Module Reader for SOP-100: Teacher Mindsets

Context: This reader includes all readings for SOP-100: Teacher Mindsets.

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In describing quality teaching, Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) argue that it is composed of both good teaching and successful teaching. Good teaching involves the "worthiness of the activity," and successful teaching involves the "realization of intended outcomes" (p. 186). They argue that although one may be successful insofar as the teacher has employed methods that produced student learning, the teaching may not have been good if the teacher taught something that is morally reprehensible. Although Fenstermacher and Richardson focus on the act of teaching, their argument can be extrapolated to explain the qualities embraced by an effective teacher. If an effective teacher must possess content knowledge and pedagogical skills to achieve successful teaching (Carter, 1990; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Shulman, 1987), what must the effective teacher possess to achieve good teaching?

In the early 1990s the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) offered an answer: dispositions. Dispositions replaced the construct of attitudes in the knowledge, skills, attitudes triad. According to Freeman (2007), many viewed attitude as a vacuous construct: "Attitude is not a reliable predictor of behavior," as a chasm exists between what one intends to do and what one actually does (p. 6). For example, a teacher may have a positive attitude toward teaching struggling students to read but may fail in any attempts to accomplish that goal. In contrast, dispositions have been described as "predictive patterns of action" (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007, p. 361), exemplifying teachers' tendencies to act in certain ways under certain circumstances (Katz & Raths, 1985). By connecting intention with actions (Sockett, 2009), dispositions serve a more useful purpose than the construct of attitudes and provide a means to exemplify good teaching. In summarizing the rationale behind including dispositions in the standards, Diez (2007a) explains, "The INTASC standards group recognized the problem of having the knowledge and skills required to be an effective teacher and yet not using them for good in the classroom" (p. 389). Dispositions became a means to fill this void.
Dispositions bridge successful teaching – revealing how teachers enact knowledge and skills – with good teaching – elucidating the discernment one employs to achieve worthwhile ends.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) adopted INTASC’s inclusion of dispositions as requisite for effective teachers. In 2002, the NCATE accreditation standards required teacher education programs both to "articulate" and "systematically assess" candidate dispositions (p. 19). This requirement has pushed many institutions to focus on disposition assessment. Although assessment is important, it is the development of dispositions that should be of the most concern in teacher education (Carroll, 2005; Diez, 2007b; Eberly, Rand, & O'Connor, 2007; Sackett, 2008). Fostering development means helping teacher candidates become aware of the dispositions they tend to manifest in particular contexts so they can reach desired outcomes, namely, fostering student learning...

...Before proceeding any further, we should be more specific about what we mean by the term disposition. Our conceptualization stems from the research on thinking dispositions and the literature on the self of the teacher. Psychologists studying thinking dispositions posit that intelligence includes more than ability. It involves an inclination to put one’s ability to use and the sensitivity to know when a situation calls for specific skills. In a number of compelling studies (see Perkins, Tishman, Ritchhart, Donis, & Andrade, 2000; Ritchhart & Perkins, 2000), researchers studying thinking dispositions found that although people often possessed particular intellectual abilities and the inclination to use these abilities, unless they were specifically prompted, they often lacked the sensitivity to know when to put this knowledge and these skills to use. For example, Perkins et al. (2000) found that a person may have the ability and inclination to use creative problem-solving skills, but may lack the sensitivity to know when a particular situation calls for problem solving. In other words, most people could creatively problem solve, but in ill-structured
situations they lacked the sensitivity to know when to use this skill. By their very nature, classrooms are ill-structured settings; there are no prompts informing teachers when to put particular knowledge and skills to use. As Shulman (1998) states, as is true of all professions, one cannot merely learn a decontextualized body of knowledge and apply it systematically in the field. In the "gritty particularities of situated practice," judgment that "incorporates both technical and moral elements" (p. 519) is required to determine how one should proceed. To be effective, teachers must not only be inclined to achieve particular purposes but also be sensitive to the context of any teaching situation to know what knowledge and skills to put to use at any given time to achieve those purposes.

In addition to having sensitivity for the context of the situation, possessing awareness of the context of the self is also important. Teacher educators researching the teacher as self claim that effective teachers are aware of the "subjective educational theories" (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994) or "private theories" (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995) that bear on their teaching decisions. Echoing a perceptual view of teaching posited by Combs, Blume, Newman, and Wass (1974), the self of the teacher is important because, according to Nias (1989), "The attitudes and actions of each teacher are rooted in their own ways of perceiving the world" (as cited in Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994, p. 49). For example, if the teacher inclined to help a struggling student learn to read more fluently believes that success results from effort, the teacher may attribute the student's lack of success to lack of effort. If the student's struggle to read stems from another cause, this teacher likely will be ineffective. According to Combs et al., "Whether an individual will be an effective teacher depends fundamentally on the nature of his private world of perceptions" (p. 21).

If Combs et al. are correct that quality teaching is predicated on the individual teacher's perceptions, one may conclude that teacher education cannot affect
anything other than teachers' knowledge and skills. On the contrary, what is crucial is one's awareness of one's perceptions and how they interact within different contexts, just as psychologists found the linchpin to be one's sensitivity to a situation. A teacher's perceptions are shaped, though not entirely determined, by the individual's prior experience, beliefs, culture, values, and cognitive abilities, all which affect the assumptions the individual may make (Schussler, 2006). Teacher education can play a vital role in fostering awareness by helping candidates uncover knowledge of themselves. "Through self-knowledge [candidates] recognize their own values and the biases that might color their perception of others; and through self-awareness they can assess the effects of their behavior on pupils" (Borich, 1999, p. 95). By helping candidates to perceive situations with greater clarity, self-awareness becomes a tool for teacher educators seeking to develop candidates' dispositions.

To summarize, an effective teacher employs both successful teaching, which realizes intended outcomes, and good teaching, which is morally worthwhile. Teachers' knowledge and skills help them to achieve successful teaching, whereas their dispositions help them achieve both. Dispositions involve the inclination of a teacher to achieve particular purposes and the awareness of the self and the context of a given situation to employ appropriate knowledge and skills to achieve those purposes. Therefore, teacher educators interested in cultivating candidate dispositions should focus on candidates' awareness of the self and their discernment of the situational context.

High Expectations: *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupils' Intellectual Development* (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992)

All of the children of Oak School were pretested with a standard nonverbal test of intelligence. This test was represented to the teachers as one that would predict intellectual "blooming" or "spurting." The IQ test employed yielded three IQ scores: total IQ, verbal IQ, and reasoning IQ. The "verbal" items required the child to match pictured items with verbal descriptions given by the teacher. The reasoning items required the child to indicate which of five designs differed from the remaining four. Total IQ was based on the sum of verbal and reasoning items.

At the very beginning of the school year following the school-wide pre-testing, each of the eighteen teachers of grades one through six was given the names of those children in their classroom who, in the academic year ahead, would show dramatic intellectual growth. These predictions were allegedly made on the basis of these special children's scores on the test of academic blooming. About 20 percent of Oak School's children were alleged to be potential spurters. For each classroom the names of the special children had actually been chosen by means of a table of random numbers. The difference between the special children and the ordinary children, then, was only in the mind of the teacher.

All the children of Oak School were retested with the same IQ test after one semester, after a full academic year, and after two full academic years. For the first two retests, children were in the classroom of the teacher who had been given favorable expectations for the intellectual growth of some of her pupils. For the final retesting all children had been promoted to the classes of teachers who had not been given any special expectations for the intellectual growth of any of the children. That follow-up testing had been included so that we could learn whether any expectancy advantages that might be found would be
dependent on a continuing contact with the teacher who held the especially favorable expectation.

For the children of the experimental group and for the children of the control group, gains in IQ from pretest to retest were computed. Expectancy advantage was defined by the degree to which IQ gains by the "special" children exceeded gains by the control-group children. After the first year of the experiment a significant expectancy advantage was found, and it was especially great among children of the first and second grades. The advantage of having been expected to bloom was evident for these younger children in total IQ, verbal IQ, and reasoning IQ. The control-group children of these grades gained well in IQ, 19 percent of them gaining twenty or more total IQ points. The "special" children, however, showed 47 percent of their number gaining twenty or more total IQ points.

During the subsequent follow-up year the younger children of the first two years lost their expectancy advantage. The children of the upper grades, however, showed an increasing expectancy advantage during the follow-up year. The younger children who seemed easier to influence may have required more continued contact with their influencer in order to maintain their behavior change. The older children, who were harder to influence initially, may have been better able to maintain their behavior change autonomously once it had occurred.

High Expectations: Misconceptions & Pitfalls

**Misconception #1:** Some students are naturally "brighter" than their peers.

**Sounds like:** "I expect my 'low' students to make a lot of growth this year, but realistically, they'll probably still finish the year behind my other students."

**Clarification:** The imaginary teacher quoted above has what's called a fixed-mindset theory of intelligence. Teachers with fixed-mindset theories of intelligence believe people are born with a certain (fixed) amount of intelligence that stays stable over time. They believe high performance is indicative of high intelligence and low performance is indicative of low intelligence.

In contrast, teachers who have a growth-mindset theory of intelligence believe that all children are born with sufficient innate ability to achieve what is asked of them. They believe learning and development depend upon investing effort; if students invest more effort, they will "grow" their intelligence.

As you read in *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992), teacher perception of student intelligence impacts student academic performance.

If you sometimes lean toward a fixed-mindset theory of intelligence and want to change your beliefs, check out the excerpt from *Mindset* (Dweck, 2008) that appears in the Additional Resources session of the module. It provides concrete advice for doing the difficult but important ongoing work of shifting from a fixed-mindset theory of intelligence to a growth-mindset theory of intelligence.

**Misconception #2:** Certain students—e.g., black students, English language learners, girls, low-income students—are less capable than their peers.

**Sounds like:** "Most low-income families tend to value education less, which accounts for students' low performance..."

**Clarification:** As Dr. Beverly Tatum acknowledges in "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" and Other Conversations About Race, "We all have prejudices, not because we want them, but simply because we are so continually exposed to misinformation about others" (1997, p.5).

And misinformation is rampant.

What's most important to understand is this: The responsibility for identifying your prejudices and doing the (re)learning necessary to correct your misconceptions is yours and yours alone. No one can do this work for you. Once you have identified a prejudice you hold, seek out learning experiences with the potential to help you (re)learn: engage in conversations with critical friends, ask a mentor (e.g., your instructor) to recommend readings, or have new experiences that will challenge your preconceived notions about a particular group of people.
Misconception #3: Students with a particular identity marker (e.g., boys) learn best when you use certain teaching strategies (e.g., kinesthetic learning). This is culturally responsive teaching!

Sounds like: "Black students tend to prefer to learn new information by listening rather than by reading; they're just generally more aural learners."

Clarification: Generalizing statements about teaching strategies matched to identity markers are likely examples of stereotyping, not examples of culturally responsive teaching. Statements like these, though often well-meaning, have the potential to hurt students and negatively impact student learning because they are reductive, deprioritize individual differences, may result in lowered expectations, and may deprive students of the diverse array of learning experiences, strategies, and skills that will be of value to them at other times in their lives.

If you find yourself thinking in this way, reflect on the origin of your generalization and debunk the myth by redoubling your efforts to get to know your students' strengths, areas of growth, and interests on an individual basis.

Misconception #4: Learning and testing accommodations for exceptional learners lower expectations.

Sounds like: "I get that she has an IEP that requires accommodations, but I don't want to lower my expectations for her. All students (including exceptional learners!) can meet the high bar I set."

Clarification: Accommodations don't actually change the standard you set or lower your expectations. Accommodations simply make learning activities more accessible to students. According to Dr. Lindy Crawford, a member of the Professional Advisory Board at the National Center for Learning Disabilities,

Accommodations are instructional or test adaptations. They allow the student to demonstrate what he or she knows without fundamentally changing the target skill that's being taught in the classroom or measured in testing situations. Accommodations do not reduce learning or performance expectations that we might hold for students. More specifically, they change the manner or setting in which information is presented or the manner in which students respond.

(National Center for Learning Disabilities)

The same could be said of differentiation. Differentiation doesn't change the standard you set or lower expectations; it makes learning activities accessible to all students.
**Misconception #5: Confusing sympathy with empathy**

**Sounds like:** "I let Patricia take a nap today. Her family is in a shelter right now, and she said it's noisy at night. She's struggling to get adequate sleep. What would you have me do?"

**Clarification:** The statement above exemplifies sympathy, not empathy. Tyrone C. Howard sheds light on this misconception in his *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America’s Classrooms*. (2010). He writes:

"One of the concepts that has been instrumental in my own work with teachers is that many who lower expectations for students from low-income backgrounds do so because they feel sorry for the students and their circumstances, and thus become sympathetic teachers... Conversely, teachers who play a role in transforming the academic plight of low-income students are not sympathetic in their orientation but are instead empathetic, in that they understand the challenges that poverty poses for many students, but they do not become paralyzed by this understanding in their teaching orientation, and instead communicate to their students a firm belief in their ability to be successful... They still expect and demand excellence, and they find creative ways to help students attain success despite circumstances that might suggest that this is not possible." (p.48)

Teachers who empathize with students (as opposed to sympathizing with them) set and maintain a high standard, work to understand the challenges their students may face, and support all students to meet that high standard. Empathy and high expectations go hand in hand; sympathy and high expectations do not.
All professions involve serving clients with particular problems. Those who become practitioners understand that it is in the nature of any profession to deal with people who have problems. Those who become dentists do not expect to practice dentistry by only giving examinations to those with perfect teeth and advice to only those who will follow it. A dentist regards it as a natural condition of his/her work to be dealing with people who have bad teeth and bad gums and who are not always overjoyed about their treatment. Many clients may even have contagious diseases which make the dentist's work dangerous. By definition, it is not possible to practice dentistry and avoid people with dental problems. This analogue pertains to all professionals. Lawyers deal with clients who present them with legal problems, many of which involve the stress of avoiding prison sentences. It is not people who are free of legal problems who seek the services of lawyers but those with serious problems. Accountants, social workers, and health professionals all deal with people who face issues which they need help dealing with. Professionals expect and prepare for serving people who have problems because they would not have a professional practice if their clients did not bring them their problems. Indeed, it is to the advantage of professionals to have clients with problems. The greater the number and complexity of the problems the more money they make... and the greater the satisfaction they derive from helping their clients deal with these problems.

Why is pointing out such obvious things about professional practice necessary? Why in a book about teaching is there a need to point out that people enter professions because they want to deal with problems?

Why is there a need to remind people that the practice of any profession continuously involves the practitioner in dealing with conditions and issues that need fixing? The answer is that the criterion too many young people use to decide that teaching is appropriate for them is that they "love children," not that they want to deal with children's needs and problems all day, every day.
Unfortunately, love is not enough. It is not a method of teaching and not a goal of the schools. This distorted basis for entering professional service continues on into the practice of veteran teachers. It is demonstrated by the fact that teachers make sure that students defined as being problems or having problems are equally distributed. They protest or feel unfairly treated if they have more inclusion students than the teacher next door. They resent having more students who are below grade level than other teachers. Indeed, many teachers will protest if they have more male students than other teachers. The term teachers use for being assigned children with problems is being "dumped on." The objective is to avoid problems, or to have as few problems as possible. In effect, teachers prefer to teach children who don't really need them. Their expectation is that if the system were working the way it should be they would only have children who complete assignments without having the instructions repeated over and over, and that the children would all complete their assignments without continuous monitoring. They hold on to this fantasy even in the face of years of experience and continue to practice the Pedagogy of Poverty described earlier. Many teachers enter the profession not understanding that professions are needed precisely for the purpose of dealing with problems and they maintain this irrational belief throughout their careers by seeking to have other teachers, specialists or aides deal with their problems.

Star teachers do not think this way. Their ideology is the reverse. They understand that, like other professionals, they are there to perform services which help children and youth deal with all kinds of problems that interfere with their learning. This component of the star teacher's ideology is critical to their success and in understanding the differences between them and failure/quitters. Failure/quitters define any child who interferes with their giving of a lesson, or who is unable or unwilling to follow the directions for completing the assignment as a problem... a problem that the teacher should not be having. The best "solution" that quitter/failures see for these problems is either…
removing the student or having someone else (with more time or special training) deal with student problems. They do not accept the role of problem solver because in their view of the teacher’s role, students with problems should not be there. This belief that the ideal teaching situation is a problem-free classroom leads to a bizarre situation for substantial numbers of teachers working with diverse children in poverty. They are under constant stress because they will inevitably be assigned many students with severe problems and troubling previous school experiences. And in spite of the realities they face daily, they will cling to the view that their role as teachers is to have as few problems as possible. This explains why so many teachers persist in believing that the children in their classrooms, in many cases a majority of them, should not be there. As a consequence of this widespread denial of what constitutes professional service, diverse students in urban poverty schools are either suspended or mislabeled as abnormal in disproportionate numbers.

Personal Responsibility: Misconceptions & Pitfalls

Misconception: Personal responsibility means extreme self-sacrifice

Sounds like: "Only lazy teachers have time for a social life outside school. They must not be doing enough to help their students."

Clarification: If demonstrating personal responsibility today requires extreme levels of self-sacrifice (e.g., skipping a night’s sleep, failing to make time for lunch, running on emotional "empty"), you will find it more challenging to teach effectively tomorrow.

In contrast, drawing clear boundaries and making time regularly to meet your personal needs will position you to demonstrate greater personal responsibility later, when the going gets tough.

Try calendaring time for exercise and family, just as you would for grading. Try asking a friend to help hold you accountable for seeking equilibrium between the personal and the professional. Ask for advice from a trusted colleague on how you can work smarter, not just harder.
**Continuously Increasing Effectiveness:** *Teaching as Leadership: The Highly Effective Teacher’s Guide to Closing the Achievement Gap* (Farr, 2010)

Strong teachers insist that effective teaching is neither mysterious nor magical. It is neither a function of dynamic personality nor dramatic performance. Rather, effective teaching is the hard work of setting big goals, investing students in working hard, planning purposefully, executing effectively, improving over time, and relentlessly pursuing our students' success.

...These methods are replicable, and they can be learned. "When they are doing their best, leaders exhibit certain distinct practices, which vary little from industry to industry, profession to profession, community to community, and country to country. Good leadership is an understandable and universal process," found Kouzes and Posner.\(^1\) And that leadership, whether in the Senate, the laboratory, the battlefield, the boardroom, or an underresourced classroom full of students on the low end of the achievement gap, "is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that are available to all of us."\(^2\)

Some observers mistakenly see static perfection in highly effective teachers. On the contrary, these teachers' conviction that great teaching is learnable derives from their own struggles to improve. When we talk to these teachers about their effectiveness, they remind us that they are far from perfect and have many skills they want to develop. They fail, they make mistakes, they get discouraged—all of which they handle with the knowledge that they can improve going forward.

Tara Harrington, for example, a nationally honored teacher in North Carolina, recalls the complete failure of a science experiment in front of her entire class as the moment that she learned to practice every experiment before she performs it in class. Sophia Pappas, whose pre-K classroom has been the

\(^2\) Ibid., p.23
model for many new teachers, put significant energy into reaching out to families in her first year but she did not critically reflect on those practices that were more or less effective at engaging families in her classroom. She recalls, with regret, that while families expressed satisfaction with the class and her dedication to their children, she missed out on opportunities to maximize their contributions to the classroom and she did not maximize their use of important resources such as her family lending library. That realization, however, spurred her to change the way she interacted with families so that every interaction included engagement in student learning and reflected ongoing efforts to tailor her approach to the personalities, interests, and work schedules of each family member.

Highly effective teachers like Ms. Harrington and Ms. Pappas, even when presented with their outstanding student achievement results, almost never describe themselves as good, bad, strong, or weak, but rather as in the process of becoming better. "I'm getting there" is a sentiment we commonly hear. Or, "Well, I have become a much more effective planner, and that has huge payoffs for my classroom management, but I still don't have my classroom systems and organization where they need to be.

Respect and Humility: Teaching as Leadership: The Highly Effective Teacher's Guide to Closing the Achievement Gap (Farr, 2010)

As they work to effect dramatic student achievement, teachers may see ways that they could work to reduce barriers and build additional pathways to student learning. The most effective teachers do not, however, take on all of those at once. They prioritize the problems, decisions, policies, and systems that have the most impact on their students' success. They tackle those issues they are in a position to influence because of their unique knowledge, proximity, or skills. And they do so with utmost respect and humility.

"I learned early on in my teaching career that creating change in my school was a delicate procedure," explained Richard Reddick, who taught in one of Houston's most impoverished neighborhoods. "You have to choose your battles—follow the lead and advice of experienced teachers in your school. While you might initially be frustrated with some of the administrative goals in your school, as time passes, you will find that you have a greater ability to make things happen."

Unfortunately, some teachers barrel into a new community with the mindset that they are there to fix all the problems they see. Not only is that deficit-based view of their students, families, and colleagues offensive and arrogant, but it also ignores all of the hard work already going on in the community. Imagine a new teacher who, in the first week, marches into the principal's office and demands that the policy barring field trips be changed. Imagine a new teacher who promptly tells his department chairperson how to restructure the literacy program. Or imagine a new teacher writing a letter to the editor of the community newspaper to report on a perceived misappropriation of funds in the school district. Whether or not these teachers are right on the merits of their concerns, they have
probably doomed their cause with a haughty assumption that their limited perspective should inform change.

Our investigations indicate that this counterproductive approach often results from a lack of self-awareness about how one is being perceived and an inability to assume the best of the members of the school community (and the community more broadly). Such teachers have little chance of building meaningful and productive relationships with those whose help they need.

By contrast, highly effective teachers patiently earn influence by proving their leadership capabilities with extraordinary student progress in their classrooms. They also respectfully and humbly develop relationships with their colleagues and administrators in order to collaborate for the sake of their students.

Respect and Humility: Misconceptions and Pitfalls

**Misconception #1: I'm smarter and more efficient than my colleagues**

**Sounds like:** "I could ask for help with planning this lesson, but... I suspect I'm smarter than most of the other teachers in my department, so I can probably figure it out. Plus, it'll be so much faster if I do it on my own."

**Clarification:** This misconception is at the heart of the actions Farr (2010) describes in his discussion of respect and humility. Each of the three teachers he describes—the teacher who demands policy changes of the principal, the teacher who advises the literacy department chairperson to restructure the program, and the teacher who writes to the newspaper about misappropriation of funds—likely acts out of a belief that she knows more or better than others. Remember, teachers who demonstrate respect and humility "patiently earn influence by proving their leadership capabilities with extraordinary student progress in their classrooms" (Farr, 2010, p.212).

**Misconception #2: Asking for help is a sign of weakness**

**Sounds like:** "I could ask for help with classroom management, but that would just confirm my team's suspicion that I don't know what I'm doing..."

**Clarification:** When you're struggling, ask for help. Your colleagues, managers, and Relay GSE instructors have between them a wealth of diverse experiences from which they can draw to support you, and making the ask is yet another way to communicate respect and humility.

**Misconception #3: Respect and humility is all about what you say**

**Sounds like:** "I always say the right, respectful things. I don't get why my colleagues don't like me."

**Clarification:** Demonstrating respect isn't about words alone. Your actions and your tone matter at least as much as the words you say. If you are struggling to build positive relationships with members of your school community, consider:

- Do you greet students, family members, and colleagues consistently and warmly?
- Do you consistently use positive body talk (e.g., arms uncrossed)?
- Do you show you are listening when others speak (e.g., eye contact, not interrupting, laptop closed)?
- Do you listen more than you speak?
- Do you seek to truly know others in your school community beyond making "small talk?"
- Do you assume the best of others in all that they do?
- Do you seek to understand others' perspectives?
- Do you value the knowledge and experience of others in your school community?
- Do you know how others perceive you and why?

These are just a few questions you might ask yourself to push your reflection.
References


