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The Moral Nature of Teacher Candidate Beliefs About the Purposes of Schooling and Their Reasons for Choosing Teaching as a Career

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Abstract

This study reports teacher candidate beliefs about the purposes of schooling and their reasons for choosing a career in teaching. The beliefs are analyzed in relation to the moral work of teaching, and the findings suggest that teacher candidates choose teaching as a career, in part, to engage in moral work, and that they believe that schooling has moral ends. The article concludes by providing implications for teacher education research and practice, suggesting that these implications have particular relevance in the current environment of high stakes testing and accountability, as well as for constructivist teacher educators who seek to understand and meaningfully respond to their teacher candidates' beliefs.

The purpose of this article is to continue to strengthen the case for attending to the moral work of teaching in teacher education. We do so by reporting and analyzing the moral nature of teacher candidates' reasons for choosing a career in teaching and their beliefs about the purposes of schooling, as well as by making a case for addressing these widely held beliefs and motivations as an important part of constructivist teacher education practice. As we discuss below, these reported beliefs and motivations are laden with connections to the moral work of teaching, suggesting that our teacher candidates begin their preparation as teachers with some inherent moral language and explicit desires to engage in the moral work of teaching—particularly moral education and development—but unaware of contemporary purposes of schooling that might impede those desires. By asking teacher candidates to suppress their moral beliefs and motivations—and by leaving beliefs and motivations unattended in teacher education curriculum—teacher educators may do a great disservice to the individuals they are training for the profession.

In the analysis of these motivations and beliefs, we make at least three basic theoretical assumptions. First, as stated above, we fall in with an increasingly long line of scholars who assume that the practice of teaching is infused with moral and ethical considerations (Campbell, 2003; Fenstermacher, 1990; Hansen, 2001; Tom, 1984) and that teachers, whether they know it or not, engage in the moral and character education of the students in their classrooms (Berkowitz, 2002; Noddings, 2002). Second, we assume, in the constructivist tradition, that effective

teaching is informed by prior beliefs, and that attending to these prior beliefs in teacher education is important when learning how to teach (Raths & McAninch, 2003; Richardson, 1996, 2003; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Smylie, 1988; Tobin, 1990). Finally, we believe that the prevailing educational ideology (Sanger, 2012)—with its myopic focus on high stakes testing as a result of contemporary accountability reform efforts—is detrimental to the broader, moral purposes of schooling (Biesta, 2009, 2010; Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2010; Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008) and that the practice of teaching and teacher education ought to be informed by these moral purposes.

Given these assumptions and the purpose of this article, we begin below by providing a description of the methods employed in our study. Next, we report data on teacher candidates' reasons for choosing a teaching career and their beliefs about the purposes of schooling, highlighting the ways in which their motivations and beliefs are connected to the moral work of teaching. And, finally, we discuss moral beliefs and motivations in the context of teacher education. To do so, we examine the implications for developing moral language in teacher candidates, the implications for preparing teacher candidates to engage in moral education and development, and the implications raised by the tension between the reported beliefs and motivations of teachers and the prevailing educational ideology. These implications have particular relevance for teacher educators who seek to prepare their candidates for the moral work of teaching in the current environment of high stakes testing and accountability, and they also have relevance for research on teacher education that seeks to understand and respond to the learners that populate preparation and development programs.

Methods

As we have reported elsewhere (Osguthorpe & Sanger, in press), the data reported in this paper come from our study of teacher candidates' beliefs at Boise State University. These candidates reflect the student population of the university: approximately 86% Anglo Americans, 2% African American, 8% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and less than 1% American Indian. Most of the candidates are female, and most are in the elementary education program.

Data Sources

The data include two sets of writings. The first comes from 267 essays that candidates submitted for application or continuance in the teacher education program. The essay is required of all teacher candidates who desire a placement in schools, based on the following prompts: Why have I decided to become a teacher? And, what professional goals do I expect to achieve as a result of my decision to become a teacher?

The second set comes from the responses of 92 teacher candidates, each of whom responded to an open-ended questionnaire completed as part of an assignment in an undergraduate educational foundations course. This course is typically taken in a student's sophomore or junior year and is required for admission to the teacher education program. The questionnaire was distributed via an electronic survey software system mid-way through the semester as part of a class activity regarding the moral work of teaching. It elicited expressions of beliefs regarding the nature and purpose of teaching and the moral aspects of the students' future work. These questions had not been attended to in the foundations course, nor had these teacher candidates encountered them (or related questions) in other courses, as these candidates had not yet been admitted to the teacher education program. The questionnaire asked the following questions: (1) Can we teach children to be morally good? Please explain. (2) How does moral development occur? (3) What is your definition of morality? And (4) what is the purpose of schooling? Students submitted responses anonymously, and then participated in an online discussion related to their responses.

These four questions were derived from the Moral Work of Teaching Framework (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2005, 2009). This framework consists of four categories designed to assist examination of the moral domain as it relates to the practice of teaching. These four categories include: (1) psychological beliefs related to the nature of moral development; (2) philosophical beliefs related to the nature of morality; (3) educational beliefs related to the point and purpose of schooling; and (4) contingent factors that help explain the content of the other three categories.

Our analysis focuses on teacher candidate descriptions of their reasons for choosing a career in teaching and their espoused views on the purposes of schooling, extending a preliminary analysis presented in the initial reporting of

the data (Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2010). This article builds upon that previous study by further examining the tensions and implications related to the moral beliefs and motivations of the surveyed teacher candidates.

Procedures of Analysis

We used content analysis as the primary method to examine the data. Content analysis here refers to a “qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2001, p. 453; see also Marshall & Rossman, 2006). We read and re-read the teacher candidates’ writings in the first stage of analysis, and then we created codes for the data using a start list (Erickson, 1986; Huberman & Miles, 2002) that reflected the categories of the Moral Work of Teaching Framework (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2005, 2009). For example, we first coded statements that were distinctly philosophical, psychological, or educational in nature, following the categories of the Moral Work of Teaching Framework (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2005). Within these categories, we used inductive coding techniques to generate and refine themes (Huberman & Miles, 2002; see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and we held data analysis meetings to discuss findings, triangulate emergent themes, and build codebooks (Patton, 2001).

Results

In this section we report the teacher candidates’ responses to the essay questions focusing on their reasons for choosing a career in teaching. We also report the candidates’ responses to the fourth survey question related to the purposes of schooling.

Reasons for Choosing a Career in Teaching

In the 267 essays analyzed in our study, some of the most commonly cited reasons for choosing teaching were to make a positive difference in the lives of students (39%) and to be a role model (32%). Candidates also emphasized that they wanted to teach because teaching is a rewarding and challenging career (23%) that will allow them to share their love of learning (20%) and realize their desire to work with kids (16%). These reasons emerged as our students’ primary motivations for choosing a career in teaching.

Secondarily, candidates put forward specific experiences in their lives that either catalyzed or crystallized these primary motivations. For example, they cited past personal experiences with a teacher or family member that inspired them to become a role model and teacher (40%); they described various coursework, volunteering, and field experiences in teaching that gave rise to this desire (26%); and some simply and resoundingly declared that they were called/destined to teach (15%). Frequencies of each theme are presented below in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Primary Reasons for Choosing a Career in Teaching

The analysis of candidates’ responses to these essay questions quickly revealed that many of our teacher candidates hold beliefs that are consistent with the extant literature on why teachers choose a career in teaching (Book & Freeman, 1986; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Goodlad, 1984; Joseph & Green, 1986; Serow, Eaker, & Ciechalski, 1992; Watt & Richardson, 2007). While the data from prior studies have typically not been analyzed in explicitly moral terms, we find that the most prominent reasons for becoming a teacher are significantly connected to the moral work of teaching. Below we further examine these reasons through this lens.

Almost 40% of our teacher candidates expressed a desire to make a positive difference in the lives of students, which illustrates the moral altruism and regard for others that commonly brings people to the teaching profession. Examples of these responses include:

E9 – If I have the power of changing just one child's life it would be worth more than all the money in the world to me. Children are very important people and we need to come to understand that they are our future and we want to be the ones leading them down the right paths of life.

E34 – I realize it will be my responsibility to be a positive role model to my students. When children are of school age, many spend more time with their teachers than they do their parents... There are children who do not have positive role models in their lives; hopefully, I can give that to them.

S53 – I want to become a teacher so that I can positively affect the lives of my students and challenge them to become humane citizens, neighbors, co-workers, friends, spouses, parents, and people.

It is clear from our candidates' responses that many of these future teachers want to have a moral impact on their future students—be it as a positive role model and “guiding light,” or by directly teaching life lessons that go beyond academic learning. From their comments about role models, we can also infer that many of them anticipate acting in the place of a parent in the moral domain because they think that many children do not have positive role models in their lives, and they hope to stand in for this supposedly missing influence.

Also, because of the potential impact that the surveyed candidates anticipate having on their future students, they often emphasize their desire to teach because teaching is a rewarding and challenging career. Examples of this tendency include:

E36 – If I must work the rest of my adult life I would like to be a part of something rewarding and worthwhile. I hope by giving my time to help others succeed in life I will gain a sense of purpose and unselfishness.

S4 – I can't think of any other profession that, for me, reaps as many benefits as being a teacher does. The sense of accomplishment one must feel at the end of the day, knowing you've done something truly valuable, has to be incredible.

On the surface, this desire to reap the rewards of a challenging career appears to be self-serving. But for many teacher candidates, these rewards are moral rewards (Santoro, 2011). That is, they are derived from doing something that has moral worth and value. Thus, our teacher candidates seem to see something valuable in giving back and helping others by empowering children for success in life.

Additional examples of this moral motivation are expressed in our teacher candidates' desire to *share their love of learning*. In essence, we think that many of our candidates have a desire to *share* something that they have (a love of learning, in this case) with their future students. The desire is not altogether altruistic, as the candidates want to share their love of learning because they themselves enjoy doing so and anticipate the intrinsic rewards of this process, but there also appears to be a moral dimension in their willingness to share, help, and give back, perhaps as one way of making a difference in the lives of others.

Of course, no study of reasons for choosing a career in teaching would be complete without the ubiquitous, “I want to teach because I love working with kids,” and a number of teacher candidates professed just such a love:

E39 – I have decided to become a teacher because I love the classroom and I love children! Education is so important and a teacher has an awesome responsibility to be a positive influence in these young people's lives.

Much like sharing a love of learning, determining that this expressed love of children is moral in nature would require further probing and exploration, because of its self-interested dimension. But we think it is worth mentioning that this oft-derided motivation—especially in teacher education circles—for choosing a career in teaching can be interpreted as having a moral dimension. For example, this love might be connected to their above stated desire to have a moral impact by teaching valuable life lessons, by being a role model, etc. And this type of expressed love is certainly important when developing caring relationships, which serve as a primary medium for moral education and development (Battistich, 2008; Solomon, Watson, & Battistich, 2001; Watson, 1998). In fact, ongoing research on the importance of caring relationships in both the moral and academic growth of young people suggests that a love of children might be one of the more critical aspects of an effective and responsible teaching practice (Watson, 2008; Watson & Ecken, 2003).

Catalytic Experiences and Individuals

Many of our teacher candidates cited past personal experiences that inspired them to choose a career in teaching. These experiences served to either catalyze or crystallize their primary reasons (to make a positive difference, be a role model, reap the rewards of a challenging career, share their love of learning, etc.), suggesting that these positive experiences with teaching gave rise to a desire to provide that same type of experience for the next generation. Responses indicative of this include:

S2 – I was fortunate enough to have an excellent educational experience. Numerous teachers had a positive impact on my life. They all steered me in the right direction, which ultimately led to my success. Several teachers were not only passionate to help me excel academically, but they taught me valuable life lessons. Most importantly they showed me that they genuinely cared. The benefits that I received from these teachers inspired me to educate children of the future.

Similarly, teacher candidates described various coursework, volunteering, and field experiences that gave rise to this desire:

E12 – When helping in a [kindergarten] classroom, I saw the love that these students had for their teacher and how much they learned from her. It was amazing to me to see how much of an impact the teacher, and even me, had on these children. Some of these children came from a very poor background or had parents that were at work more than they were at home. I noticed how the classroom was a place for these children to go to receive love and attention as well as academics. From that moment on I knew I wanted to be a teacher so that I could become that impact on these children's lives.

These positive experiences with the teaching profession helped our students understand the type of impact they might be able to have, and they are important for at least two reasons. First, the type of catalytic experiences and individuals they described have a strong connection to the moral work of teaching, something that is evident in most responses. This moral connection is visible in descriptions of teachers forming immediate bonds, providing love and attention beyond academics, achieving noble ends, and serving as “spectacular” role models. The practice of teaching seems to have great allure to our teacher candidates because they have observed individuals engaged in the moral work of teaching (or they have engaged in such work as volunteers, interns, etc.), and they believe they can have this same type of impact on their future students. Second, because this belief is connected to previous life experiences, we suggest that it is psychologically central, making it important to address in teacher education practice (Richardson, 1996, 2003; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011).

Finally, although it was only explicitly mentioned by 15% of our teacher candidates, one of the most unambiguously expressed reasons for deciding to become a teacher was “the call to teach.” Those who described their decision to teach as a calling suggest that they were destined, even born, to teach.

E1 – I have a natural desire to help people. I want to be a teacher, because I believe it is what I am meant to do. I have felt a pull toward this career over the last several years and decided it was best not to be at odds with my nature any longer.

E22 – When selecting a career, there are those who decide to enter a profession and others are called into it...For me teaching is not something I decided to do, it is something that is an innate part of who I am.

The moral dimension is not explicit in all of the responses. Some teacher candidates suggest that they feel called to help and serve others, but most teacher candidates simply and resoundingly declare that teaching, for them, is destiny or innate. From these declarations, we do not want to infer too much in the way of a connection to the moral work of teaching. However, similar to Lortie's (1977) findings, it seems safe to assume these teacher candidates see their future work as “a valuable service of special moral worth” (p. 28). At the least, it is unlikely that anyone would feel especially called or destined to a vocation that they didn't feel had some significant moral value.

In sum, we found complexity and variation in the reasons our candidates gave for choosing a career in teaching. But across those variations, moral meaning was clearly present in the data, expressed purposefully in a desire to make a positive difference in the lives of students, to be a role model, as well as to reap moral rewards of teaching practice.

It is also important to note that these moral reasons were often derived from past personal experiences with teachers and family members that helped our teacher candidates see the moral influence they might be able to have in the classroom as they carry out their moral call to teach. Many of our teacher candidates not only choose teaching because they believe they can engage in moral education and development but also because they have engaged in moral education and development in previous classroom experiences—indicating the psychological centrality of this belief and the importance of attending to it in teacher education practice. We will discuss these findings in more depth, but, for now, we turn to our teacher candidates' responses to the fourth survey question.

The Purposes of Schooling

To explore teacher candidates' educational beliefs as they relate to the moral work of teaching, we asked them to describe the purposes of schooling. Three main categories of beliefs about the purposes of schooling emerged from our analysis of the data. Our teacher candidates expect schools to: (a) prepare students for the real world; (b) strengthen academic capacities; and (c) encourage moral and/or prosocial development (as opposed to anti-social). Table 2 below describes the frequencies of each category of beliefs. Examples of these beliefs are, in turn, discussed following the table.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Preparation for the Real World

A high percentage (79%) of our candidates believe that the purpose of schooling is, *in general*, to prepare students for future success in the “real world.” They emphasize that education should help students prepare to attend college, get a job, earn money, and find their place in the real world. They also believe that schooling serves to prepare students for life as productive citizens and to give back to and function in society:

Q4 #18 – The ultimate purpose of schooling is to provide an education to teach students things that they want to know and need to know in order to function in society.

Q4 #25 – I think that the purpose of school is to teach kids what they need to know for the real world.

Q4 #34 – [The purpose of schooling is] to get a better awareness of the world and to get a higher paying job.

Q4 #35 – The purpose of schooling is to prepare students for real-life situations, college, jobs etc.

Q4 #43 – The purpose of schooling is to give children the tools and experience they need to be productive citizens.

Q4 #53 – The purpose of schooling is to create good, well-educated citizens.

Our candidates appear to have a general belief that the purpose of schooling is to prepare students to function in society. It is not entirely clear how to interpret what they mean by “function in society,” as that function relates to being college educated, gainfully employed, and contributing to the economy. It seems to mirror what Labaree (2010) calls “the most prominent [contemporary] American rationale for schooling,” which is “to increase the productive skills of the workforce and promote economic growth” (p. 7). As that function relates to personal fulfillment and “creating good well-educated citizens,” it seems to connect to some of the broader purposes espoused in America since the inception of the common school (Rothstein et al., 2008). Regardless, these differences are often difficult to disentangle in the data, and it is most accurate to suggest that many of our teacher candidates appear to believe in the notion that schools provide preparation for some level of future success in life and contribution to society.

Strengthen Academic Capacities

In suggesting that the purpose of education is, in general, to prepare students for some future success, our teacher candidates put forward various purposes of schools as a means to that end. More than half (54%) of our teacher candidates believe that an important means of preparing students for future success is to provide instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, history, science, critical thinking, etc. They suggest that schooling should focus on the skills inherent to the core subject matter. Doing so will help prepare students for the future:

Q4 #22 – They need to be taught the core subjects to expose them to new ideas and possible interests.

Q4 # 16 – The purpose of schooling is to provide education and resources for young students so they will be able to critically think.

Q4 #77 – Schooling teaches the student how to be a part of society by providing skills in math, language, and science.

Our teacher candidates seem to place great emphasis on these academic capacities. Even given the larger context of this survey on the moral work of teaching, a number of teacher candidates made a point of singling out these academic purposes as the most important (if not solely important) purpose of schooling:

Q4 #78 – Schooling should be purely about teaching children subjects such as math, science, English and so forth. It should not be the responsibility of the school system to attempt to teach children how to be moral.

In this way, our teacher candidates appear, to some degree, to buy into the “prevailing educational ideology” (Sanger, 2012) that emphasizes core subject matter mastery as the point and purpose of schooling. This ideology is rooted in standardized test scores as a measure of student learning in core academic subjects, and it myopically focuses on these measures to the exclusion of the broad moral and social purposes of schooling.

Encourage Moral and/or Prosocial Development

Many of our teacher candidates also mentioned purposes of schooling that describe the place of moral education in the classroom, suggesting that schools do more than provide access to academic subject matter:

Q4 #22 – They also need to be taught ethics and a value of what's right and wrong so they can become honest and benevolent members of society.

Q4 #30 – I believe that the purpose of schooling should go beyond just academics. I believe teachers should teach students about values, and respect, and compassion. For many children, teachers are the best role models they will ever have.

Q4 #81 – I feel that at younger ages it is very important to teach 'rights and wrongs' as well as the foundation of what a person should need as they grow up.

Often in connection to these moral education purposes, and in contrast to the academic purposes, many of our candidates also emphasize the function of schools in promoting social skills:

Q4 #1 – it is not just providing academic knowledge, it is helping to teach social skills.

Q4 #33 – I think the purpose of schooling is mainly to produce a competent society where people can make educated decisions. School also serves to educate people socially by teaching how to live and get along with everybody.

This attention to moral and prosocial purposes of schooling in our teacher candidates' responses should not be overstated given the nature of the survey itself. The distinction between moral development and prosocial development is likely very thin (we separate them in this data only to show that many of our candidates seem to draw a line between attention to developing morality and attention to teaching social skills), but it is clear that many of our teacher candidates (51%) believe that schooling is more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. We will discuss this point in more depth in the next section.

In sum, the large majority of our candidates believe the purpose of schooling is to prepare students for future success in the real world of college, jobs, and citizenship. They also believe that this purpose is accomplished in schools by strengthening academic capacities, as well as encouraging moral and/or prosocial development. The implications for these beliefs, as they connect to the moral work of teaching and teacher education, are discussed below.

Discussion

If teacher educators take constructivism seriously, then we think the teacher candidates' beliefs discussed in this article are useful for teacher education. After all, the more teacher educators know about the beliefs that teacher candidates bring with them into classrooms the better teacher educators will be able to teach (Richardson & Placier, 2001). However, it is the combined analysis of these beliefs that we find most interesting, as they shed important light on teacher candidates' motivations to engage in moral education and the moral purposes they espouse for schooling. We believe the analysis has important implications for teacher education research and practice regarding how teacher educators might attend to the moral work of teaching. The implications discussed below include: (a) developing moral language in teacher education; (b) preparing moral educators; and (c) providing tools to cope with the effects of the prevailing educational ideology.

Developing Moral Language

Two points of analysis bear mentioning with regards to teacher candidates' tendency to cite moral education and social development as two of the primary purposes of schooling. First, *it is interesting that our teacher candidates even mention the word "moral" in their responses*. As an increasing number of teacher education researchers suggest, moral language is missing from teacher education programs (see Bergem, 1992; Sockett & LePage, 2002; Thornberg, 2008; and Willemsse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2005). Not only is it rare for teacher candidates to spontaneously discuss schooling in explicitly moral terms, but they are also particularly reticent to even mention the word "moral" in classroom discussions related to the moral work of teaching. However, after a simple survey focused on the moral work of teaching, at least a third of the surveyed candidates appeared comfortable discussing the purpose of schooling in moral terms. They specifically mentioned the role that they would play in the moral education and moral development of their future students, suggesting that they not only wanted to fulfill this role, but that this role served as a primary reason for choosing a career in teaching.

That said, we also find it interesting that only 35% of survey respondents suggest any connection to a moral purpose of schooling when taking a survey on the moral work of teaching. In other words, one might anticipate that after providing responses to questions related to the moral work of teaching (Can we teach children to be good? How does moral development occur? And, What is your definition of morality?), teacher candidates would transfer that discussion to the final question on the survey (What is the purpose of schooling?). However, regardless of the number of participants who incorporated such language into their responses, *we were intrigued by the ease with which we were able to introduce morality into the language of our teacher candidates' discussions* of the purposes of schooling. Few, if any, teacher candidates appeared uncomfortable with the content of the survey, and they all seemed quite confident in their responses—even those responses that contained explicit reference to morality. No one suggested that they did not understand the questions regarding morality, moral development, and the like, and many of them transferred that language to their beliefs about the purposes of schooling.

We think it is important to give teacher candidates opportunities to use the moral language that they bring with them into teacher education classrooms, if only to allow them to talk about morality and identify some ways in which their beliefs about morality might inform their future practice. As Sanger (2001) suggests,

It may help simply...to talk about morality, by unpacking the many ways we think about it, and demystifying the topic. If we want teachers to be able to examine critically their beliefs and come to a better understanding of how they may affect the moral development of their students, this seems to be a valuable first step. (p. 698)

The data reported above help us understand that just talking about the moral work of teaching (or taking a survey on it) does, indeed, help teacher candidates articulate their beliefs. However, given the responses (and the frequently missing moral language), we think it is important for teacher educators to engage with these beliefs in order to help teacher candidates unpack and demystify them.

The moral language needed to engage these teacher candidate beliefs can take myriad forms, including the terminology and concepts related to an understanding of moral education and moral development in classrooms, as well as the morality and ethics associated with the everyday decision-making and enactment of teaching practice—be it the way teachers administer a test, attend to classroom management, determine class rules and norms, interact with colleagues and parents, design a lesson plan, etc. Given the great extent to which classroom life is infused with morality (and it bears mentioning again that no one is arguing that it is not), we believe that assisting teacher candidates in developing moral language is paramount, especially if we expect them to be fully prepared for initial practice.

And, as suggested above, developing this language as a part of teacher preparation is not necessarily an impossible task—even in the thinly stretched teacher education curriculum. As Thornberg (2008) suggest, we need to develop a “professional language” in teacher education that reflects the professional knowledge base related to the moral work of teaching. Teacher educators can begin by merely talking about morality with teacher candidates (Sanger, 2001), and then identify the ways in which teaching is, indeed, a moral endeavor, for which there are numerous resources (Campbell, 2003; Hansen, 2001; Stengel & Tom, 1995). There are multiple opportunities to develop teacher candidates’ moral language in teacher education—one of those ways focuses specifically on helping teacher candidates prepare to engage in moral education, and is discussed below. The more difficult task might simply be preparing teacher educators to infuse moral language throughout the curriculum, as moral language seems to be far removed from contemporary discourse related to teacher education research and practice (see Sanger & Osguthorpe, in press).

Preparing Moral Educators

The data reported above suggests that the development of teacher candidates’ moral language merits some attention. We also believe that the data suggest a need to assist teacher candidates in understanding their role as moral educators. More than a third of the surveyed candidates chose a career in teaching for reasons that amount to a desire to engage in the moral work of teaching, with particular attention to one aspect of that work: the moral education and development of the children in their charge. And a corresponding number of teacher candidates espouse purposes of schooling that are directly related to moral education and moral development. When they enter their future classrooms, they expect to be a role model, teach students about values, encourage students to be moral citizens, and teach rights and wrongs. Some even feel called, destined, or born to do so. However, teacher education programs typically do not address, let alone systematically and explicitly develop, candidates’ capacity to think about and respond to the moral aspects of everyday classroom practice (see Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 2003; Sanger & Osguthorpe, in press).

To emphasize this point, consider the attention given to moral education and moral development on the assessment form that a student teaching supervisor might use to evaluate a student teacher. The form certainly covers content knowledge, instructional planning, instructional strategies, assessment, classroom management, learner development, individual differences, and professional commitment among other evaluation categories. But it would likely be strange to sit down post-observation with a group of student teachers and discuss their content knowledge of moral development and their use of specific methods of moral education in their classrooms during the observed class session (or to have a discussion about the moral values or “rights and wrongs” that they were teaching their students during that class session). At best, such discussions would likely be deemed nonessential or peripheral in importance to the actual assessment of teaching and learning as it relates to academic subject matter. Discussing moral values would also be at odds with the language and structure of the student teaching assessment forms used in most teacher education programs.

But in an effort to further develop teacher candidates' moral language capacity and then connect it to practice, we believe content and instruction related to moral education and moral development should also be introduced into the teacher education curriculum in a way that is naturally connected to teaching practice. For example, it would be natural to discuss morality and moral education as a prominent part of a course on classroom management and to assess teacher candidates in field experience on the moral considerations they employ in their classroom management strategies (see Nucci, 2006; Richardson & Fallona, 2001; Watson, 2008; Watson & Battistich, 2006). It would also be natural to substantively attend to theories of moral development in a course on educational psychology and then assess teacher candidates in a field experience vis-à-vis their understanding of how learners grow and develop academically, socially, and morally in ways that build both character and community (Battistich, 2008; Watson, 1998). And, finally, it would certainly be natural to teach the history of moral education (McClellan, 1999) and issues related to contemporary character education practices (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005) in educational foundations courses, and then develop and assess those practices in clinical field experience as they connect to the creation of learning environments that are grounded in fostering trust, respect, and care. These examples lead us to believe that the fit between preparing teacher candidates as moral educators and contemporary teacher education practice is a natural one—a fundamental and enhancing feature of teacher education curriculum and instruction that simply seeks to render teaching both effective and responsible (Oser, Dick, & Patry, 1992).

The Tension Between Teacher Candidates' Beliefs about the Purposes of Schooling and Their Reasons for Becoming Teachers, and the Prevailing Educational Ideology

To argue that the connection between the moral work of teaching and teacher education is a natural one is not to suggest that attending to such work in teacher education is an easy or simple endeavor. Again, the prevailing educational ideology (Sanger, 2012) that focuses narrowly on standardized test scores of core academic subjects presents a daunting challenge for teacher educators who hope to attend to the moral work of teaching in their teacher education practice, *even though their teacher candidates might enter their teacher education programs with desires to engage in the moral work of teaching*. As we have indicated elsewhere, there seems to be an interesting tension between (a) the moral nature of our teacher candidates' reasons for choosing a career in teaching and the purposes they espouse for schooling and (b) the academic emphasis of the prevailing educational ideology (Osguthorpe & Sanger, in press).

This tension is evident in our teacher candidates' *broad* reasons for choosing a career in teaching, the *broad* purposes they espouse for schooling, and the *narrow* focus of the prevailing educational ideology. Many of our teacher candidates report choosing teaching as a career for broad reasons, many of which are related to the moral work of teaching (such as making a positive difference in the lives of students and being a role model); and, similarly, many of them believe that there are broad purposes of schooling, including those related to moral and prosocial development. However they fail to acknowledge or suggest that their motivations and beliefs related to the *moral* work of teaching might run counter to the prevailing educational ideology and its narrow focus on *academic* outcomes. Put another way, although they align themselves well with the prevailing educational ideology—by placing great emphasis on the academic capacities that schools provide to help students achieve success in the future—they also espouse beliefs that are motivated by reasons related to the moral work of teaching and are at odds with the prevailing educational ideology. Thus teacher candidates seem to believe that they can attend to both moral/prosocial development and academic outcomes without any recognition that they will be teaching in an environment that has effectively squeezed out any notion of the broader moral and social purposes of schooling; an environment that only values what can be measured (Biesta, 2009), and places emphasis squarely on standardized test scores and the means to increasing those scores (Ravitch, 2010; Rothstein et al., 2008).

This finding is supported by the data from the study, but it is perhaps best highlighted in the following description of a typical class activity with teacher candidates. During the first class meeting of the semester in an educational foundations course, the instructor asks teacher candidates to write down their reasons for choosing a career in teaching and the purposes they espouse for schooling. After writing down their individual responses, teacher candidates compare their responses and come to consensus in small groups. Their responses are typically wide-ranging and indistinguishable from the data reported above.

But once they have reported their small group consensus, they are asked to review the consensus and identify a *primary* reason for choosing a career in teaching and a *primary* purpose for schooling. Invariably, when pressed to select a primary reason as a large group, they put forward a reason that is connected to the moral work of teaching (such as, make a positive difference in the lives of students). And after surveying all of the various purposes for schooling (typically categorized as social, moral, and academic), they almost always choose academic purposes as their primary reason. The teacher candidates thus put forward purposes of schooling that connect to the moral work of teaching, but they do not hesitate to select academic purposes as the primary reason for schooling (in fact, given what seems to them to be an obvious choice, they often appear perplexed when faced with the decision, thinking it might be a trick question). Thus, similar to the data reported above, they have multiple reasons for choosing a career in teaching—with strong connections to the moral work of teaching—and they describe multiple purposes of schooling. But when forced to identify a primary purpose of schooling, they almost always choose academic purposes. Notions of competence in core academic subject matter dominate their conception of the purposes of schooling.

Of course, it is quite possible and appropriate for teacher candidates to have multiple ends for schooling and multiple reasons for choosing a career in teaching. We believe, however, that the tension posed by the differences between the prevailing educational ideology and candidates' motivations for joining the profession could be a rich one for exploration, as it gives teacher educators reason to (a) connect teacher candidates to their most basic motivations for teaching, (b) validate those basic motivations connected to the moral work of teaching, and (c) examine possibilities for attending to the moral work of teaching in their future practice, thereby providing teacher candidates with the tools for coping with the effects of the prevailing educational ideology. Without such connection, validation, and examination, it is likely these broader purposes and moral motivations will be negated by the strident focus on standardized test scores as a measure of competence in core academic subjects.

Moreover, if left unattended, this tension is troubling at both a pedagogical and practical level. That is, ignoring significant elements of a learner's background that are relevant to a given course of study is simply bad pedagogy, from a constructivist perspective (see Raths & McAninch, 2003; Richardson, 1996, 2003). Candidates have substantive beliefs and motivations grounded in the moral nature of teaching and the purpose of schooling. They also base these motivations and beliefs on their personal life experiences in classrooms, possibly rendering these beliefs as psychologically central. Failing to address these beliefs and motivations suggests that what candidates do, learn, and experience in their teacher education programs will be disconnected from these basic elements themselves, with all the attendant problems of such 'learning' experiences (Dewey, 1963; Richardson, 1996, 2003).

One such problem is the risk of subsequent dissatisfaction and demoralization in their teaching practices. Practically speaking, and as many have argued (Goodlad, 1984; see also Hansen, 1995, p. 153; Serow, Eaker, & Ciechalski, 1992, p. 140), teachers who are dissatisfied because they have lost sight of their most valued motivations to teach are susceptible to leaving the profession. Likewise, teachers who are demoralized because they cannot access the moral rewards of their practice also run the risk of quitting (Santoro, 2011). Along these lines, Fenstermacher and Richardson (2010) suggest, "High stakes accountability diminishes the teacher's opportunities to nurture social relationships that foster moral development, aesthetic sensibility, and democratic character. These three features of any education worthy of the name have almost no traction in the current reform climate" (p. 1). Thus, a myopic focus on training teacher candidates for performance within the context of high stakes accountability reform might "increase the difficulty of teachers promoting the values and ideals that brought so many of them into the profession and that sustain so many through the tribulations that mark their careers" (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2010, p. 1).

The teacher candidates we surveyed expect teaching to be a morally rewarding career. They express an interest in making a difference in the lives of children and building caring relationships with them. Many candidates even profess to being called or destined to engage in educative work that is morally rewarding. Certainly, we see no evidence that any of our candidates feel called or destined to be a cog in an accountability system of high stakes standardized testing. It is critical to attend to this tension, if only to assist teacher candidates in identifying their basic motivations for teaching. Even more, it is also a pedagogical and moral necessity to honestly and transparently unpack these motivations and beliefs in light of the realities of classroom practice under the prevailing educational ideology. Facilitating connections between teacher candidates' motivations and beliefs would certainly limit potential dissatisfaction and demoralization by helping teacher candidates understand the realities of practice and what they might reasonably expect in terms of the moral rewards reaped from their careers. Done well, these

connections could also provide candidates with the tools to constructively navigate classroom realities in ways that honor their reasons for becoming teachers and their beliefs about the purposes of schooling (see Stillman, 2011)

This final point highlights the extent of the need for more research on beliefs about the moral work of teaching and how those beliefs can be effectively and responsibly addressed in teacher education. Following Fenstermacher and Richardson (2010), such research promises to shed important light on the nature and background of the candidates in our teacher education programs, informing what and how we respond as teacher educators; it also serves to inject the moral work of teaching into contemporary educational reform. That reform movement continues to transform the moral work of teaching into a strictly technical academic practice, and has the potential to foster dissatisfaction and demoralization among today's teacher candidates as they begin their future work in classrooms. Assisting teacher candidates in developing the moral language that they bring with them into teacher education programs, and preparing them to engage in the moral work of teaching provides them with tools to cope with the effects of the prevailing educational ideology. It also helps them fulfill the moral commitments that serve as the primary motivators for so many teacher candidates seeking entry into the profession. We believe these are noble ends for teacher candidates and teacher education alike.

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Table 1. Frequency of responses to essay questions: *Why do you want to become a teacher? And, what professional goals do you expect to achieve as a result of your decision to become a teacher?*

| Responses | Frequency (N=267) | Percentage |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Make a difference | 104 | 39% |
| Be a role model | 83 | 32% |
| Have a rewarding career | 61 | 23% |
| Share love of learning | 53 | 20% |
| Work with children | 42 | 16% |
| Past personal experiences with teacher/family member | 106 | 40% |
| Teaching experiences in the classroom | 69 | 26% |
| Called/destined/born to teach | 40 | 15% |

Table 2. Frequency of responses to survey question 4: *What is the purpose of schooling?*

| Responses | Frequency (N=89)* | Percentage |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Preparation for the real world (to be ready for college; to function in a job; to serve as citizen) | 70 | 79% |
| 2. Strengthen academic capacities (reading, writing, arithmetic, science, critical thinking, etc.) | 48 | 54% |
| 3. Encourage moral and/or prosocial development | 45 | 51% |
| --Instill moral character/values | 31 | 35% |
| --Teach socialization skills | 24 | 27% |

*Only 89 of 92 survey participants responded to the final question related to purposes of schooling.