the scored response of an item, the more positive the attitude (Kennedy, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the rating scale was anchored as follows: SA = strongly agree (5); A = agree (4); N = neutral (3); D = disagree (2); SD = strongly disagree (1). (See Figure 3.)

**Figure 3: Delphi Rating Scale**

|           |          |          |          |           |
|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| <b>5</b>  | <b>4</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>SA</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>D</b> | <b>SD</b> |

The Round One Questionnaire contained 30 items relevant to the study's first research question: What are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community? Panelists used their best judgment to indicate degrees of agreement or disagreement with the compelling nature of each teacher disposition by circling the scale value that best represented their perceptions for each of the 30 items.

The Round Two Questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A entailed the teacher dispositions identified in Round One as the most compelling based on analysis of descriptive statistics (i.e., mean value and standard deviation). Panelists received individualized and summary data (i.e., mean values) for each item in Round Two. Panelists were then asked to consider their own responses and the mean responses of the group. Provisions were made for panelists to indicate a change in opinion or to check the "no change" option based on their consideration of the data, and to comment on each item from the list. (See sample item in Figure 4.)

**Figure 4: Sample Round Two Instrument (Part A)**

| SAMPLE ITEM                         | Your Answer | Panel Mean | No Change                | New Answer | Comments |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|----------|
| 1. Insert teacher disposition here. |             |            | <input type="checkbox"/> |            |          |

Part B addressed the study's second research question: What observable behaviors are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community? Panelists were asked to give recommendations of observable behaviors for the most compelling teacher dispositions presented in



Part A. Additional space was provided directly under each disposition, which allowed for detailed responses to the open-ended question posed in Part B.

#### Pilot Testing.

A pilot test is a preliminary trial of a research instrument or study (Cengage Learning, 2005; Fink, 2003b). The objective of the pilot test is both to determine whether the instrument works and to ensure that the data can be analyzed in the manner proposed by the researcher (Buckingham & Saunders, 2004). A small group of 3 to 5 respondents is common in miniature versions of a study (Bordens & Abbott, 2005; Cengage Learning, 2005) and a comparable setup was arranged for this study. Based on a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of Delphi studies by Rowe and Wright (1999), it was determined that Delphi is “not a procedure intended to challenge statistical or model-based procedures against which human judgment is generally shown to be inferior” (p.354). This position is supported by quantitative Delphi dissertations which rely on the judgment of pilot testers and expert panelists, to provide non-statistical validation of the instruments used (Clayton, 1992; Kennedy, 2002). Thus, the current Delphi study also relied on expert, human judgmental input as validation, initiated with the appropriation of the pilot study as indicated.

Both questionnaires used in this study underwent pilot testing prior to the first and second rounds with a mock Delphi panel of three qualified individuals (approximately one-third of the actual panel size) solicited from inside and outside the pool of participants. All pilot testers received identical packaging of

the questionnaires, which they checked for validity issues, clarity, level of difficulty, and length of time required for completion. Both first and second round instruments were received positively by the pilot testers; however, modifications were made to the second round instrument, in response to tester's requests that additional space be allotted for additional qualitative commentaries. Complete procedures for each Delphi round will be explained in the accompanying sections.

### **Research Procedure**

Delphi studies typically follow a three round process (Kennedy, 2002; Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, 2007), requiring questionnaire development and distribution to expert panelists for their experienced judgments and responses (Clayton, 1992; Delbecq, A. L., Van de Ven, A. H., & Gustafson, D. H., 1986). During the process of this study, panelists were expected: (1.) to identify the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities and (2.) to recommend the observable behaviors that are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness in positive classroom communities.

#### Round One

The following is an itemization of associated tasks for Round One.

- Two research questions were formulated by the researcher to guide the research: (a.) What are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community?, and (b.)

What observable behaviors are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community?

- Criteria were set by the researcher based on credentials and observational details: (a.) a degree (i.e., bachelors, masters, or doctorate in education or psychology), (b.) a minimum of 5 years of classroom teaching at the K-12 level, and (c.) demonstrated positive teacher dispositions in their interactions with students, colleagues and parents. Panelists were also required to have had supervisory experience with teachers or student teachers or have had publications in educational or psychological journals.
- The Round One questionnaire was formulated and designed by the researcher who used documents relative to professional teacher dispositions in extant literature to create the Positive Teacher Dispositions Inventory (PTDI), a 30-item instrument of teacher dispositions.
- The researcher requisitioned the IRB for approval of the research.
- Approval of the research was granted by the IRB.
- The researcher prepared an invitational packet, which included an invitation letter, a consent form, a panel profile, a clarification of terms sheet, and the PTDI.
- The Round One instrument was pilot-tested by a panel of 3 qualified individuals from inside and outside the pool of participants.

- The researcher telephoned eligible panelists to ascertain the willingness of the experts to participate in this Delphi study and to let them know when to expect their packet in the mail.
- The researcher sent an invitational packet to each panelist (via U.S. mail).
- The researcher collected and disaggregated the data compiled from the Round One packets received from panelists.

### Round Two

The associated tasks of Round Two are listed below.

- Using a modified version of the original PTDI, the researcher formulated the Round Two instrument containing Round One feedback pertaining to the most compelling teacher dispositions in a positive classroom community with added open-ended questions on behavior indicants.
- The researcher administered the Pilot Test to the Pilot Testers.
- The Round Two instrument, and feedback from Round One, were sent to panelists via U.S. mail.
- The researcher received the Round Two questionnaires from the panelists which contained the panelists' revisited selections and their dispositional indicants via U.S. mail.
- The researcher collected, synthesized, distilled and collapsed the data for the Round Three verification list.

### Round Three

The associated tasks of Round Three are listed below.

- The researcher sent panelists a feedback summary from Round Two, which indicated the changes from Round One and the indicants recommended by the panelists via U.S. mail. The panelists were given one last opportunity to verify or otherwise comment on the data.
- The researcher collected the final Round Three packet via U.S. mail.
- The researcher analyzed the Round Three data based on panelists' responses and prepared culminating reports.
- The researcher sent reports to panelists via U.S. mail.

### **Data Analysis**

Data identified from rounds one and two were analyzed using descriptive statistical measures. A criterion was set for the determination of consensus combined with importance regarding the most compelling teacher dispositions in Round One ( $\bar{M} > 4.499$ ). The Round Two Questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A contained data from Round One, analyzed for consensus (i.e., standard deviation) combined with importance ratings (i.e., mean values) regarding the most compelling teacher dispositions. Part B addressed research question number two, an open-ended item, the answers of which were used to provide clarification for the dispositions considered most compelling. For the open-ended item, panelists were asked to provide examples of observable behaviors indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community.

Panelists were given the opportunity to verify responses. At the conclusion of all iterative rounds, final data were analyzed, once again, for mean scores and standard deviations, and panelists' recommendations were listed as clarifications of the most compelling teacher dispositions indicative of dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community. These clarifications offered by panelists were not intended for consensus, since they were examples of behaviors which may run the teacher-performance gamut. Facione (1990), in his seminal Delphi study on critical thinking, utilized non-consensus clarifications, stating that "others may see in them the tools to initiate staff development conversations about the curricular implication. However, the panel's consensus... does not necessarily extend to the examples" (p. 16). Summaries of the research findings for the current study have been documented in appropriate tables which appear later in this manuscript.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this Delphi study on positive psychology and teachers' dispositional fitness was to identify the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities. A questionnaire, the Positive Teacher Dispositions Inventory (PTDI), was designed and refined by the researcher for use in this study. The PTDI is a 30-item survey questionnaire which lists 30 teacher dispositions for the Delphi panelists to use to answer the primary research question: What are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community? A variation of the initial PTDI was also developed, following the determination of the most compelling teacher dispositions, to enable panelists to answer the secondary research question: What observable behaviors are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community?

This chapter chronicles the results of this Delphi study by rounds. Each round, one through three, includes a project history, providing procedural summaries of each round, and an explanation of findings, delineating the descriptive statistics and qualitative data for the round. The chapter concludes with a summation of the major findings in this study.

## Round One

### Project History

The first round of the Delphi began following IRB approval. The process was initiated with the dissemination of 15 invitational packets to potential panelists and with telephone calls to each person to stimulate interest in the study and to apprise each as to when the packets should be received. The final response rate for Round One was 67% with 10 active participants completing the packet and expressing a willingness to continue. Although two additional potential panelists originally expressed verbal interest, their packets were not received by the researcher and subsequent inquiries (i.e. phone calls and/or e-mails) by the researcher went unanswered. Therefore, abiding by an operational rule of the Delphi, that non-responsiveness and sustained silence be construed as an unwillingness to participate (Facione, 1990), both potential panelists were removed from the mailing list and, thus, dropped from the study.

All 10 panelists were well qualified, meeting the previously delineated criteria for expertise and completing all three rounds as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Delphi Panelists' Participation By Round**

| Panelist Classification    | Round 1 | Round 2 | Round 3 |
|----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Classroom Teachers         | 2       | 2       | 2       |
| Educational Administrators | 5       | 5       | 5       |
| University Faculty         | 3       | 3       | 3       |
| <b>Total N</b>             | 10      | 10      | 10      |

Note. Total N = Total number of panelists



The duration of Round One was 16 days from the time of dissemination to the receipt of panel profiles, consent forms and surveys from all panelists. Panelists completed the PTDI, reacting to all 30 items. Using a 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), panelists rated their level of agreement or disagreement regarding their answers to research question one: What are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community?

### **Explanation of Findings**

In Round One, panelists answered the primary research question: What are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community? Panelists rated teacher dispositions as listed in the PTDI, a 30-item survey questionnaire, with the accompanying 5-point Likert-like scale which was anchored as follows: SA = strongly agree (5); A = agree (4); N = neutral (3); D = disagree (2); SD = strongly disagree (1). The terms “most compelling” and “compelling” were rendered synonymous with “strongly agree” and “agree” which have corresponding points of 5 and 4, respectively, on the Likert-like scale.

At the conclusion of Round One, descriptive statistics were calculated for measures of central tendency (i.e., mean) and dispersion (i.e., consensus). In this study and from this point forward, the statistical mean will be used synonymously with the term “importance rating” to represent the extent to which

panelists collectively agreed or disagreed that a given disposition was “most compelling” in a positive classroom community.

Although definitive guidelines for consensus are not apparent in the literature (Cyphert & Grant, 1970; Hsu & Standford, 2007; Kennedy, 2002), consensus measures were also reported. In this study, the researcher reported panel consensus based on two criteria: standard deviation and the “simple percent-agreement figure” (Stemler, 2004, ¶ 8). In reference to the first criterion for consensus, the researcher determined that panel consensus occurred when the standard deviation of the mean for each item measured less than 1.00. Regarding the second criterion, and in reference to consensus-finding in a Delphi study, the recommendation that consensus is achieved when 80% of participants’ votes fall within two categories of 7 on a 7-point scale has been established (Hsu & Standford, 2007). Inasmuch as the upper boundary of the measurement scale in this study is 5, rather than 7, this researcher determined that consensus was achieved if at least 80% of the panelists selected a rating of 4 or greater for the item. Table 4 shows descriptive statistics calculated for measures of central tendency (i.e., mean) and dispersion (i.e., consensus) for all items in the order in which they were presented to panelists in Round One of this study to allay any concern that phenomena such as primacy-effect or order-effect bias were issues. (Note: Following Table 4, future tables will display dispositions according to mean scores.)

**Table 4: Round One Descriptive Statistics For Original 30 Dispositions**

| <b>Disposition</b>  | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>% of Panelists Rating Item <math>\geq</math> 4</b> |
|---|-------------|-----------|---|
| Believes that all students can learn  | 4.80        | .42       | 100   |
| Believes in treating all students fairly                                    | 5.00        | .00       | 100   |
| Is committed to social justice  | 4.40        | .69       | 90  |
| Is a reflective educator  | 4.40        | .69       | 90  |
| Recognizes the importance of collaborative efforts with other professionals | 4.30        | .67       | 90  |
| Recognizes the importance of lifelong learning                              | 4.40        | .51       | 100   |
| Understands the importance of good classroom management                     | 4.60        | .51       | 100   |
| Understands the importance of being a responsive listener                   | 4.80        | .42       | 100   |
| Respects the diversity of all students                                      | 4.90        | .31       | 100   |
| Accepts responsibility in fulfilling duties                                 | 4.60        | .51       | 100   |
| Is flexible in changing circumstances                                       | 4.40        | .51       | 100   |
| Is patient with students  | 4.70        | .48       | 100   |
| Has a positive work ethic   | 4.80        | .42       | 100   |
| Has a generous nature   | 4.20        | .63       | 90  |
| Models ethical behavior   | 4.90        | .31       | 100   |
| Encourages critical thinking  | 4.70        | .48       | 100   |
| Is honest and trustworthy   | 4.80        | .42       | 100   |
| Is empathetic   | 4.60        | .51       | 100   |
| Understands the importance of effective communication                       | 4.80        | .42       | 100   |
| Exhibits a genuine authenticity of self                                     | 4.40        | .67       | 90  |
| Has a positive view of self   | 4.40        | .84       | 80  |
| Has a positive regard for others  | 4.90        | .31       | 100   |
| Holds students to high moral and ethical standards                          | 4.60        | .51       | 100   |
| Values a democratic community   | 4.40        | .69       | 90  |
| Is compassionate and caring   | 4.60        | .51       | 100   |
| Is enthusiastic about teaching  | 5.00        | .00       | 100   |
| Has intellectual wisdom   | 4.40        | .51       | 100   |
| Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students            | 5.00        | .00       | 100   |
| Exhibits strong leadership  | 4.30        | .82       | 80  |
| Is courageous in the face of adversity                                      | 4.00        | .66       | 80  |

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree; N=10

At the conclusion of Round One and upon final analysis, a determination was made as to which dispositions were most compelling in a positive classroom community. For the purpose of data analysis, the following mean score specifications (i.e., cutoffs) should be used for interpretation of data: 1.00 to 1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.50 to 2.49 = Disagree; 2.50 to 3.49 = Neutral; 3.50 to 4.49 = Agree; 4.50 to 5.00 = Strongly Agree. The guidelines for interpreting Likert mean group scores in this study are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Interpretation of Dispositional Mean Scores**

| Score Specification | Interpretive Guideline                       |
|---------------------|--|
| 4.50 – 5.00         | Strongly Agree = most compelling disposition |
| 3.50 – 4.49         | Agree = compelling disposition               |
| 2.50 – 3.49         | Neutral = undecided                          |
| 1.50 – 2.49         | Disagree = not compelling                    |
| 1.00 – 1.49         | Strongly Disagree = least compelling         |

Teacher dispositions regarded as most compelling were those with which panelists “strongly agreed” ( $\underline{M} > 4.49$ ). Analysis of Round One data revealed that panel members “strongly agreed” ( $\underline{M} > 4.49$ ) that 18 of the 30 dispositions were most compelling in a positive classroom community and that unanimous consensus (100%) was also achieved for these items. Of special interest were three dispositions receiving maximum importance ratings ( $\underline{M}=5.00$ ) and unanimous consensus. Those highly-regarded dispositions were: “Believes in

treating all students fairly,” “Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students,” and “Is enthusiastic about teaching.” Table 6 presents the top 18 dispositions from Round One arranged by mean scores. These 18 dispositions were deemed most compelling and, thus, used to construct the Round Two instrument.

**Table 6: The Most Compelling Teacher Dispositions in Round One**

| <b>Disposition</b>   | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|--|-------------|-----------|
| <i>Strong Agreement M 5.00 – 4.50</i>                            |             |           |
| Believes in treating all students fairly                         | 5.00        | .00       |
| Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students | 5.00        | .00       |
| Is enthusiastic about teaching                                   | 5.00        | .00       |
| Has a positive regard for others                                 | 4.90        | .31       |
| Respects the diversity of all students                           | 4.90        | .31       |
| Models ethical behavior  | 4.90        | .31       |
| Believes that all students can learn                             | 4.80        | .42       |
| Is honest and trustworthy  | 4.80        | .42       |
| Understands the importance of effective communication            | 4.80        | .42       |
| Understands the importance of being a responsive listener        | 4.80        | .42       |
| Has a positive work ethic  | 4.80        | .42       |
| Encourages critical thinking                                     | 4.70        | .48       |
| Is patient with students   | 4.70        | .48       |
| Holds students to high moral and ethical standards               | 4.60        | .51       |
| Understands the importance of good classroom management          | 4.60        | .51       |
| Is compassionate and caring                                      | 4.60        | .51       |
| Accepts responsibility in fulfilling duties                      | 4.60        | .51       |
| Is empathetic  | 4.60        | .51       |

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree; N=10

## Round Two

### Project History

Round Two began with the dissemination of the Round Two instrument, self-addressed stamped envelopes and copies of the signed consent forms to the 10 panel experts who completed Round One. The duration of Round Two was 18 days, from the time of dissemination to the receipt of all panelists' responses.

The quantitative component of the Round Two instrument was constructed from Round One survey items, specifically the 18 most compelling dispositions as determined by the panelists. In Round Two, panelists were invited to: a.) review the averaged, composite Round One ratings of the most compelling teacher dispositions in a positive classroom community; b.) reconsider their personal ratings as compared to the group mean; and c.) indicate a "change" or "no-change" response in their rating of each disposition.

The qualitative component of the Round Two instrument consisted of two parts. First, panelists were asked to write an explanation for each of their "changed" ratings. Next, panelists were invited to respond to an open-ended question, which addressed the secondary research question (i.e., What observable behaviors are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community?), by selecting a minimum of three dispositions and providing recommendations for associated behavior indicants.

## Explanation of Findings

Upon completion of both the quantitative and qualitative sections of the Round Two instrument, panelists returned their surveys to the researcher. The researcher then completed quantitative and qualitative data analyses for all items, re-calculating descriptive statistics for each of the 18 dispositions.

Upon comparative analysis, shifts in strength of agreement (i.e., mean shifts) were noted for five dispositions. Of special interest was a positive mean shift from 4.90 to 5.00, resulting in unanimous consensus for the disposition “Has a positive regard for others,” bringing the total number of dispositions with maximum importance ratings ( $M=5.00$ ) and unanimous consensus to four dispositions. Those highly-regarded dispositions were: “Believes in treating all students fairly,” “Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students,” “Is enthusiastic about teaching,” and the newly added “Has a positive regard for others.”

Shifts in the strength of agreement were noted in four other dispositions, resulting in higher importance ratings for each as depicted in Table 7. Two of the dispositions, “Believes that all students can learn” and “Has a positive work ethic,” resulted in positive mean shifts from 4.80 in Round One to 4.90 in Round Two. The disposition “Understands the importance of effective communication” produced a positive mean shift from 4.80 to 4.85. And, the disposition “Holds students to high moral and ethical standards” produced a positive mean shift from 4.60 to 4.70. Table 7 shows descriptive statistics calculated for measures

of central tendency (i.e., mean) and dispersion (i.e., consensus) for all items, and arranged by mean scores from Round Two.

**Table 7: The Most Compelling Teacher Dispositions in Round Two**

| <b>Disposition</b>   | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Change</b> |
|--|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| <i>Strong Agreement M 5.00 – 4.50</i>                            |             |           |               |
| Believes in treating all students fairly                         | 5.00        | 00        | -             |
| Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students | 5.00        | 00        | -             |
| Is enthusiastic about teaching                                   | 5.00        | 00        | -             |
| Has a positive regard for others                                 | 5.00        | 00        | ↑             |
| Respects the diversity of all students                           | 4.90        | .31       | -             |
| Models ethical behavior  | 4.90        | .31       | -             |
| Believes that all students can learn                             | 4.90        | .31       | ↑             |
| Has a positive work ethic  | 4.90        | .31       | ↑             |
| Understands the importance of effective communication            | 4.85        | .33       | ↑             |
| Is honest and trustworthy  | 4.80        | .42       | -             |
| Understands the importance of being a responsive listener        | 4.80        | .42       | -             |
| Encourages critical thinking                                     | 4.70        | .48       | -             |
| Is patient with students   | 4.70        | .48       | -             |
| Holds students to high moral and ethical standards               | 4.70        | .48       | ↑             |
| Understands the importance of good classroom management          | 4.60        | .51       | -             |
| Is compassionate and caring                                      | 4.60        | .51       | -             |
| Accepts responsibility in fulfilling duties                      | 4.60        | .51       | -             |
| Is empathetic  | 4.60        | .51       | -             |

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree; N=10

Table 8 depicts a comparative analysis of each disposition's mean and aggregate totals for all dispositions by subgroup (i.e., classroom teachers (CT), educational administrators (EA), and university faculty (UF)). Although it appears that all groups would concur that the 18 dispositions are highly regarded, modest differences were noted. The aggregate total of the CT subgroup ( $\underline{M}$  = 4.92) was greater than the EA subgroup ( $\underline{M}$  = 4.83), the UF subgroup ( $\underline{M}$  = 4.70), and the



panel mean ( $\underline{M} = 4.81$ ). In contrast, the aggregate total of the UF subgroup ( $\underline{M} = 4.70$ ) was lower than all groups, including the aggregate panel mean. Additionally, among the UF subgroup, the composite mean of three dispositions, “Understands the importance of good classroom management” ( $\underline{M}=4.00$ ), “Is compassionate and caring” ( $M=4.33$ ), and “Is empathetic” ( $M=4.33$ ) did not receive importance ratings indicative of “strong agreement” but, instead, indicated that university faculty merely “agreed” ( $\underline{M}=3.50$  to  $4.49$ ) to the compelling nature of the three dispositions in a positive classroom community. Conversely, the composite mean importance ratings for the other subgroups reportedly ranged from 4.60 to 5.00. These differences were not intended to suggest statistical significance, due to panel size and minimal variation, but were depicted to facilitate analysis, optically, in the interest of side-by-side comparisons by subgroup.

**Table 8: Comparisons of Dispositional Mean by Subgroup**

| <b>Disposition</b>   | <b>Panel <math>\bar{X}</math></b> | <b>EA <math>\bar{X}</math></b> | <b>UF <math>\bar{X}</math></b> | <b>CT <math>\bar{X}</math></b> |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Believes in treating all students fairly                         | 5.00                              | 5.00                           | 5.00                           | 5.00                           |
| Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students | 5.00                              | 5.00                           | 5.00                           | 5.00                           |
| Is enthusiastic about teaching                                   | 5.00                              | 5.00                           | 5.00                           | 5.00                           |
| Has a positive regard for others                                 | 5.00                              | 5.00                           | 5.00                           | 5.00                           |
| Respects the diversity of all students                           | 4.90                              | 5.00                           | 4.67                           | 5.00                           |
| Models ethical behavior  | 4.90                              | 5.00                           | 4.67                           | 5.00                           |
| Believes that all students can learn                             | 4.80                              | 4.80                           | 4.67                           | 5.00                           |
| Is honest and trustworthy  | 4.90                              | 4.80                           | 5.00                           | 5.00                           |
| Understands the importance of effective communication            | 4.85                              | 5.00                           | 4.50                           | 5.00                           |
| Understands the importance of being a responsive listener        | 4.80                              | 4.80                           | 4.67                           | 5.00                           |
| Has a positive work ethic  | 4.90                              | 5.00                           | 5.00                           | 4.50                           |
| Encourages critical thinking                                     | 4.70                              | 4.60                           | 4.67                           | 5.00                           |
| Is patient with students   | 4.70                              | 4.60                           | 4.67                           | 5.00                           |
| Holds students to high moral and ethical standards               | 4.70                              | 4.80                           | 4.67                           | 4.50                           |
| Understands the importance of good classroom management          | 4.60                              | 4.80                           | 4.00                           | 5.00                           |
| Is compassionate and caring                                      | 4.60                              | 4.60                           | 4.33                           | 5.00                           |
| Accepts responsibility in fulfilling duties                      | 4.60                              | 4.60                           | 4.67                           | 4.50                           |
| Is empathetic  | 4.60                              | 4.60                           | 4.33                           | 5.00                           |
| <b>Aggregate Total</b>   | <b>4.81</b>                       | <b>4.83</b>                    | <b>4.70</b>                    | <b>4.92</b>                    |

Note: EA=Educational Administrators, UF=University Faculty, CT=Classroom Teachers

Qualitative analysis of Round Two was conducted within each of the constituent components of the round pertaining to the explanation of changed ratings and recommended behavior indicants. First, pertaining to changes in ratings, three panelists chose to modify a total of five dispositions, resulting in positive mean shifts toward higher importance ratings and greater strengths of agreement.

For the disposition “Understands the importance of effective communication” ( $\underline{M}=4.85$ ), ratings changes from two panelists were noted. One university faculty member reported a response change for this disposition, from 4.00 to 4.50, based on a belief that “Effective communication is important at all levels and aspects of human interaction and (is therefore) an important disposition to have.” Another panelist, a classroom teacher, explained a response change for this disposition from 4.00 to 5.00, in this way: “Communication should be a basic skill taught (and lived) in the classroom in all subjects: reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, science – everything.”

Positive mean shifts also occurred for four other dispositions – “Has a positive regard for others,” “Is honest and trustworthy,” “Has a positive work ethic,” and “Holds students to high moral and ethical standards” – with one educational administrator altering the response for each from a rating of 4.0 to 5.00, and offering the following, interesting blanket explanation as the reasoning behind the change in ratings:

All of the listed dispositions will infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities to the degree that the individual teacher possesses and implements these dispositions. Some (dispositions) on the list are “must haves” and are rated #5. Others can be nurtured toward becoming more positive; they are rated #4. Ideally, a conscientious teacher would strive to incorporate all of them into his/ her philosophy and daily behavior. It is my position that... it is possible to work for full implementation of all positive dispositions, thereby improving the overall educational environments.

Qualitative data pertaining to the second component of Round Two arose from panelists' statements in response to the open-ended question which addressed the secondary research question: What observable behaviors are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community? Each panelist provided recommendations for associated behavior indicants for a minimum of three dispositions, resulting in a variety of data in the form of complex paragraphs to comprehensive lists of multi-faceted behaviors.

Content analysis for this study followed the steps as delineated by Fink (2003) for qualitative survey data which involved: (a) assembling the data from all sources, (b) learning the contents of the data, (c) entering and cleaning the data, and (d) analyzing the data. All data were typed into a word-processing database and arranged according to the dispositions they described, as is the case in deductive analysis. In the event that more than one panelist provided similar behavior indicants for the same dispositions, which occurred often, those indicants were synthesized and streamlined (when necessary) to avoid redundancy. In the final analysis, data were collapsed into corresponding bulleted-points for each of the dispositions they represented. Although some statements were edited and some which lacked relevance to the research question were abandoned, special consideration was given to maintaining the words and phrasing of the panelists, inasmuch as these were the clarifications used to construct the verification list in Round Three. Data pertaining to

panelists' recommendations for behavior indicants of dispositional fitness has been included in the table below (see Table 9).

**Table 9: Panelists' Recommended Behavior Indicants of Dispositional Fitness**

| <b>Category/<br/>Disposition</b>  | <b>Behavior Indicants of Dispositional Fitness</b>  | <b>Panelists<br/>Contributing<br/>To Each<br/>Category</b> |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Believes in treating students fairly</b>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is nonbiased with students</li> <li>• Will listen to all sides (perspectives) of students' accounts of events before rendering a judgment</li> <li>• Will render a decision that takes into account all reasonable perspectives</li> </ul>   | 10%  |
| <b>Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will give specific, targeted feedback and suggestions to help students achieve their goals as opposed to just saying "good job" repeatedly</li> <li>• Will use encouraging strategies and reinforcement to inspire students to do their "personal best" work</li> <li>• Understands that reluctant students (due to previous failures) require more than the usual amount of motivation and checks-in with them regularly, giving encouragement often</li> </ul> | 30%  |
| <b>Is enthusiastic about teaching</b>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exudes a contagious enthusiasm that positively impacts students' achievement and passion for learning</li> <li>• Presents engaging lessons that are informative, interesting, and fun</li> <li>• Prepares and delivers lessons that actively engage students</li> </ul>  | 20%  |
| <b>Has a positive regard for others</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows appreciation for students' contributions to classroom discussions and activities</li> <li>• Treats others with respect, setting conditions to receive respect in return</li> </ul>   | 20%  |
| <b>Respects the diversity of all students</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presents instruction and lessons that are sensitive to the experiences and cultures of students</li> <li>• Uses multiple perspectives in discussing events and subject matter</li> <li>• Identifies and accesses appropriate resources to meet students' diverse needs</li> <li>• Respects individual differences, thereby building a trusting community environment</li> </ul>  | 20%  |
| <b>Models ethical behavior</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a code of what is right and what is wrong, and projects those values in dealing with students</li> <li>• Finds fair solutions to student situations which often involve moral dimensions and challenges</li> </ul>   | 20%  |

**Table 9 continued**

| <b>Category/<br/>Disposition</b>                                 | <b>Behavior Indicators of Dispositional Fitness</b>   | <b>Panelists<br/>Contributing<br/>To Each<br/>Category</b> |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Believes that all students can learn</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will use observational techniques and other assessment data to determine a student's academic needs</li> <li>• Will teach each child (individually or in small groups) as needed and according to academic needs</li> <li>• Will look beyond student performance (or lack thereof) and engage in personal reflection on one's own instructional delivery whenever students under-perform</li> </ul>  | 10%  |
| <b>Is honest and trustworthy</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will temper truthfulness with kindness and caring</li> <li>• Will demonstrate trustworthiness by keeping promises, adhering to agreements and maintaining confidences</li> </ul>   | 10%  |
| <b>Understands the importance of effective communication</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaks clearly and correctly (grammatically speaking and devoid of expletives) at all times</li> <li>• Listens attentively and thoughtfully while students are speaking and encourages students to listen to each other courteously</li> <li>• Adheres to prescribed curricula schedules for teaching all of the language arts (writing, reading, speaking and listening)</li> </ul>   | 10%  |
| <b>Understands the importance of being a responsive listener</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is patient with students as they ask questions, answer questions and make comments</li> <li>• Pays close attention not just to the content of what the student is saying but also to the emotions that lie behind the words</li> <li>• Is "fully present" while listening and responding to students</li> <li>• Develops a deeper understanding of the students' needs through thoughtful communication</li> </ul>   | 30%  |
| <b>Has a positive work ethic</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has an excellent attendance record (and keeps good records)</li> <li>• Puts the necessary time into planning lessons with care</li> <li>• Follows through on commitments and keeps promises</li> <li>• Maintains confidences shared by others</li> <li>• Participates in professional development opportunities</li> <li>• Maintains a positive classroom environment reflective of his/ her attitude</li> </ul>   | 40%  |
| <b>Encourages critical thinking</b>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engages students in thoughtful dialogue</li> <li>• Asks "why" and doesn't accept simple "yes" or "no" answers</li> <li>• Teaches students to recognize and reject propaganda</li> <li>• Instructs students in weighing issues and considering several perspectives</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for critical thinking across the school day through independent learning, problem solving, and making inferences and predictions from open-ended questions</li> </ul> | 20%  |

**Table 9 continued**

| <b>Category/<br/>Disposition</b>                               | <b>Behavior Indicants of Dispositional Fitness</b>   | <b>Panelists<br/>Contributing<br/>To Each<br/>Category</b> |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Is patient with students</b>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will not censure a student who asks a question about a concept that has already been explained</li> <li>• Will welcome the question, re-teach, reinforce and/or re-explain the concept</li> </ul>   | 10%  |
| <b>Holds students to high moral and ethical standards</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First determines and then sets standards so that students know what behaviors are expected of them</li> <li>• Models and demonstrates ethical standards in concrete ways in his/her interactions with others</li> </ul>   | 20%  |
| <b>Understands the importance of good classroom management</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes routines and schedules in the classroom that are supportive of establishing and maintaining a positive learning environment</li> <li>• Involves the students in making the classroom a good working environment</li> <li>• Plans organized lessons in advance of classes</li> <li>• Recognizes that good classroom management is at least as important as a well-planned lesson</li> <li>• Produces an effectively-run classroom which ensures a safe, predictable environment that allows students to focus on learning</li> </ul> | 30%  |
| <b>Is compassionate and caring</b>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizes the classroom community so that students and teachers support each other and attend to each other</li> <li>• Is cognizant of each student's needs, interests and abilities</li> <li>• Knows and addresses each student by name</li> </ul>   | 10%  |
| <b>Accepts responsibility in fulfilling duties</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will meet deadlines with a positive attitude</li> <li>• Will be present for staff meetings, fulfill paperwork obligations and communicate regularly with parents</li> <li>• Will plan engaging, cohesive lessons and differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of students</li> <li>• Projects a reliability and trustworthiness that exemplifies his/her core values, which can impact (positively) the school community</li> </ul>   | 20%  |
| <b>Is empathetic</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the child's situation and is able to perceive that situation from the child's perspective</li> <li>• Can say to the child "I know how you feel" when the child experiences a loss or misfortune</li> <li>• Shares in the exuberance of the child who announces "This is my birthday. I'm six years old today!"</li> </ul>   | 10%  |

## Round Three

### **Project History**

Round Three began with the dissemination of the Round Three verification list and self-addressed stamped envelopes to the 10 panel experts. The 18 most compelling teacher dispositions and associated behavior indicants of those dispositions, as recommended by panelists in Round Two, were listed in the Round Three verification list. Panelists were invited to review the list, consider each disposition and the associated behaviors, and then provide their assessment of each by indicating agreement or disagreement. Additionally, space for comments was provided with each of the 18 items, and panelists were encouraged to add qualitative commentary in support of their positions (i.e., agreement or disagreement) concerning the associated behavior indicants of each disposition.

The duration of Round Three was 17 days, from the time of dissemination to the receipt of all panelists' responses. Upon determination that the research questions had been sufficiently answered and consensus satisfactorily achieved, the data collection phase of this Delphi investigation concluded following the completion of Round Three.

### **Explanation of Findings**

Responses from Round Three generated 30 qualitative commentaries as panelists were not limited in the number of responses and clarifications pertaining to their decisions to agree or disagree with the previously



recommended behavior indicants of the 18 dispositions. Panelists were in unanimous accord (100%) without commentary concerning their perception of appropriateness of the behavior indicants associated with six dispositions (i.e., “Respects the diversity of all students,” “Is honest and trustworthy,” “Understands the importance of being a responsive listener,” “Is patient with students,” “Is compassionate and caring,” and “Accepts responsibility in fulfilling duties.”) Regarding the remaining 12 dispositions, panelists provided qualitative commentaries that were generally supportive of the recommended behavior indicants. Panelists communicated the greatest endorsement and number of commentaries for one particular behavior indicant associated with the disposition “Believes that all students can learn.” Five panelists supplied commentaries in conjunction with this disposition, three of whom concurred with the behavior indicant which recommended that teachers engage in personal reflection as a reaction to underperformance by students. Commentaries were received from representatives of each subgroup, including one classroom teacher who noted a two-fold beneficence that can occur when teachers engage their reflective capacities:

Personal reflection by teachers is a must! When they can realize that the problem (if there is one) could possibly be with the presentation of the concept, then not only will the students receive better instruction but the teacher will grow professionally.

Two other panelists, one university professor and one educational administrator also attested to the importance of personal reflection, with the educational administrator echoing the following:

Teachers must engage in personal reflection of one's own instructional delivery whenever students under-perform – (it's) important!

In several other instances, panelists expressed opposition to a particular term or phrasing of a behavioral indicant. Of particular interest was the commentary by one university faculty member, in response to a behavior indicant associated with the disposition "Is enthusiastic about teaching," who objected to the use of the word 'fun' as a component of the indicant.

Not everything can be 'fun.' Some things are interesting and important and challenging and engaging – but not fun. Studying the Holocaust, WWII, and The Great Depression. I point this out because I've seen teachers shy away from really important curricular topics because they aren't fun.

Despite opposition to that one word (i.e., fun) that was used in the expression of the indicant, this panelist confirmed agreement with the behavior indicants as a collective unit and as associated with the disposition; therefore, unanimous consensus was achieved.

Unanimity was reported in all but five cases. In four instances consensus was strong (90%), but not unanimous. Of particular interest was the objection of one educational administrator to the behavior indicant concerning propaganda as it related to the disposition "Encourages critical thinking." The panelist's objection was based on the behavior indicant that supported the rejection of propaganda. Instead, the panelist proffered:

Teach students to recognize propaganda but not necessarily reject it. Students with a clear knowledge and understanding of propaganda should be allowed to reject it or not.

The lowest level of consensus (80%) was reported for the behavior indicants used in conjunction with the disposition “Understands the importance of effective communication,” with two panelists objecting to two separate indicants of the associated disposition. One university professor expressed concern regarding the possible underlying implications of a behavior indicant as it referred to clarity and correctness of speech.

Understanding the importance of effective communication in a respectful environment also means understanding the legitimacy of all dialects. There is danger... of denigrating non-standard dialects.

Another caveat was noted by an educational administrator, who rejected the (possible) implication of rigid adherence to curricula by stating:

At times it is appropriate to depart from the prescribed curriculum to take advantage of ‘teachable moments’.

In the final analysis, the recommended behavior indicants as associated with their dispositions were endorsed by a majority of the Delphi panelists. Overall consensus was strong with the level of consensus reported at 100% in all but five cases, and with the decision not to endorse an indicant registered by a mere three panelists. The cogent observation of one panelist, a university faculty member, summarized the cognitive process of endorsement of the indicants by focusing on dispositional fitness from both a situation-specific and interactionist perspective.

It may not be realistic to expect a teacher to be able to do them all. Dispositions are also situation-dependent. Some situations may call for a particular response with a student on a particular day – a good teacher would know what would be the appropriate response for the given situation.

Table 10 lists all 18 dispositions, their associated behavior indicants, the percentage of panelists' who endorsed them, and corresponding qualitative commentaries.

**Table 10: Commentary and Endorsement Percentages of Behavior Indicators**

| Category/<br>Disposition  | Behavior Indicators of Dispositional Fitness  | Panelists'<br>Endorsement<br>of Indicators |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Believes in treating students fairly</b>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is nonbiased with students</li> <li>• Will listen to all sides (perspectives) of students' accounts of events before rendering a judgment</li> <li>• Will render a decision that takes into account all reasonable perspectives</li> </ul>   | 100%                                       |
| Commentary  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I believe the nonbiased descriptor is very important and often overlooked. (EA #7)  |  |
| <b>Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will give specific, targeted feedback and suggestions to help students achieve their goals as opposed to just saying "good job" repeatedly</li> <li>• Will use encouraging strategies and reinforcement to inspire students to do their "personal best" work</li> <li>• Understands that reluctant students (due to previous failures) require more than the usual amount of motivation and checks-in with them regularly, giving encouragement often</li> </ul>   | 100%                                       |
| Commentary  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teachers need much encouragement too. Mentoring for new teachers is extremely important! Even though teaching is rewarding, its also very hard work. (UF #3)  |  |
| <b>Is enthusiastic about teaching</b>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exudes a contagious enthusiasm that positively impacts students' achievement and passion for learning</li> <li>• Presents engaging lessons that are informative, interesting, and fun</li> <li>• Prepares and delivers lessons that actively engage students</li> </ul>  | 100%                                       |
| Commentary  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A teacher's enthusiasm about teaching also acts as a great motivator for students who will get the message and absorb the teacher's interest so that it becomes their own. (CT#10)<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not everything can be 'fun'. Some things are interesting and important and challenging and engaging – but not fun. Studying the Holocaust, WWII, and The Great Depression... I point this out because I've seen some teachers shy away from really important curricular topics because they aren't fun. (UF #9) |  |
| <b>Has a positive regard for others</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows appreciation for students' contributions to classroom discussions and activities</li> <li>• Treats others with respect, setting conditions to receive respect in return</li> </ul>   | 90%  |
| Commentary  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I'm not so sure a teacher needs to set conditions to receive respect in return. (EA #4)<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> When teachers treat students with consideration, students react (in most instances) reciprocally; this contributes to their own (the students') personal, social development. (CT #10)   |  |

Note:  = Consent;  = Dissent; N=10

**Table 10 continued**

| Category/<br>Disposition                      | Behavior Indicators of Dispositional Fitness   | Panelists'<br>Endorsement<br>of Indicators |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Respects the diversity of all students</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presents instruction and lessons that are sensitive to the experiences and cultures of students</li> <li>• Uses multiple perspectives in discussing events and subject matter</li> <li>• Identifies and accesses appropriate resources to meet students' diverse needs</li> <li>• Respects individual differences, thereby building a trusting community environment</li> </ul>   | 100%                                       |
| Commentary                                    | None   |  |
| <b>Models ethical behavior</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a code of what is right and what is wrong, and projects those values in dealing with students</li> <li>• Finds fair solutions to student situations which often involve moral dimensions and challenges</li> </ul>  | 100%                                       |
| Commentary                                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teachers should realize that they must teach by precept and example at all times because for all practical purposes, they are 'on stage' for their audience (the students) who, very often, have only their teachers for role models. (CT #10)   |  |
| <b>Believes that all students can learn</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will use observational techniques and other assessment data to determine a student's academic needs</li> <li>• Will teach each child (individually or in small groups) as needed and according to academic needs</li> <li>• Will look beyond student performance (or lack thereof) and engage in personal reflection on one's own instructional delivery whenever students under-perform</li> </ul>   | 100%                                       |
| Commentary                                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personal reflection by teachers is a must! When they can realize that the problem (if there is one) could possibly be with the presentation of the concept, then not only will the students receive better instruction but the teacher will grow professionally. (CT #10)<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teachers must engage in personal reflection of one's own instructional delivery whenever students under-perform – (it's) important! (EA #2)<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I especially agree with the third bulleted (point). (UF #1)<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Often the needs of students are so great and complex that teachers find it difficult to teach individually or in small groups, without support. (UF #3)<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> To build on a child's strengths is to believe (that all students can learn). (EA #7) |  |

Note:  = Consent;  = Dissent; N=10

**Table 10 continued**

| Category/<br>Disposition   | Behavior Indicators of Dispositional Fitness  | Panelists'<br>Endorsement<br>of Indicators |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Is honest and trustworthy</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will temper truthfulness with kindness and caring</li> <li>• Will demonstrate trustworthiness by keeping promises, adhering to agreements and maintaining confidences</li> </ul>   | 100%                                       |
| Commentary   | None  |  |
| <b>Understands the importance of effective communication</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaks clearly and correctly (grammatically speaking and devoid of expletives) at all times</li> <li>• Listens attentively and thoughtfully while students are speaking and encourages students to listen to each other courteously</li> <li>• Adheres to prescribed curricula schedules for teaching all of the language arts (writing, reading, speaking and listening)</li> </ul>                               | 80%  |
| Commentary   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ At times it is appropriate to depart from the prescribed curriculum to take advantage of teachable moments. (EA #4)</li> <li>☒ Understanding the importance of effective communication in a respectful environment also means understanding the legitimacy of all dialects. There is danger (in the above bullets) of denigrating non-standard dialects. (UF #1)</li> </ul>  |  |
| <b>Understands the importance of being a responsive listener</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is patient with students as they ask questions, answer questions and make comments</li> <li>• Pays close attention not just to the content of what the student is saying but also to the emotions that lie behind the words</li> <li>• Is “fully present” while listening and responding to students</li> <li>• Develops a deeper understanding of the students’ needs through thoughtful communication</li> </ul> | 100%                                       |
| Commentary   | None  |  |
| <b>Has a positive work ethic</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has an excellent attendance record (and keeps good records)</li> <li>• Puts the necessary time into planning lessons with care</li> <li>• Follows through on commitments and keeps promises</li> <li>• Maintains confidences shared by others</li> <li>• Participates in professional development opportunities</li> <li>• Maintains a positive classroom environment reflective of his/ her attitude</li> </ul>   | 100%                                       |
| Commentary   | ☒ I strongly agree with all of the above statements. (EA #2)  |  |

Note: ☑ = Consent; ☒ = Dissent; N=10

**Table 10 continued**

| <b>Category/<br/>Disposition</b>                               | <b>Behavior Indicators of Dispositional Fitness</b>  | <b>Panelists'<br/>Endorsement<br/>of Indicators</b> |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Encourages critical thinking</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engages students in thoughtful dialogue</li> <li>• Asks “why” and doesn’t accept simple “yes” or “no” answers</li> <li>• Teaches students to recognize and reject propaganda</li> <li>• Instructs students in weighing issues and considering several perspectives</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for critical thinking across the school day through independent learning, problem solving, and making inferences and predictions from open-ended questions</li> </ul>  | 90%   |
| Commentary   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teach students to recognize propaganda but not necessarily reject it. Students with a clear knowledge and understanding of propaganda should be allowed to reject it or not. (EA #6)   |   |
| <b>Is patient with students</b>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will not censure a student who asks a question about a concept that has already been explained</li> <li>• Will welcome the question, re-teach, reinforce and/or re-explain the concept</li> </ul>   | 100%  |
| Commentary   | None   |   |
| <b>Holds students to high moral and ethical standards</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First determines and then sets standards so that students know what behaviors are expected of them</li> <li>• Models and demonstrates ethical standards in concrete ways in his/her interactions with others</li> </ul>   | 90%   |
| Commentary   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Also works with students to facilitate their construction of the standards. (UF#1)<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I’m not so sure that the teacher ‘determines and then set standards’ – school? Community? (EA #4)  |   |
| <b>Understands the importance of good classroom management</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes routines and schedules in the classroom that are supportive of establishing and maintaining a positive learning environment</li> <li>• Involves the students in making the classroom a good working environment</li> <li>• Plans organized lessons in advance of classes</li> <li>• Recognizes that good classroom management is at least as important as a well-planned lesson</li> <li>• Produces an effectively-run classroom which ensures a safe, predictable environment that allows students to focus on learning</li> </ul> | 100%  |
| Commentary   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very Important! (EA #2)  |   |

Note:  = Consent;  = Dissent; N=10



**Table 10 continued**

| <b>Category/<br/>Disposition</b>                   | <b>Behavior Indicators of Dispositional Fitness</b>  | <b>Panelists'<br/>Endorsement<br/>of Indicators</b> |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Is compassionate and caring</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizes the classroom community so that students and teachers support each other and attend to each other</li> <li>Is cognizant of each student's needs, interests and abilities</li> <li>Knows and addresses each student by name</li> </ul>   | 100%  |
| Commentary   | None   |   |
| <b>Accepts responsibility in fulfilling duties</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will meet deadlines with a positive attitude</li> <li>Will be present for staff meetings, fulfill paperwork obligations and communicate regularly with parents</li> <li>Will plan engaging, cohesive lessons and differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of students</li> <li>Projects a reliability and trustworthiness that exemplifies his/her core values, which can impact (positively) the school community</li> </ul> | 100%  |
| Commentary   | None   |   |
| <b>Is empathetic</b>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understands the child's situation and is able to perceive that situation from the child's perspective</li> <li>Can say to the child "I know how you feel" when the child experiences a loss or misfortune</li> <li>Shares in the exuberance of the child who announces "This is my birthday. I'm six years old today"</li> </ul>  | 90%   |
| Commentary   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I'm not so sure that even an empathetic teacher can always say 'I know how you feel' with honesty – that is not always possible. (EA #4)   |   |

Note:  = Consent;  = Dissent; N=10

## Summary of Major Findings

This chapter presented results of this Delphi study which synthesized positive psychology and teaching dispositions for the purpose of determining: (a) the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community and (b) the observable behaviors indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community. The results of this study indicated that educational professionals on this panel have a highly favorable view of positive teacher dispositions. Through statistical analysis, it was reported that panelists strongly agreed ( $\underline{M}>4.49$ ) that 18 dispositions out of 30 were deemed most compelling in a positive classroom community. From those top 18 dispositions, four favorites emerged with maximum importance ratings ( $\underline{M}=5.00$ ). Those highly regarded dispositions were: "Believes in treating all students fairly," "Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students," "Is enthusiastic about teaching," and "Has a positive regard for others."

Upon comparative analysis, exploring mean scores for individual dispositions and aggregate mean totals of 18 dispositions between the subgroups – educational administrators, university faculty, and classroom teachers – it was apparent that the dispositions were approved by all. However, modest differences were also evidenced. Classroom teachers registered the highest aggregate mean total for all dispositions ( $\underline{M}=4.92$ ) whereas university faculty registered the lowest aggregate mean total for all dispositions ( $\underline{M}=4.70$ ).

Three of the 18 dispositions, “Understands the importance of good classroom management” ( $\underline{M}$ =4.00), “Is compassionate and caring” ( $\underline{M}$ =4.33) and “Is empathetic” ( $\underline{M}$ =4.33), did not meet the researcher-determined level of “strong agreement” ( $\underline{M}$ >4.49) among university faculty but, instead, indicated that university faculty merely “agreed” ( $\underline{M}$ =3.50 to 4.49) to the compelling nature of the three dispositions in a positive classroom community. Nonetheless, the composite mean for individual dispositions and aggregate mean totals for the other subgroups ranged from 4.60 to 5.00.

Panelists were also able to recommend and agree upon behavior indicants for the 18 selected dispositions with remarkable consensus. In five instances, near unanimity was reported by university faculty and/or educational administrators who were not in complete accord with behavior indicants associated with five dispositions. In two other instances, panelists agreed to accept recommended behavior indicants despite slightly divergent views and, thus, consensus was achieved. Classroom teachers, however, expressed unanimous accord with all behavior indicants of the selected 18 dispositions. In summation, unanimous consensus (100%) was reached on the behavior indicants of 13 dispositions. Near unanimity (80% - 90%) was reached on behavior indicants of five dispositions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter will discuss the research findings presented in Chapter Four. Findings related to the primary and secondary research questions will be examined along with their convergence with previous literature (or lack thereof). Next, limitations of the study will be explored followed by possible implications and suggestions for future research. The chapter will conclude with a summative statement on positive teacher dispositions, but first an overview of the study will be provided.

#### **Overview**

This Delphi study on positive psychology and teacher dispositions was designed to identify the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities. A review of the literature revealed that no studies, to date, specifically investigated associations between positive psychology and teacher dispositions. A methodological selection, referred to as a Delphi process, utilized a panel of well-qualified experts to address the primary and secondary research questions guiding this study. Using a questionnaire designed by the researcher, the 30-item Positive Teacher Dispositions Inventory (PTDI), Delphi panelists identified what they perceived to

be the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community. In addition to determining which teacher dispositions were most compelling, panelists also recommended observable behaviors as exemplars of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community. A variation of the PTDI was developed by the researcher for the purpose of enabling panelists' qualitative commentaries and responses to the secondary research question.

The following research questions were addressed in this Delphi study:

1. What are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community?
2. What observable behaviors are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness within a positive classroom community?

Major interpretive findings pertaining to both research questions are provided below.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

U.S. educators of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have witnessed renewed attention given to the importance of teacher dispositions as a component of the requisite tripartite of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Benninga et al., 2008; Honawar, 2008). Consistent with this renewed interest was the highly-favorable view toward positive teacher dispositions, evidenced by the credible panel of educators in this Delphi study. Among the PTDI's list of 30 teacher dispositions,

panelists selected 18 dispositions as most compelling in a positive classroom community, and from those 18, four favorites emerged.

The four most highly regarded dispositions in this study ranked in the top tier for maximum importance ratings and unanimous accord among all panelists. These four favorite dispositions advocated that teachers treat students fairly, encourage and motivate students, convey enthusiasm toward teaching, and hold a positive regard for others. NCATE, however, has specifically endorsed only two professional dispositions – fairness and the belief that all students can learn (Wise, 2006). Delphi panelists decidedly concurred with NCATE'S two endorsements by rating the dispositions to: (a.) treat all students fairly and (b.) believe that all students can learn, in the top first and second tiers of this study, respectively.

“Good teachers believe that every student can learn” (Fineburg, 2004, p. 205) and by accepting a disposition that espouses this belief, as NCATE and Delphi panelists in this study have done, a perception of optimism emerges. Optimism is one of several emerging tenets of study in positive psychology, a discipline that is devoted to an emphasis on the positive aspects of human nature (Miller, Nickerson, & Jimerson, 2009). It should be noted that NCATE has not provided a cohesive theoretical framework for the construct of teacher dispositions (Freeman, 2007) and, to date, empirical data linking positive psychology and teacher dispositions remain non-existent. Alignment of these two constructs, however, is promising especially in light of the continued explicit

endorsement of a professional disposition that presents teachers as an optimistic group who believe in the learning capacity of all students.

The disposition to believe that all students can learn also generated the greatest number of qualitative commentaries from panelists in this study. Panelists were also in unanimous consensus regarding their recommended behavioral indicants for this disposition. The behavior indicants stressed that teachers use a variety of methods to meet students' academic needs (e.g., observational techniques, assessment data, and instructional individuation), and that teachers engage in personal reflection concerning their own instructional delivery, especially in instances when students under-perform. Qualitative commentaries were myriad in support of the indicant that recommended engagement in reflective action by teachers, which was consistent with Dewey's espousal of the merits of the reflective teacher one century ago (Dewey, 1910/1997). This popular disposition and its associated behavior indicants provided the only case in which recommended behaviors and qualitative commentaries were offered by at least one member of each panelist subgroup.

Delphi panelists in this study were comprised of classroom teachers, university faculty, and educational administrators, and although dispositions were approved and consensus was reached among all participants, subtle differences were noted between subgroups. Classroom teachers reported the highest aggregate totals for all dispositions, whereas university faculty reported the lowest. And, although all 18 teacher dispositions were highly favored by

panelists, university faculty registered mere “agreement” (rather than “strong agreement”) with the compelling nature of three dispositions regarding empathy, compassion and caring, and classroom management. Classroom teachers were also the only subgroup to report unanimous consensus concerning all behavior indicants associated with the 18 most compelling teacher dispositions. Extant research has suggested that differences exist among elementary teachers and secondary teachers in their characteristic perceptions of exceptional teachers, with a subject-centered orientation favored by the latter and a student-centered focus favored by the former (Book & Freeman, 1986). Consistent with previous research, modest differences were apparent among post-secondary educators and classroom teachers in this study; university faculty members were least receptive to the social and affective elements of teacher dispositions and classroom teachers were most receptive to them.

Based on the results of this study, cautious speculation could be made that the higher the grade taught, the less important positive teacher dispositions seem to be (to the teacher), especially for those dispositions that reflect social and affective elements. Upon closer examination of this somewhat troubling anomaly, university faculty members are at the highest instructional grade level on the educational continuum and they are the ones who are educating the elementary pre-service teachers. Certainly it is understandable that secondary and college level teachers may have less commitment to a particular set of positive teacher dispositions due to the classroom dynamics of adults and pre-



adults (e.g., classroom management and discipline), which are so different in elementary classrooms. Nonetheless, a cogent recommendation must be made that university faculty (the teachers' teachers) must remain cognizant of the significance of teachers' interpersonal dispositions (e.g., empathy, compassion and caring) because students at any level never outgrow the need for affective sustenance.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although great measures were taken to ensure a sagacious study, limitations were inevitable, as is the case with any study. Characteristically, Delphi panelists are recruited based on their qualifications and knowledge of the subject being investigated, and therefore, the sampling cannot be random (Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2006), which is the first limitation of this research. With this Delphi study, as is the case with any research, no matter how diverse the sample, it can never be inclusive of everyone (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). The participating panelists in this study were esteemed professionals located in a Midwestern metropolis, and therefore, not totally representative, geographically, of the population. Thus, generalizations of the results to the population cannot be made without caution, especially considering the modest sample size.

In preparing the Round One instrument for this study, several resources were utilized by the researcher, who constructed the instrument with a final compilation list of 30 teacher dispositions. Herein lies another possible limitation (and query) of the study: Should more than 30 dispositions have been included

in the PTDI research instrument? The rationale for the exclusion of additional dispositions from the PTDI was based on the fact that the researcher did not want to overwhelm the panelists with an excessive number of items and, consequently, affect the rate of response adversely. Additionally, more dispositions added to the list could have added an impression of redundancy.

The iterative nature of the Delphi rounds may possibly be responsible for another limitation of this study. In Round Two, panelists were asked to reconsider their Round One ratings of the teacher dispositions, giving consideration to the Round One ratings responses of the other panelists. It is not known to what extent panelists felt pressured to conform to the responses of the other panelists (because neither passive consent nor implicit endorsement can be measured) and, although a majority of panelists did not change their responses, the ones who did change, changed toward the mean. The differences in the Round One and Round Two responses did not skew the outcomes, but they could have.

### **Implications of the Study**

The present study has both theoretical and practical implications. The single most significant theoretical implication that arises retrospectively from this study resides in the synthesis of positive psychology and teacher dispositions. Ever since the enshrining of teacher dispositions into the standards of teacher education, the construct of teacher dispositions has lacked a cohesive theoretical framework (Freeman, 2007). References to teacher dispositions as being a

loosely-defined construct (Burant, Chubback, & Whipp, 2007) and an “empty linguistic vessel” (Freeman, 2007, p. 15), underscore the absence of a common defining language and deep theory. Theory provides a schematic framework that labels and links specifics (Peterson, 2006), and enlarges conceptual understanding. Indeed, it is possible to generate a greater understanding of positive teacher dispositions through positive psychology’s conceptual network of interacting pillars (i.e., positive subjective experience and emotions, positive individual traits and positive institutions and communities).

The first pillar, positive subjective experiences and emotions, pertains to the positive aspects of human life and an interest in positive states concerning an individual’s past, future and present (British Psychological Society, 2007; Seligman, 1998; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Within this study, there exists a capacity for viewing at least two of the compelling dispositions selected by Delphi panelists through this first pillar. The disposition that proposes that the teacher “is enthusiastic toward teaching,” denotes the joy, pleasure and ebullience that is indicative of the positive subjective experiences and emotions concerning the present-oriented trajectory of Pillar One; whereas the positive teacher disposition “believes that all students can learn,” denotes the hope and optimism of the future-oriented trajectory of Pillar One.

The second pillar, positive individual traits, which is inclusive of 24 distinct strengths, is also clustered around the following six virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, love, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Seligman,

1998; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Several positive teacher dispositions were selected by Delphi panelists in this study that appear to be consistent with the character traits and virtues of Pillar Two. They include the dispositions that propose that a teacher: (a.) is honest and trustworthy; (b.) believes in treating all students fairly; (c.) is patient with students; (d.) is empathetic; and (e.) is compassionate and caring.

The third pillar, positive communities and institutions, pertains to societal entities and civic virtues that promote and sustain human flourishing through qualities such as responsibility, civility and a positive work ethic. Delphi panelists in this study selected several positive teacher dispositions that can be perceived as consistent with Pillar Three. The following positive teacher dispositions that are representative of this pillar proffer that a teacher: (a.) has a positive work ethic; (b.) understands the importance of good classroom management; and (c.) accepts responsibility in fulfilling duties.

It bears mentioning once again that Pillar One and Pillar Two are facilitators of Pillar Three, and each plays its own role in the cultivation and maintenance of positive classroom communities. When teachers model the dispositions to be fair and to believe that all students can learn, they evince the positive individual trait of Pillar Two and the optimistic feature of the positive subjective experiences of Pillar One, respectively. Collectively, each also has its place in the positive classroom community of Pillar Three.

The aforementioned compelling dispositions, chosen by Delphi panelists in this study, are consistent with the core principles of positive psychology's three pillars. Through this study, the potential exists to expand awareness among practitioners and scholars (of education and psychology) to the potential theoretical and empirical nexus of positive psychology and teacher dispositions.

Additionally, the findings of this research study provide explicit implications for practical applications. The behavior indicants proffered by the panelists of this study provide a range of dispositional fitness exemplars that may be exhibited by either classroom teachers or teachers-in-training. In answer to NCATE's explicit documentation that teacher-candidates demonstrate classroom behaviors that are consistent with the ideas of fairness and the belief that all students can learn (Diez, 2007), Delphi panelists in this study provided recommendations for observable behaviors indicative of those dispositions, and were in unanimous consensus in their endorsement of these indicants.

Panelists indicated that teachers who show fairness in their dealings with students will not be biased toward any students and will listen to all sides and perspectives of students' accounts of events before rendering a decision. Additionally, panelists indicated that a teacher who is disposed toward believing that all students can learn will use observational and assessment data to determine each student's academic needs, then use the information to teach each student according to those needs. Further, panelists recommended that

the belief that all students can learn will extend to the teacher's reflection on his/ her own performance (or lack thereof) and said teacher will vary the instructional strategies when students under-perform.

The foregoing teacher dispositions (e.g., the belief that all students can learn and the belief that students should be treated fairly) and their related behavior indicants, elucidate the pragmatic findings of this study. Teacher accreditation agencies, teacher-training institutions, and administrators may find that this study can be a powerful tool in the clarification and assessment of positive teacher dispositions. By providing recommended behavior indicants for the aforementioned dispositions endorsed by NCATE, in addition to a host of other similarly compelling dispositions, Delphi panelists have delineated far more than what positive teacher dispositions are; they have provided pathways for the envisioning of how they can be actualized.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The results of this study suggest a number of areas for future research in the context of positive psychology and teacher dispositions. In the current Delphi study, a small credible panel of experts (i.e., classroom teachers, educational administrators, and university faculty) from a Midwestern metropolis were selected to form the participatory sample. Future studies might consider the inclusion of a larger and more widely dispersed group of experts to pursue a national consensus on positive teaching dispositions and behavior indicants,

possibly utilizing the Internet and the iterative process of Delphi research to give voice and value to a multiplicity of expert opinions nationwide.

The findings of this study suggest a modest discrepancy among educators regarding dispositions indicative of social and affective elements. Future research is needed to validate and extend the social and affective dynamics that may underpin what might constitute a disconnect between grade-level taught and the importance of certain dispositions. Follow-up research might explore the potential of grade-appropriate teacher dispositions and the extent to which these dispositions, and any others for that matter, are being addressed and how they might be assessed by teacher-training programs.

This study has assimilated in a unique way the constructs of positive teacher dispositions and the newly emerging theoretical and academic discipline of positive psychology. Future research should continue a more extensive exploration of the theoretical, empirical, and practical relationships among positive psychology, teacher dispositions, and positive classroom communities (e.g., how they complement one another), inasmuch as this is the first known study to attempt do so.

### **Conclusion**

The primary goal of this study, which was to identify the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities, was achieved in the first and second rounds of this Delphi study, when Delphi panelists selected and confirmed 18 of the most compelling teacher

dispositions. The secondary goal was achieved in the second and third rounds when Delphi panelists offered lists of observable behaviors (and commentaries) that were indicative of these teacher dispositions. The overriding need for this research and similar research is evidenced by the interest engendered in teacher dispositions for more than two decades, which has motivated some colleges and universities of teacher education to incorporate moral reasoning and sensitivity to learners in their training programs (Diez, 2007), and by the absence of a cohesive theoretical framework to engender greater conceptual understanding of positive teacher dispositions.

This study has provided research-based support for positive teacher dispositions that are essential for the cultivation of positive classroom communities. Based on the results of this study, now is the time to move beyond the explicit minimal requirement that teacher-candidates demonstrate classroom behaviors compliant with two dispositions endorsed by NCATE – fairness and the belief that all students can learn. Delphi panelists in this study indicated a proclivity for four most compelling positive teacher dispositions, which advocated that teachers treat students fairly, encourage and motivate students, convey enthusiasm toward teaching, and hold a positive regard for others. In addition to those four highly regarded dispositions, fourteen others were identified by panelists as most compelling in a positive classroom community, resulting in a total of 18 positive teacher dispositions that were deemed most compelling by the Delphi panel of experts in this study. If we are to fully educate our students and



(indeed) our teachers, teacher education institutions must recognize the importance (and perpetuation) of research on teacher dispositions and their ramifications for educating all students in positive classroom communities.

APPENDIX A  
POSITIVE TEACHER DISPOSITIONS INVENTORY (PTDI)

| <b>Positive Teacher Dispositions Inventory (PTDI)</b>  |   | <i>Stimpson 2008</i> |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Instructions:</b> Please read through the entire list first, then use your best judgment to identify the <b>most</b> compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into positive classroom communities. Circle one number to the right of each of the following 30 statements that represents the degree to which you believe the disposition infuses positive psychology into the classroom. |   |                      |   |   |   |   |
| 5=Strongly Agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2= Disagree 1=Strongly Disagree   |   |                      |   |   |   |   |
| <b>The Teacher...</b>  |   |                      |   |   |   |   |
| 1.)  | Believes that all students can learn  | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2.)  | Believes in treating all students fairly                                    | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3.)  | Is committed to social justice  | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4.)  | Is a reflective educator  | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5.)  | Recognizes the importance of collaborative efforts with other professionals | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6.)  | Recognizes the importance of lifelong learning                              | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7.)  | Understands the importance of good classroom management                     | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8.)  | Understands the importance of being a responsive listener                   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9.)  | Respects the diversity of all students                                      | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10.)   | Accepts responsibility in fulfilling duties                                 | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11.)   | Is flexible in changing circumstances                                       | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12.)   | Is patient with students  | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13.)   | Has a positive work ethic   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 14.)   | Has a generous nature   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 15.)   | Models ethical behavior   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 16.)   | Encourages critical thinking  | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 17.)   | Is honest and trustworthy   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 18.)   | Is empathetic   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 19.)   | Understands the importance of effective communication                       | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 20.)   | Exhibits a genuine authenticity of self                                     | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 21.)   | Has a positive view of self   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 22.)   | Has a positive regard for others  | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 23.)   | Holds students to high moral and ethical standards                          | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 24.)   | Values a democratic community   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 25.)   | Is compassionate and caring   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 26.)   | Is enthusiastic about teaching  | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 27.)   | Has intellectual wisdom   | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 28.)   | Recognizes the importance of encouraging and motivating students            | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 29.)   | Exhibits strong leadership  | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 30.)   | Is courageous in the face of adversity                                      | 5                    | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| <b>Comments:</b> (optional section)  |   |                      |   |   |   |   |

APPENDIX B  
CORRESPONDENCE LETTERS SENT TO PANELISTS

## **ROUND ONE LETTER (Invitation Letter)**

Dear Delphi Panelists:

I am excited and pleased to extend this invitation for your participation as a panelist in my Delphi Dissertation Research Study for you are, indeed, in excellent company! I cannot identify the other participants in the study for you, inasmuch as anonymity of panelists is a vital feature of any Delphi study. Should you agree to participate, I thank you in advance for your dedication and willingness to contribute your expertise to this unique opportunity in this exploration of an alignment of positive psychology and teaching dispositions. I know that you will use your own considerable experience as an exemplary professional in education for this cause.

Undoubtedly, you are a professional with an extremely busy schedule. However, I am writing to requisition your participation in a Delphi study because Delphi methodology permits the interaction of busy people without their having to travel to a meeting or to time-consuming conferences. Basically, the Delphi method consists of a few sets of questionnaires that are given to expert panelists (that's you). Responses to the questions are returned to the researcher (that's me) who analyzes the data and returns feedback to the panelists, who will each receive a final copy of the conclusions of the research.

This study will be the basis of my Ph.D. dissertation under the direction of Dr. David Shriberg of the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. Graduate School Dean Dr. Samuel Attoh, Dr. Pamela Fenning and Dr. Christopher Rector are also members of my dissertation committee.

The purpose of this Delphi Dissertation Research Study will be to explore a possible synthesis between positive psychology and teacher dispositions through your responses to the following questions in a minimum of two rounds of questionnaires:

- What are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community?
- What observable behaviors are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness in a positive classroom community?

I've chosen to send this invitation package before the holiday season gets underway, hoping that you can make arrangements to complete the questionnaires before the demands of the season are upon us. Should you have any questions, please feel free to call me directly at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you in advance for sharing your time and expertise, and for your contributions to this research!!

## ROUND TWO LETTER

Dear Delphi Panelists:

Thank you so very, very much for your prompt participation in Round One of my Delphi Dissertation Research Study. I hope you had a very Happy Thanksgiving and I'm wishing you all the best of everything during this Holiday Season!

Your involvement is crucial to my study and I really appreciate your taking the time to help me. You will recall that Round One requested that you indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, your opinions on the most compelling teacher dispositions necessary in a positive classroom community.

In this round, Round Two, you will have the opportunity to reappraise your responses to the Round One question: *"What are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community?"* You will also be asked to write (or type) three observable behaviors aligned with three teacher dispositions. On the following three pages you will find the 18 most compelling teacher dispositions that were chosen by you and your fellow panelists. Each page consists of two sections of exercises, with instructions provided at the beginning of each of the sections. Please remember that there are no right or wrong responses in this study.

If possible, please complete this round and return it to me within one week of receiving it. Remember there are two sections on each page and each should be completed before returning the packet. Please do not hesitate to call me (xxx-xxx-xxxx) if you have any questions at all. I will be more than happy to receive your call. Also, please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope to return your Round Two documents. I am also enclosing a copy of the consent form, which is yours to keep.

Again, thank you for your support, diligence and patience, and for your contributions to this research! Your input is extremely valuable and very much appreciated.

### **ROUND THREE LETTER**

Dear Delphi Panelists:

Happy New Year and thank you for your continued support and active involvement in Round Two of my Delphi Dissertation Research Study! I wish all of you a very happy, healthy and prosperous new year! I truly admire the quality and care evident in your responses and sound suggestions. I sincerely appreciate your prompt persistence despite your busy schedules, during what must be the busiest time of the year. The quality and utility of this effort will be a direct reflection of your involvement and I am thrilled beyond words at what we have accomplished.

Soon, I will start assembling the final chapters of my dissertation because with this round, Round Three, I expect to accomplish the goals of this study which were to determine through your responses: a.) what are the most compelling teacher dispositions that infuse positive psychology into a positive classroom community?, and b.) what observable behaviors are indicative of teachers' dispositional fitness in a positive classroom community?

Specifically, Round Three seeks verification of what you chose, as a collective group, to be the 18 most compelling teacher dispositions and your combined recommended behavior indicants of those dispositions, which have been analyzed, synthesized, distilled and then collapsed into bullet-points. You might, therefore, recognize only a few words or phrases from your Round Two responses; however, all of your behavior indicants have been incorporated into the qualifying commentaries in this round. If you agree or disagree with the inclusion of the recommended teacher behavior indicant of the stated disposition, please circle the tab marked "agree" or "disagree." When considering these comments, and especially if you disagree with them, please use the "comments" section to express any qualifying comments. Again, there are no right or wrong responses in this study.

Also, in the final section of this round, I will ask you to select one of your own personal educator dispositions that you subscribe to in your own daily endeavors with students and or teachers (preferably in the classroom or simply as a professional educator) and describe that disposition and your associated behavior. In other words, this is your time to shine so don't be shy, okay?

If possible, please complete this round and return it to me within one week of receiving it. Remember there are two sections and each should be completed before returning the packet. Please do not hesitate to call me (xxx-xxx-xxxx) if you have any questions at all. I will be more than happy to receive your call. Also, please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope to return your Round Three documents.

Many thanks and best wishes for a wonderful new year!!

APPENDIX C  
DELPHI PANEL PROFILE



## Delphi Panel Profile

To formulate a profile of the expert panelists, I will need some basic information. Please complete the following 8 items on this page by checking the appropriate boxes and/or filling in the appropriate blanks.

| 1.) Willing to Participate  | 2.) Gender   | 3.) Age  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes<br><input type="checkbox"/> No   | <input type="checkbox"/> Female<br><input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> ≤ 34<br><input type="checkbox"/> 35-44<br><input type="checkbox"/> 45-54<br><input type="checkbox"/> ≥ 55 |
| <b>4.) Which best describes your race/ ethnicity?</b>   |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White<br><input type="checkbox"/> Latino<br><input type="checkbox"/> African American<br><input type="checkbox"/> Native American<br><input type="checkbox"/> Asian American ( <i>please specify</i> ) _____<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ) _____                                       |  |  |
| <b>5.) Which best describes your highest level of education?</b>  |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree in ( <i>please specify</i> ) _____<br><input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree (( <i>please specify</i> ) _____<br><input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree and ____ added hours in ( <i>please specify</i> ) _____<br><input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral Degree in ( <i>please specify</i> ) _____ |  |  |
| <b>6.) Occupation</b>   |  |  |
| Check the <u>one</u> that best represents your current or most recent title.<br><input type="checkbox"/> Classroom Teacher (K-12)<br><input type="checkbox"/> University Faculty/ Teacher-Educator<br><input type="checkbox"/> Admin. (Principal/ Asst. Principal/ Area Instruction Officer/ Superintendent/ Consultant)                      |  |  |
| <b>7.) Number of years as a classroom teacher</b> _____.  |  |  |
| <b>8.) Number of years in the education profession (incl. yrs. as a classroom teacher)</b> _____.   |  |  |

APPENDIX D  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

## Consent To Participate In Research

**Project Title:** Maria Stimpson's Delphi Dissertation Research Study

**Researcher:** Maria Stimpson    **Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. David Shriberg

### Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Maria Stimpson for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. David Shriberg in the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. You are being asked to participate because you are both an exemplary educator and a professional with classroom experience indicative of one who understands the dispositions of effective teachers. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

### Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to identify the most compelling teacher dispositions that evidence a positive classroom community.

### Procedures:

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a minimum of two rounds of questionnaires (within approximately 2 months), which will request that you identify and rate teacher dispositions that are the most compelling in a positive classroom community, and provide recommendations for the behaviors and expressions that evidence dispositional fitness aligned with positive classroom communities. Each questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please return the questionnaires within 5 days of receipt. Questionnaires will be distributed via U.S. mail and postage paid envelopes (SASEs) will be provided for ease of responding.

### Risks/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life and there are no direct benefits.

### Confidentiality:

The information gathered (including mailing addresses) will be kept confidential and stored on a password-protected computer. Hardcopies will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Your name will not be reported with any responses that you provide and will not be reported in any presentations or publications as a result of this study. You will be assigned a code number which will not appear on any sheet with your name. Only aggregate data will be summarized and reported.

### Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not choose to be a part of this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

### Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Maria Stimpson, by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx and via e-mail at mstimps@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dr. David Shriberg, via e-mail at dshrib@luc.edu and by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola's Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

### Statement of Consent:

*Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.*

---

**Participant's Signature**

**Date**

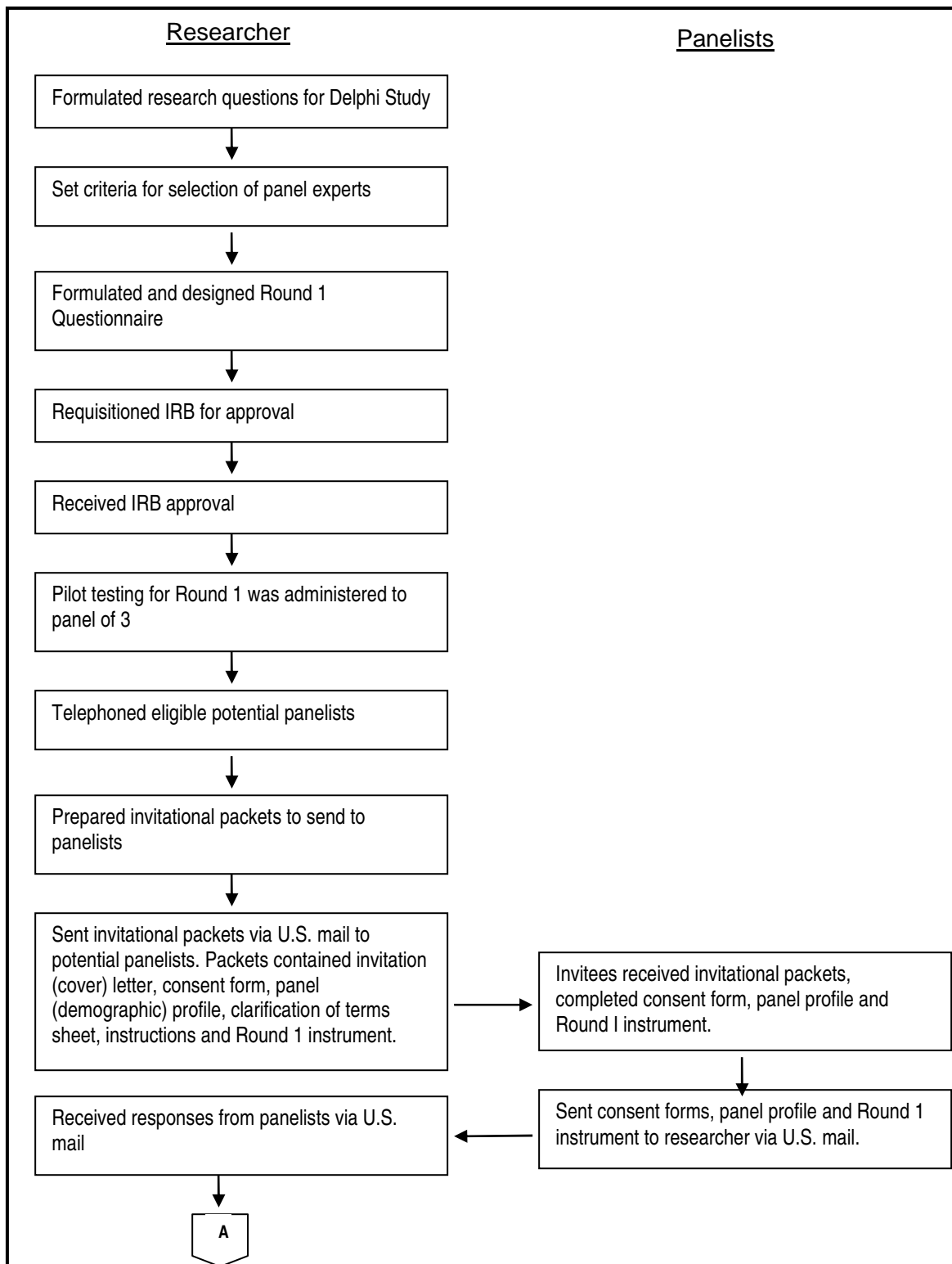
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**Researcher's Signature**

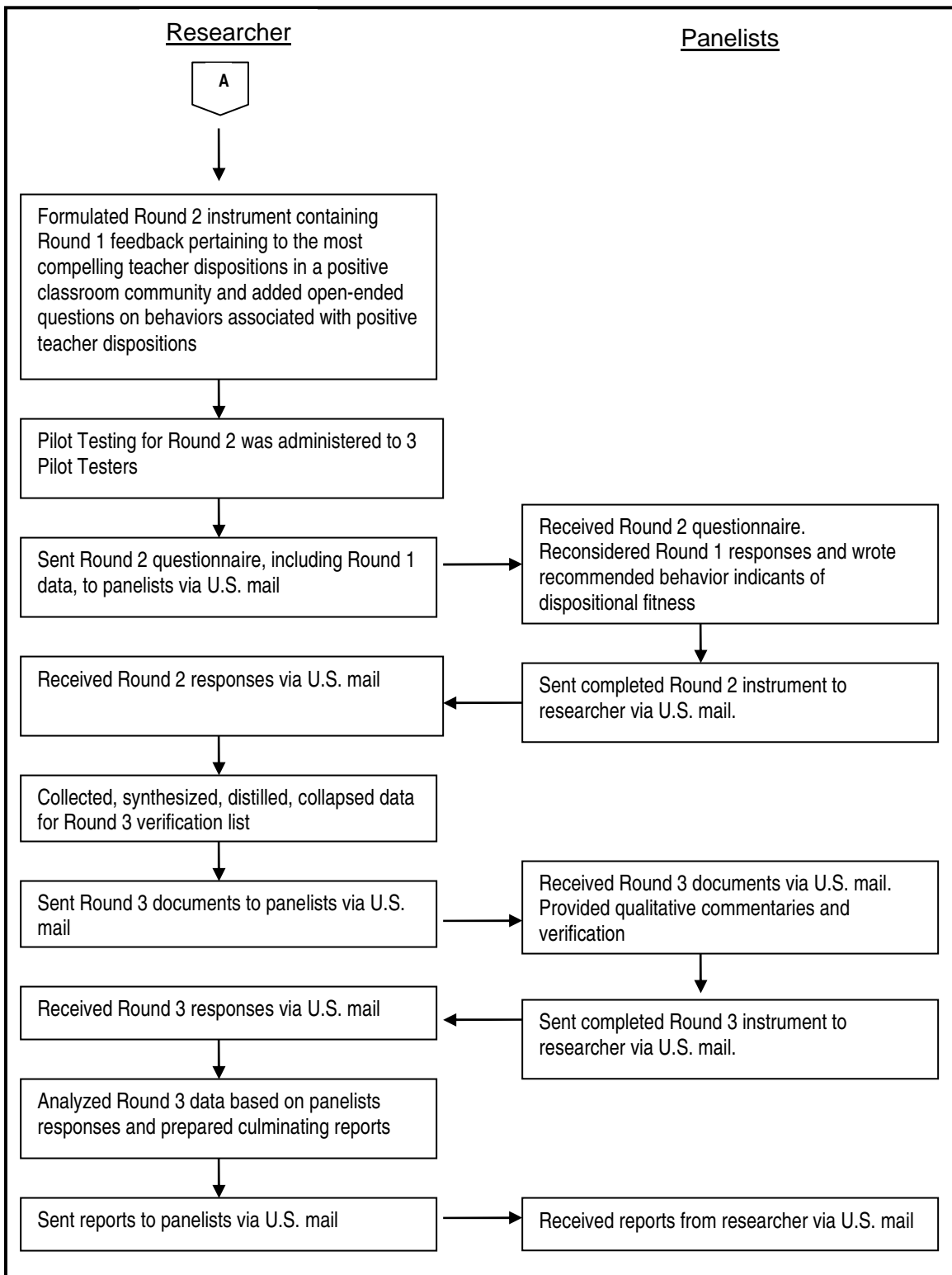
**Date**

APPENDIX E  
THE DELPHI ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS

## The Delphi Organizational Process



**The Delphi Organizational Process**



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## VITA

Maria Elizabeth Stimpson holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from Loyola University Chicago and a Master of Arts in Psychology from National-Louis University. Ms. Stimpson has served as a teacher of elementary school students, Sunday school students, and university students at both graduate and undergraduate levels. In 2002, she joined the faculty at National-Louis University in Chicago as an adjunct instructor where she has contributed to several writing projects for the psychology department and where she continues to teach today.

Maria returned to Loyola University in 2005 to study educational psychology, pursuing a double-minor in counseling and diversity and, one year later, became a full-time doctoral student and recipient of a doctoral fellowship from the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program. Her professional interests are in the cultivation and maintenance of positive classroom communities at all educational levels. A staunch believer in the humanistic premise that all of life is an education, she remains passionate about the innovative potentialities for spreading the message of positive psychology, professional dispositions, and humane leadership both within and beyond classroom communities.