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DISPOSITIONS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

A LOOK AT SOCIAL JUSTICE

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The use of a dispositional framework in the preparation of teachers, especially one that attends to issues of social justice, has generated considerable debate of late. In this article, the author argues that assessing teacher candidates' dispositions related to social justice is both reasonable and defensible. She explains why social justice matters in teacher education, provides a definition of the term dispositions and discusses why programs of teacher education must attend to them, and gives examples of practices used at one institution to assess teacher candidates' dispositions related to social justice to illustrate that such assessment can be done in a fair and principled manner. The author concludes that underlying the dispositions debate is an all-out war to define the goals of public education, the role of teachers, the nature of knowledge, and conceptions of learning, teaching, and learning to teach.

Keywords: *dispositions; teacher education; social justice; teacher beliefs*

In recent years, teacher education has been under severe, if not outright vicious attack. The role of dispositions in teacher education, particularly the disposition related to social justice, is one of latest contested arenas. Critics charge that the assessment of dispositions pertaining to social justice makes teacher candidates vulnerable to the imposition of their professors' ideological viewpoints. This vulnerability, they contend, is a violation of candidates' constitutional rights under the First Amendment and a denial of their academic freedom (Creeley, 2007; Damon, 2005; Hines, 2007; Leo, 2005; National Association of Scholars [NAS], 2006; Will, 2006). According to critics, social justice is an ambiguous and ideologically loaded term fraught with potential for abuse. Critics further contend that the social justice agenda is nothing more than "political indoctrination" in the service of the cultural left and that its use in teacher education not only infringes on candidates' constitutional rights and academic privileges but also detracts from the real work of giving teachers-to-be the knowledge and skills needed to teach their future students effectively (NAS, 2006). As critics put it, programs of teacher education that attend to issues of social justice and assess pre-service teachers' dispositions related to social justice are guilty of engaging in "thought control" (Leo, 2005) and "political screening" (Hines, 2007) using criteria derived from the "progressive political catechism" (Will, 2006).

In this article, I argue that attending to issues of social justice in teacher education is appropriate and that assessing teacher candidates' disposition related to social justice is both reasonable and defensible. The article is organized

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into four sections. I first discuss why social justice matters in teacher education and provide highlights of what teaching for social justice entails. Following this, I define the term *dispositions* and explain why programs of teacher education must attend to them, focusing specifically on teacher candidates' disposition related to social justice. I then describe strategies for assessing such a disposition at my own institution and make a case that the assessment practices presented are principled and fair. In the concluding section, I suggest that beneath the surface of the ongoing dispositions debate is an even more contentious battle to define the goals of public education, the role of teachers, the nature of knowledge, and conceptions of learning, teaching, and learning to teach.

WHY SOCIAL JUSTICE MATTERS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

The school is a multipurpose and complex institution. It is generally agreed that a central purpose of schools is to develop among students the knowledge and skills they will need to lead successful adult lives. While profound disagreement exists over the content of such education (Labaree, 1997), few would question the educative function of schools. Beyond providing children and young people with knowledge and skills, schools perform a delicate, although less frequently discussed, sorting function in society (Mehan, 1996). Some have argued that schools serve as efficient sorting devices, allocating individuals to particular locations in the socioeconomic hierarchy based on their academic performance (Parsons, 1959; Turner, 1960). Students who do well in schools are granted access to the higher-paying and more prestigious positions in the economic order. By contrast, those who do least well are generally confined to positions at the bottom of the economic hierarchy, and destined to a life of poverty. I do not mean to suggest that schools **should** sort students into social winners and losers. My point is simply that, whether we like it or not, schools **do** perform a sorting function. And teachers, whether consciously or not, play a critical role in the sorting process.

In the United States, the ethics of the education-based stratification system is contingent on one critical assumption—that school practices are equitable and fair. After all, the sorting process could have profound consequences for the future lives of students. In 2005, for example, individuals in households in the highest quintile earned over 50% of total income for that year, compared with a mere 3% for those in households in the lowest income quintile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Because the sorting process significantly influences the quality of students' adult lives, teachers—as the school professionals most directly involved in the sorting—have a moral and ethical responsibility to teach all their pupils fairly and equitably. They also must be vigilant about the fairness and equity of the educational enterprise as a whole. This moral and ethical dimension of teaching makes issues of social justice legitimate terrain for exploration in the preparation of prospective teachers.

Given the salient role that schools play in shaping students' life chances and the obligation that teachers have to teach all students fairly, teacher education can ill-ignore the conspicuous pattern of disparities in the distribution of school benefits across groups. Historically, factors such as social class, race, and ethnicity have been forceful predictors of the benefits students are apt to reap from their school experience. Compared with their white, middle-class peers, students from low-income and racial/ethnic minority groups have lower scores on achievement tests (Lee, 2002); are overrepresented in special education programs (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000) and lower academic tracks (Lucas, 2001); are more likely to repeat a grade (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000) and/or drop out of high school (Swanson, 2003); and are less apt to enroll in and graduate from college (Havey & Anderson, 2005). Such educational disparities and the income inequality associated with them have grown dramatically over the past ten years, despite the country's overall economic well-being. Preparing teachers who are responsive to the student population that schools have historically left behind is imperative. The urgency of this task is brought into sharp focus by the increasing racial/ethnic

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diversity of the K-12 student population. The overriding goal of the social justice agenda in teacher education is to prepare teachers who can teach all students well, not just those traditionally well served by schools, so that, as adults, all are able to participate equitably in the economic and political life of the country.

It is beyond the scope of this article to explain in detail a concept as rich as teaching for social justice. I want to emphasize, however, that this concept cannot be reduced to a disposition—as teacher education critics erroneously assume. Teaching that is inspired by principles of social justice—which is variously referred to as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994); teaching against the grain (Cochran-Smith, 1991), teaching to change the world (Oakes & Lipton, 1999), teaching for diversity (Zeichner, 1993), and multicultural education (Banks, 1993; Nieto, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 2007)—is a broad approach to education that aims to have all students reach high levels of learning and to prepare them all for active and full participation in a democracy.

To achieve these goals, teachers need a broad range of knowledge and skills. To begin with, they need a comprehensive grasp of content knowledge, including a deep understanding of the concepts in their academic disciplines and how those concepts relate to one another, and an understanding of the structures, the principles of inquiry, and the nature of discourse in those disciplines. To be responsive to a diverse population, teachers also need to understand how children and youth learn and develop in different cultural contexts. Such teachers further need sophisticated pedagogical expertise, including skills for creating learning experiences that build on students' individual and cultural strengths while engaging them in meaningful and purposeful activities; facility for making the subject matter come alive for learners from diverse backgrounds by using varied instructional strategies that create different paths to learning; skills for tapping relevant school and community resources in the service of student learning; ability to diagnose sources of difficulty in students' learning and strengths on which to build instruction; skills for monitoring students' developing understanding of new ideas and re-directing them if needed; proficiency in using varied assessment practices that promote learning for all students; and strategies for creating an inclusive classroom community that supports learning for diverse students. Equally important, teachers who are resolved to teach their students equitably need to understand existing barriers to learning that children and youth from low-income and racial/ethnic minority backgrounds consistently encounter in school. (For a review of this literature see Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Beyond the knowledge and skills identified above, teachers who aim to make a difference in the lives of diverse students need the disposition to teach all learners equitably. Before discussing this dispositional component of teaching for social justice, I will provide a working definition of dispositions and explain why they are relevant to the preparation of teachers.

WHAT ARE DISPOSITIONS AND WHY DO THEY REQUIRE ATTENTION IN TEACHER PREPARATION?

The term *dispositions* gained currency in the teacher education discourse during the 1990s. According to Freeman (2003), the movement toward standards-based teacher preparation changed the old formulation of "knowledge, skills, and **attitudes**" as goals of teacher education to "knowledge, skills, and **dispositions**." As Freeman explains, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment Support Consortium (INTASC), a voluntary group of state education agencies and professional educational organizations, played a central role in bringing about this change. A widely distributed and highly influential document titled *Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing and Development: A Resource for State Dialogue* (INTASC, 1992) put dispositions on the teacher preparation map. This document, which identifies 10 teacher performance principles, included a list of dispositions for each proposed principle. For example, under the disciplinary knowledge principle, INTASC suggested the

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following disposition: "The teacher has enthusiasm for the discipline(s) s/he teaches and sees connections to everyday life" (p. 14). As an increasing number of states incorporated the INTASC principles into their licensing programs for beginning teachers during the 1990s, dispositions gained attention in the preparation of prospective teachers.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) further reinforced the role of dispositions in the preparation of educators with its adoption of *Standards 2000.* The new standards, which NCATE has used to accredit programs of teacher education since 2000, specify that candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers must demonstrate the "professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions" necessary to help all students learn. *Standards 2000* further requires that programs seeking accreditation from NCATE develop and implement a performance-based system for assessing candidates, including their dispositions. Since NCATE accredits over half of the approximately 1,300 teacher education programs nationwide, it is easy to see how dispositions have come to command considerable attention in teacher education.

For purposes of clarity in this article, I will offer a working definition of dispositions. Following the lead of Rokeach (1968) and building on work by Brown and Cooney (1982), Freeman (2003), Katz and Raths (1985), Tabachnick and Zeichner (1984), Richardson (1996, 2003), Tatto and Coupland (2003), and Pajares (1992), I propose that dispositions are tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs. A tendency implies a pattern of behavior that is predictive of future actions. This predictive feature of the proposed definition gives teacher educators some assurance that once program completers who have developed the dispositions (or tendencies) promoted by the program assume the formal role of teachers, their practices will be in keeping with those dispositions. A second important feature of this definition is its focus on candidates' actions rather than on their attributes. Since actions can be examined directly, unlike attributes, the complexity of measuring a disposition is somewhat lessened, as long as the types of actions thought to represent that disposition can be specified with reasonable confidence. I will return to this point in a subsequent section of this article.

While the conceptual and empirical literature on teacher candidates' dispositions is sparse, considerable work has been done since the early 1980s on prospective teachers' beliefs. Given the prominent role beliefs play in the working definition of dispositions, a few words about this literature are appropriate. According to Richardson (2003), developments in learning theory over the past three decades have focused a spotlight on the beliefs teacher candidates bring to their teacher preparation programs. As she explains, current thinking in cognitive science depicts learning as an active process by which learners infuse new ideas with meaning. In this interpretive activity, learners are said to draw on their prior knowledge and beliefs as they strive to make sense of new ideas (Resnick, 1989; National Research Council [NRC], 2000). Applied in the context of learning to teach, this theory suggests that the beliefs pre-service teachers bring to programs of teacher education—derived from their previous schooling and life experiences—shape what and how candidates learn from their formal preparation, and eventually influence what and how they teach in classrooms. Comprehensive reviews of the learning-to-teach literature conducted by Pajares (1992), Richardson (1996), and Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998) provide substantial evidence to support this proposition. A careful review of this literature shows that specific attention has been paid to candidates' beliefs about the role of teachers and schools, the nature of knowledge, the process of teaching and learning, and about students and families.

Because teacher candidates' beliefs are powerful filters that not only make new phenomena understandable but also organize new ideas, teacher educators cannot ignore their students' entering and developing beliefs (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Pajares, 1992). Unexamined beliefs, especially those that are contradicted by new ideas about teaching introduced in teacher education courses, tend to remain latent

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throughout a candidate's formal preparation, only to resurface once they are placed in a classroom to teach (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). As Raths (2001) explains, prospective teachers generally dismiss teaching that challenges their beliefs on grounds that it is too theoretical, too impractical, or simply wrong. Thus, beliefs can act as stumbling blocks or barriers to learning on the part of teacher candidates.

To maximize the impact of formal preparation on teacher learning, teacher educators must create ample opportunities early in the program for candidates to examine critically their taken-for-granted beliefs in relation to classroom actions. Without such reflection, many teachers-to-be are unable or unwilling to incorporate "new ideas and new habits of thought and action" into their teaching, preferring instead to teach based on their taken-for-granted beliefs (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 3). A focus on candidates' beliefs requires a shift in teacher education from a training model that stresses the transmission of propositional knowledge and the development of technical skills to a learning model that emphasizes how prospective teachers construct their understandings of learning to teach, how those understandings are affected by what they bring to their formal preparation, and how their thinking changes over time (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005).

Teacher candidates' beliefs about students, especially students of color, merit special attention given their relevance to the topic of this article. Over the past 15 years or so, a growing number of studies regarding prospective teachers' beliefs about diversity and students of diverse backgrounds have been reported in the literature. (For a review of this research, see Hollins & Torres Guzman, 2005; Sleeter, in press). This line of research shows that prospective teachers generally enter teacher education believing that cultural diversity is a problem to be overcome and that students of color are deficient in some fundamental way. There is evidence that those beliefs are influenced by unexamined racial/ethnic biases. For instance, Richman, Bovelsky, Kroovand, Vacca, and West (1997) asked pre-service teachers in their study to estimate the grade point average (GPA), IQ, and other personal attributes of African American and White students shown in photographs. The students in the photographs were all similarly dressed. Merely by looking at the photographs, the teacher candidates in their sample assessed the African American students as having lower GPAs and IQs than the White students. They also indicated that the African American students were less ambitious, less self-confident, and less self-sufficient than the White students.

The negative views of students of color held by many teacher candidates are highly problematic given the power of teacher expectations (see Brophy & Good, 1974; Cooper, 1979; Madom, Jussim, & Eccles, 1997; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). A substantial body of research confirms that teacher beliefs about students significantly shape the expectations they hold for student learning. Once formed, these expectations lead teachers to treat students differently, resulting in positive or negative performance, aspirations, and self-concepts, which correspond to the teacher's original assessment. As Madom and colleagues (1997) put it, "Teachers do indeed develop erroneous expectations for their students, and these expectations predict student motivation and achievement even after statistically controlling for students' previous motivation and achievement" (p. 792). Thus, teachers who perceive learners as deficient in some way are more apt to make negative judgments about students' potential. Lacking faith in the students' ability to achieve, these teachers are more likely to form low academic expectations of the children and ultimately to treat them in ways that stifle their learning.

This phenomenon, known as the self-fulfilling prophecy, is especially well documented in the context of teachers teaching students of color. While a review of this vast literature is beyond the reach of this article, highlights from a frequently cited synthesis of research conducted by Irvine (1990) are instructive. Irvine reviewed the teacher expectations research as it pertained specifically to Black students. The review included both experimental studies in controlled settings and naturalistic studies in classrooms. From her review, Irvine concluded that teachers generally

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believe Black students have less potential for academic achievement than White students. These differential expectations are communicated to learners in unambiguous ways. For instance, Black students tend to receive less attention, less encouragement, less praise, less time to respond, less positive feedback after a correct reply, less eye-contact, and more verbal and nonverbal criticism (especially Black boys). According to Irvine, these patterns of negative expectations and ensuing treatment are a critical contributor to the Black–White achievement gap. Patterns of classroom interactions similar to those found by Irvine for Black learners have also been reported for Hispanic students and for students placed in instructional groups designated as low-achieving (Brophy & Good, 1974).

Above I stated that the fundamental disposition of an educator whose practice is informed by principles of social justice is the tendency to act in ways that give all students access to knowledge. In keeping with the working definition of disposition, teacher education programs designed to produce such teachers must examine patterns of actions—preferably in classrooms and schools—from which to infer that the candidate possesses that disposition. Such actions might include the following: setting high performance goals for all students and holding them accountable; planning and implementing an enriched curriculum that challenges every learner to develop critical thinking skills; helping students examine text from multiple perspectives; ensuring that learning activities offer appropriate adaptations for English language learners and for students with special needs; helping students see connections between what they are asked to learn in school and their everyday lives outside school; selecting and using materials that are relevant to students' individual and cultural experiences; using examples and analogies from students' lives to clarify new concepts; using varied instructional strategies to accommodate differences in approaches to learning; ensuring that all students are actively engaged in learning activities; providing encouragement for all learners to excel; and creating an inclusive classroom culture.

Clearly, teacher candidates who lack the skills needed to carry out the actions identified above will not be able to do so. That is, a disposition is contingent on a set of skills. But as Katz and Raths (1985) astutely pointed out, the fact that a teacher has skills is no guarantee that he or she will apply them in the classroom. Underlying the disposition to teach all students equitably (that is, the tendency to act in ways that support learning for all students) are beliefs that lend support (or serve as barriers) to that disposition. As suggested in the literature discussed above, to give all students access to knowledge, teachers must believe all students are capable learners who bring to school a wealth of knowledge and experiences on which to build instruction. Given the negative views many prospective teachers have about students of color and their potential for learning, teacher educators must create space in preparation programs for candidates to critically inspect their beliefs about diverse students as an initial step in the process of learning to teach a diverse population. Equally important, teachers-to-be must be helped to understand the connections between and among teacher beliefs about students, teacher actions in classrooms, and student outcomes. Challenging deficit perspectives and promoting affirming views of diverse students is a precursor to building teacher candidates' disposition to teach all students equitably.

I will now turn to the assessment of dispositions. To make the above ideas clearer, I will discuss several strategies used at my home institution, Montclair State University (MSU), to assess prospective teachers' disposition to teach all students equitably. Because teacher candidates' beliefs and pedagogical skills are antecedents to dispositions, I will also comment on how the faculty addresses candidates' beliefs and skills associated with equitable teaching.

ASSESSING THE DISPOSITION TO TEACH ALL CHILDREN EQUITABLY

In developing a system for assessing the performance of teacher candidates at MSU, the faculty has grappled continuously with the assessment of dispositions. Our program is committed to preparing teachers who provide

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access to knowledge to all children and youth, a goal derived from our participation in the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) and the Agenda for Education in a Democracy (AED), both based on the work of Goodlad (1994). Consistent with this goal, MSU faculty aim to prepare teachers who have not only the knowledge and skills to teach all children successfully, but also the disposition to do so regularly in their practice as teachers. How to assess this disposition at various stages in the program has been a topic of animated discussion among the faculty for some time.

We have decided that dispositions, defined as a tendency to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances (e.g., teaching in ways that give access to knowledge to all students in a class—including those who differ from the mainstream norm), cannot be assessed at entry to the teacher education program. For one thing, judgments faculty make about applicants to the program are based solely on a review of materials found in the application packets and information gleaned from an interview with them, not on observable actions in classroom settings, as the assessment of the disposition in question calls for. Furthermore, it would be unfair—not to mention senseless—to expect potential candidates, prior to their preparation in the program, to act in ways that someone already adept at teaching students equitably would act. However, the admissions review process can be productively used to explore applicants' beliefs, which are precursors to their disposition to teach all students equitably. This is the approach MSU faculty has adopted at admissions.

During the in-person interview built into the admissions process, faculty members purposefully seek out evidence of applicants' beliefs about the educability of all children. We have debated whether to deny admission to applicants perceived to have deficit views of students who differ from the mainstream. After prolonged discussions, we decided against this strategy. Because a deficit perspective is difficult to detect with certainty in the limited time available during the admissions process, we feared such a strategy would exclude some applicants unfairly. Instead of screening out students based on what may be taken as evidence of negative views about diverse students, we have opted for an approach in which applicants play a central role in selecting themselves into or out of teacher education, based on an understanding of the core values that inform the program (see Jacobowitz, 1994). A belief in the educability of all children is one such value. In the admissions process, faculty members make it clear to applicants that their performance in the program, including in their fieldwork and student teaching, will be assessed for evidence that they hold this belief. If applicants feel that this is not consistent with their own beliefs, they may decide not to enroll in the program. In some cases, we admit students conditionally, pending their taking a course that will help them expand their understanding of different worldviews and ways of learning.

Once admitted into teacher education at Montclair, candidates are engaged in coursework and in field experiences in elementary and secondary classrooms and schools and in diverse communities purposefully designed to develop their knowledge, skills, and disposition to teach in ways that give all students access to knowledge. This preparation includes opportunities for candidates to examine their views toward diverse students, recognize aspects of those views that might compromise their effectiveness as teachers in diverse classrooms, and make adjustments when needed. I will illustrate with an example from an urban education course I regularly teach.

One of the requirements for this class is that students write an essay in which they explain their personal theories regarding the reasons for the racial/ethnic achievement gap. During the initial class session, I ask students to identify the salient factors they believe account for the gap. Invariably, some candidates initially explain the problem by pointing to what they see as deficiencies in the students (e.g., laziness, lack of motivation, lack of skills, even lack of potential) and their families (who are believed not to care about their children's education), with little or no acknowledgement that schools and teachers contribute in important ways to the production of this pattern. Once students' entering beliefs about learners of color are out in the open, I am able to guide

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them through an examination of those beliefs in light of the literature on the topic. Over the next eight weeks or so, the class studies a variety of explanations for the achievement gap. To help the students keep track of possible changes in their thinking, even if slight, I ask them to keep a weekly log in which they reflect on their initial and evolving ideas in light of the material studied in class that week. As support to the students, I comment on their log entries twice during the eight-week period, giving them detailed individualized feedback on their evolving thinking. A required essay invites students to openly discuss how their entering views on the topic developed throughout those eight weeks. To foster such openness, the rubric I use to assess the essay, which I share with the students at the beginning of the semester, intentionally focuses on process criteria such as thoughtful engagement with ideas studied in class, clarity and logic of ideas developed in the essay, willingness to consider alternative viewpoints, and grammar and editing. This assessment strategy gives the students the space they need to inspect their own views without fear of being penalized for reaching conclusions that differ from my own.

Supporting candidates' disposition to teach all children fairly also means ensuring that they develop the knowledge and skills needed to act accordingly. Without such preparation, even candidates with a strong commitment to teach students equitably are not likely to translate this commitment into action. Cognizant of this, MSU faculty systematically reviewed the curriculum of all courses in the professional education sequence to make certain our students have opportunities to develop the needed knowledge and skills. For example, one of the courses in the sequence is designed, at least in part, to teach students how to adapt instruction for English language learners. To this end, candidates are taught relevant principles of second language learning, skills for analyzing the linguistic demands that different learning tasks place on students, and strategies for modifying learning activities based on the linguistic needs of ELLs. To ascertain that candidates have indeed developed the necessary knowledge and skills, they are expected to meet the performance expectations of an assessment in which they are given a detailed description of an ELL and are asked to adapt a lesson of their choice for this student. Candidates' performance of this task is assessed with the use of a rubric developed and piloted by the faculty for this purpose. This is one of several course-embedded performance assessments candidates must complete before being approved for student teaching. The overall intent of those course-embedded assessments is to ensure that candidates have mastered the essential knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in student teaching.

The assessment of candidates' disposition to give all students access to knowledge occurs in the context of field experiences—especially student teaching—during which faculty see candidates working directly with students over an extended period. In our interactions with student teachers, we consciously look for patterns of actions from which to infer their disposition or tendency to teach all students equitably. The types of actions we look for are similar to those mentioned above, including evidence from instructional plans and classroom observations of consistent use of rigorous learning goals; frequent use of an enriched curriculum that builds on students' prior knowledge and experiences while stretching them beyond the familiar; and verification that all students, not just some, are learning over time (from samples of student work and performance in other relevant classroom assessments). When we detect inequitable patterns of classroom interactions and/or obvious differences in student outcomes, those patterns serve as the focal point of conversations during post observation conferences. We also use those conversations to gain access to the thinking behind the instructional decisions our candidates make. While we do not expect student teachers to perform flawlessly, we do require that they treat difficulties students might be experiencing in the classes they teach as a challenge to their ingenuity rather than as excuses for ineffectiveness.

I contend that the approach Montclair faculty uses to assess teacher candidates' disposition to teach all students equitably, highlights

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of which I presented above, is principled and fair. It is grounded in an understanding of the ethical dimension of teaching within a diverse and economically stratified society. It is based on a wealth of empirical evidence attesting to the relationship between teacher beliefs and student outcomes, especially as it relates to marginalized learners. And it attends to the challenges of achieving high levels of validity and reliability in the assessment of dispositions. I offer this example, not necessarily as a model for other institutions to follow—but as evidence that dispositions related to social justice **can** be assessed in a fair and defensible way.

CONCLUSION

Without question, we—teacher educators—need to be more precise and consistent with our use of terms like social justice and dispositions. We also need to develop a more refined understanding of the connections between teacher candidates' beliefs, their actions in classrooms, and what their students learn. And we need to give more focused attention to issues of validity and reliability in the assessment of teacher candidates' dispositions. I suspect, however, that even doing all of this will not satisfy our critics. As I see it, beneath the surface of the dispositions debate is an all-out war to define the goals of public education, the role of teachers, the nature of knowledge, and conceptions of learning, teaching, and learning to teach.

The adversaries in this war have very different perspectives. In highlighting those differences here, I acknowledge I am oversimplifying their views. I suspect that those who see no place for issues of social justice and dispositions in teacher preparation believe the primary goal of public education is to prepare students with the knowledge and skills needed to serve as productive workers in the stratified socioeconomic system as it currently exists. They most likely believe that it is not the role of the schools to influence the larger socioeconomic system, but to provide educational opportunities for students, based on what their performance merits. They probably see schools, in their current form, as fair grounds for all students to prove their individual merit. They are apt to view knowledge as a body of "objective" and "uncontested" facts that reside "out there," independent of the knower. With this view of knowledge, they see little role for beliefs; instead, they think focusing on beliefs in teaching and learning is at best touchy–feely and at worst thought control. They see teaching as a technical activity of "transmitting" the certified content of the school curriculum from books to students. Similarly, they see learning to teach as the simple act of acquiring technical knowledge and skills that will allow teachers to dispense information to students efficiently—which involves providing different types of educational experiences to students of different abilities.

By contrast, those who (like me) see a proper role in teacher education for issues of social justice and dispositions related to social justice are more apt to believe that the salient goal of public education is to enhance students' life chances and to prepare them for responsible participation in a democracy; that while schools have made progress over the years to become more equitable, they continue to structure inequalities for some students; that knowledge is value-laden, partial, tentative, and constructed by the knower; that learning is an active process by which learners give meaning to new input based on their prior knowledge and experiences; that teaching involves supporting students in their attempts to make sense of new input by helping them build bridges between their prior knowledge and experiences and that input; and that teacher candidates, like any other learners, construct their understandings of learning to teach based on the beliefs, knowledge, and experiences they bring to their formal preparation as teachers.

These irreconcilable differences, and the interests that underlie them, are the subtext of the dispositions debate. The tension will not dissipate even after supporters of teaching for social justice make a scholarly and reasoned argument in support of giving attention to dispositions related to social justice in teacher education—as I have tried to do in this article. The conflict will only reappear in another form, and the war will continue.

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