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# Understanding Teacher Candidate Dispositions: Reflecting to Build Self-Awareness

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Deborah L. Schussler<sup>1</sup>, Lisa M. Stooksberry<sup>2</sup>, and Lynne A. Bercaw<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

Dispositions have become an important part of the conversation about effective teaching. The purpose of this article is to analyze the disposition domains teacher candidates draw from as they think about their early teaching experiences. A framework of three disposition domains—intellectual, cultural, and moral—was used as a heuristic to analyze 35 teacher candidates' journals. The candidates reflected on a range of topics, yet few possessed the self-knowledge to identify their assumptions and evaluate how these assumptions influenced their teaching decisions. Candidates with the greatest capacity to unpack their assumptions and who therefore possessed the greatest awareness of their dispositions demonstrated (a) a propensity for questioning the how and why of their thinking and actions, (b) a balance between focusing on students and the self, and (c) an adoption of multiple perspectives. These baseline data provide essential information for teacher educators working to develop candidates' dispositions.

## Keywords

teacher education, development, teacher knowledge and beliefs, teacher learning, self study, dispositions

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.

<sup>1</sup>Villanova University, Villanova, PA, USA

<sup>2</sup>National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Arlington, VA, USA

<sup>3</sup>California State University, Chico, Chico, CA, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Deborah L. Schussler, Villanova University, Department of Education and Human Services, St. Augustine Center—Room 356, 800 Lancaster Ave., Villanova, PA 19085

Email: [deborah.schussler@villanova.edu](mailto:deborah.schussler@villanova.edu)

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; Sockett, 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. The purpose of this article is to analyze and describe the dispositions teacher candidates draw from as they think about their early teaching experiences. These baseline data provide essential information for teacher educators working to develop candidates' dispositions.

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.

As a means to foster the development of candidates' awareness of their dispositions, we have proposed a framework of three disposition domains—intellectual, cultural, and moral—which we refer to as the ICM framework (see Stooksberry, Schussler, & Bercaw, 2009). Succinctly defined, these domains

encompass content and pedagogy, the cultural identities of teachers and students, and the values driving one's moral reasoning. We developed the ICM framework based on areas of the literature that are essential for effective teaching: teacher knowledge, including pedagogical content knowledge, culturally relevant pedagogy, and teacher moral development and care. Similar to early research on the reflective judgment model (see King & Kitchener, 2004), we are currently moving between theory development and validation, conducting an in-depth analysis of how teacher candidates are inclined to think intellectually, culturally, and morally about their teaching experiences and assessing the validity of the ICM framework. We began with the conceptual understanding of dispositions summarized above (see Schussler, 2006) and hypothesized that the three domains of the ICM framework were comprehensive enough to capture candidates' dispositions (see Stooksberry et al., 2009). The data analyzed in this article are intended to test this hypothesis.

Therefore, the dual purposes of this article are (a) to elucidate the framework further, examining the nuances of teachers' awareness of their dispositions within each domain, and (b) to empirically assess whether the domains of the framework adequately capture candidates' dispositions at the beginning stages of their teaching. To accomplish these goals we used the ICM framework as a heuristic for analyzing teacher candidates' open-ended journals. We give an overview of the topics candidates reflected on within each disposition domain and provide examples of teacher thinking as articulated in their journals. The discussion primarily addresses the domains separately in an effort to explain each domain thoroughly. We speculate that this separation is artificial, that likely the domains operate relationally given the complex nature of teaching; however, examining the nature of this relationship is beyond the scope of this article. We conclude by discussing what these findings mean in terms of helping candidates to develop their awareness of their dispositions and in terms of refining the framework so that it is most useful in fostering candidates' disposition awareness.

### ICM Disposition Framework<sup>1</sup>

The incipience of a framework of disposition development originated from a discussion of one teacher candidate's journal entries. Jackie was a successful teacher candidate in that she earned excellent grades throughout her teacher education program.<sup>2</sup> In her journal, Jackie expressed her struggle to understand her students in ways that helped her motivate them effectively. We noted that she stated potentially problematic assumptions based on limited knowledge about the area where her students lived. Specifically, she assumed all students did not value education because they lived in a working-class, lower socioeconomic area and less than 50% of students attended a 4-year college. In contrast, almost 100% of students from Jackie's high school attended a 4-year

college after graduation. Jackie's desire to motivate students to value education (moral domain) and her knowledge of content and pedagogy (intellectual domain) collided with potentially faulty assumptions about her students, especially her inclination to generalize about her students' individual identities based on limited demographic knowledge (cultural domain). We hypothesize that the most effective teaching occurs when teachers are aware of how their dispositions manifest across all domains and in a variety of teaching contexts. We further hypothesize that because dispositions are dynamic as opposed to static entities (Diez, 2007a), fostering teachers' awareness is the key to disposition development.

#### *The Intellectual Domain*

We define intellectual dispositions as teachers' inclination to process knowledge of content and pedagogy, their awareness of what the educational context requires for desired learning outcomes to be reached, and their inclination to put their knowledge and awareness to use accordingly in the classroom. More specifically, intellectual dispositions involve the learning expectations teachers establish for all students, decisions around curriculum (e.g., what to teach), decisions around instruction, beliefs about how students learn, and an understanding of one's role as a professional.

Because teachers have been observers of teaching for at least 16 years (Hammerness et al., 2005; Lortie, 1975), they possess beliefs, values, and cognitive structures defining what effective teaching looks like. These perceptions of effective teaching guide teachers' decisions related to content and pedagogy. It is important to note that intellectual dispositions move beyond mere knowledge as they represent how knowledge is received and utilized to develop one's practice. Teachers experience a "problem of enactment" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 70) when they cannot put their knowledge to use by transferring what they know to actual teaching situations (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005; Eraut, 1994). To overcome the problem of enactment, teachers must develop an awareness for which teaching situations require specific content knowledge and pedagogical skills, and they must be inclined to use the knowledge and skills. This requires continually reflecting on one's practice (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

#### *The Cultural Domain*

We define cultural dispositions as teachers' inclination and desire to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. Our definition of cultural dispositions includes three strands consistent with the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy. The first strand is teachers' awareness of their own culture and its effect on their teaching. The second strand is teachers' awareness of students' culture and its effect on learning. The third strand examines how teacher candidates utilize their

knowledge of self and student (the intersection of teacher culture and student culture) toward modifying instruction to meet the needs of the diverse learners most effectively (Banks et al., 2005; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001).

Although most teachers are not aware of it, all teachers possess a cultural identity (Banks et al., 2005; Villegas, 2007). When we refer to one's cultural identity, we include race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. This identity comprises one's cultural dispositions, reflecting an understanding of the self through shaping a teacher's beliefs, values, and understanding of cultural norms. This identity also comprises cultural dispositions influencing how a teacher perceives culturally-laden experiences of the classroom and chooses to act based on those perceptions. Villegas (2007) claims that even if candidates' cultural dispositions are latent during their preparation programs, they become evident when candidates begin teaching. A correlation exists between teachers' lack of cultural experience and lower student achievement (Gay, 2002; Hollins & Guzman, 2005), making teachers' awareness of their cultural dispositions (identity of self and students) imperative.

### *The Moral Domain*

Many have argued that teaching is a moral endeavor (Dewey, 1916; Sizer & Sizer, 1999; Tom, 1984). Moral dispositions encompass awareness of one's moral values, the inclination to think through the assumptions and ramifications behind those values, considering desirable ends and the processes to achieve those ends (Tom, 1984), and the responsibility one has to others and to helping others meet their needs (Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1984; VanManen, 2000). This entails teachers putting aside their own needs to help another reach her or his potential.

Teacher candidates begin their teacher education programs with an extensive value system in place (Mayes, 2001; Sockett, 2006). It should be noted that when we refer to values, we specifically are referring to moral values. Teachers base their understanding of teaching situations on their underlying value system, which includes personal distinctions between right and wrong (Dill, 1990; Strike & Soltis, 1985). Because teachers make hundreds of decisions daily that are packed with assumptions about the purposes of education and how students should be educated, their dispositions act as a value-laden guide that frames their thinking and actions. Effective teachers know they possess a value system (Carroll & Carney, 2005) and can reflect on how that system affects their responses to various teaching situations.

With a strong literature base within each of these domains, we chose to use this framework as a heuristic to examine the nuances of teacher candidates' dispositions. We wanted both to determine whether the ICM framework adequately captured candidates' dispositions at this early stage of their development and to flesh out the particulars of the three

domains. The method we used to accomplish these purposes is described next.

### **Method**

Data consisted of 35 teacher candidate journals from two teacher education programs in the United States. All but 2 of the 35 participants were female. Researchers received institutional review board approval at both universities. University A is a midsized, private, religiously affiliated university in a suburban northeastern city. Teacher candidates were full-time student teachers at the secondary level concurrently enrolled in a student teaching seminar. Student teachers' content areas included English (6), math (3), social studies (2), Spanish (1), and biology (1). The course focused on helping candidates apply theory and research to their practice as teachers by emphasizing reflective practices and modeling a professional learning community (DuFour, 2004). Candidates reflected individually in their journals, in their professional teaching portfolios, and through implementation of a classroom research project. They also reflected collaboratively through candidate-led discussions of problematic situations of each candidate's choosing and through roundtable presentations of their classroom research projects.

University B is a midsized, public university in a rural setting located in the Southeast. Teacher candidates at University B were enrolled in an elementary education curriculum course taken the semester prior to student teaching; the course included a 6-week internship during which candidates observed and taught in elementary classrooms. The course focused on preparing candidates to design and implement curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners. The instructor emphasized issues of social justice as they relate to instruction in heterogeneous classes. The internship occurred in the middle of the semester, giving candidates an opportunity to reflect on their experiences when they returned to the college classroom.

Course requirements included journals in both courses—three entries per week at University A and one per week at University B—where candidates reflected on events taking place in the practicum classrooms. The journal assignments were open-ended, meaning the candidates and not the professors selected the topic for each entry. The journals provided an opportunity to examine both what candidates were thinking and how they were thinking about these things. Entries were graded solely on completion; candidates were required to write at least one type-written page. To encourage candidates' reflections and expand their thinking in potentially new directions, professors responded to candidates' journals by posing questions offering alternative perspectives. Candidates were not required to respond specifically to these questions though many did in subsequent entries. Although course professors spent class time facilitating discussions during which candidates reflected on their experiences in their placements, neither course explicitly mentioned dispositions.

To participate in the study, candidates gave confidential consent at the beginning of the semester which gave the professors permission to analyze candidates' coursework; professors did not know until after the posting of semester grades which candidates agreed to participate.

We used a four-stage process to analyze the data using the constant comparative method throughout (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially, our purpose was to determine whether ICM dispositions were evident in the data. We quickly realized that it was even more compelling to develop our understanding of how they were evident. The way candidates described their thinking about each topic revealed more than the topics themselves. This became our focus as we coded data in the domains. In the first stage, journal entries were coded by disposition domains: intellectual, cultural, moral, and other. The *other* label allowed us to be "open to additional codes" (Creswell, 1998, p. 152), though we found that this label was unnecessary. We compiled both raw data and summaries of data. Grain size generally was a few sentences. For example, we placed the following chunk of data from Whitney in the moral domain. Direct quotes from the candidate's journals are in quotes. Information not in quotes indicates the researchers' summary of data during the coding process:

"How do you make students care about their grades?"  
She says she's not surprised Track 3 [lower level] students failed vocabulary quiz and is frustrated because this should be easy: "All they have to do is memorize the words. How could they fail a vocabulary quiz?"  
She says she blamed herself, then realizes it wasn't her lack of effort, but students' being accustomed to failing. "I realized then that what I have to do with these students is give them confidence in themselves."

These comments pertained both to Whitney's understanding of her responsibility to meet her students' needs and to her questioning how to achieve desirable ends, which define the moral domain. Each researcher coded for one domain but made note of data that could be multicoded in other domains. Multicoded data indicated relationships existed between the domains as candidates tried to make sense of various teaching situations. Researchers also conferred at regular intervals to refine coding procedures.

In the second stage, we placed all units of data into subcategories. For example, we assigned Whitney's statements above to the "what to do about poor grades" subcategory, found in the moral domain. Because one of our goals was to assess the validity of the ICM framework, we wanted to ensure these subcategories fit the definitions of each domain. Therefore, we constantly referred back to the definitions of each domain during coding. In addition, we outlined the salient components of each domain's definition and aligned them with the subcategories of coded data. The definitional components of the intellectual domain are learning expectations,

curriculum instruction, beliefs about how students learn, and role as a professional. The components of the cultural domain are awareness of teacher identity, awareness of student identity, and modifying instruction to meet all students' needs. The components of the moral domain are value awareness, consideration of desirable ends and how to achieve, and responsibility to meet the needs of others and care for others. This composed the third stage of analysis. In the final stage of coding, we grouped together subcategories that were phenomenologically similar and assigned them broader categories. As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984), this information is organized into tables (see Tables 1-3 below). These multiple layers of specificity provided a means to examine how teachers were intellectually, culturally, and morally thinking about their teaching.

### Dispositions Expressed by Teacher Candidates

We present the data using two forms. First, we provide a table with topics (categories and subcategories) under each domain and the aligning components from the definition of each domain (see the previous paragraph). We then describe typical examples to illustrate how candidates address some of the more salient categories. Although the presence and the absence of certain topics provide interesting information, we believe the heart of understanding dispositions lies in the way teacher candidates attempt to make sense of the teaching situations they encounter. More sophisticated reflections generally indicated greater awareness of dispositions. This is described in more detail in the discussion section.

#### Intellectual Dispositions

Categories that emerged from the intellectual domain focus on the candidates' content and pedagogical decisions in teaching. Candidates described issues such as delivering the content, motivating students, and grading as some of their struggles (see Table 1). Although teacher candidates aptly considered issues of instructional methods and connecting students to the content, a focus on student learning was noticeably absent.

Aspects of "content and pedagogy" underlie all topics in this domain. We use it as a broad category within the intellectual domain when teacher candidates make explicit references, whereas we use other categories when content and pedagogy are backgrounded to other related topics. Consistent with research on the concerns of beginning teachers (Berliner, 1994; Fuller, 1969), one issue that consistently emerged across teacher candidates' journals is that of delivery of material; however, this subcategory occurred often at the exclusion of students. Instead of asking questions about students' learning of the content, candidates most often focused solely on their delivery of instruction. For example, Jackie, from University A, was enthusiastic about her plans to teach 11th

**Table 1.** Categories of Intellectual Dispositions

Broad category	Subcategory	Intellectual domain definition
Content and pedagogy	• Delivery of material	• Instruction
	• Comparison with methods of cooperating teacher	• Instruction
	• Planning	• Curriculum
	• Grading	• Learning expectations
	• Pacing/timing of lessons	• Learning expectations; instruction
	• Assignments	• Learning expectations
Students	• Questioning	• Instruction
	• Lack of transition from content knowledge to pedagogical content knowledge	• Instruction
	• Relevance to students' lives	• Curriculum; beliefs about learning
	• Maintaining students' attention	• Instruction
	• Gaining students' respect	• Role as professional
	• Seeking ways to reach students	• Instruction; beliefs about learning
Classroom management	• Completion of assignments	• Learning expectations
	• Grades	• Learning expectations
	• Inability to teach content without management	• Instruction, beliefs about learning
	• Issues of how to motivate students to maintain manageable classroom	• Instruction
Professional relationships	• Methods of teaching influencing management	• Instruction; beliefs about learning
	• Influence of supervising classroom teacher	• Role as professional
	• Influence of relationships with other teachers	• Role as professional
Reflection	• Communication with parents	• Role as professional
	• Changes in teaching methods	• Instruction
	• Lack of reflective thought/reflective practice	• Role as professional
	• Feedback from supervising classroom teacher/university supervisor	• Role as professional
<b>TOTALS</b>		
Instruction	11	
Role as professional	6	
Learning expectation	5	
Beliefs about learning	4	
Curriculum	2	

graders about the use of quilts in the Underground Railroad. She wrote,

I put together a worksheet with the symbols showing each square of a quilt . . . and how each square was put together to tell an entire message. . . . I told them about it excitedly . . . however, I was disappointed by the lack of discussion or enthusiasm.

Jackie did not question her goals of instruction or whether her methods may have influenced students' lack of motivation. Jackie's focus was on her own enthusiasm about the content. Later in the semester, she was disappointed at the students' grades on a test. She lamented, "I don't know what else I could have done. I tried cooperative learning activities, puzzles, games, discussion and debate. I tried to make it relevant, fun, interesting and at their level." Jackie is experiencing a problem of enactment (Kennedy, 1999). From her teacher education program Jackie possessed knowledge of different

instructional strategies, and she actually was inclined to put this knowledge to use. Where Jackie can show improvement is in her reflection of how she puts her knowledge to use and whether she is achieving the ultimate goal of increasing student learning.

Karen, a biology teacher from University A, also struggled to focus on student learning, mostly focusing on her methods. She described teaching about protozoa, a topic she had not studied herself for three years:

I think by the 3rd time I gave the talk it was getting better. My coop[erating teacher] helped me out with some things that I did not say. The only other thing that is bothering me is that he . . . wants me to straight lecture like he does. . . . However, I feel like the students will learn better if I provide at least an outline for them. . . . I felt lost also because I had to keep looking down at my notebook to make sure I was covering everything.

In this example, Karen tried to determine the best way to cover her material. Like Jackie, Karen adopted language and principles that she learned in her teacher education program. She wanted to avoid straight lecture and to incorporate visuals into her lesson. Although Karen tangentially mentioned student learning, there is no evidence that she assessed whether learning occurred. Many of the candidates in our sample used educationally appropriate terms in their journals but failed to display the depth of understanding necessary to put to use the complex concepts the terms represented. According to Hammerness et al. (2005), “Novice teachers often use the same language as teacher educators but signify different things” (p. 368). Awareness of educationally appropriate terms is insufficient; teacher candidates like Karen must also demonstrate awareness for how the meanings of such concepts relate to students’ learning.

The emphasis on content is not to imply the teacher candidates were not concerned about students; it is students’ learning that they regularly overlooked. This explains why “beliefs about learning” is a definitional component that appeared infrequently when we aligned the definition of intellectual with the subcategories that emerged in the data (see Table 1). However, candidates raised several issues with regard to students, including grading. Not surprisingly, the subcategory of grading is the closest connection to students’ learning evidenced in the journals. Often, the candidates wanted students to improve their performance yet still failed to mention whether or not students actually learned content or engaged in critical thinking processes around the content. Karen questioned the appropriateness of a semester grade for her student Benita:

She never did well on the tests, but she does pay attention and she turned in a huge project at the end of the quarter that she has not yet done for any other quarter. . . . She is in the track 3 class. Most of them do not plan on going into the science field. . . . Since she tried so hard this semester, we decided to pass her. I know this is somewhat giving an unfair grade since we did not bump up everyone who failed, but I really feel in this situation that we did the right thing.

Although Karen questioned Benita’s final grade, she failed to pose some crucial questions: What do the grades represent—effort, learning, both? What are reasonable expectations for Track 3 students? What does it mean to be fair both to individual students and to an entire class? Karen seems unaware that she assumed effort should be factored into student grades, that fairness means treating everyone equally, and that expectations for Track 3 students should differ from those for other students. As will be discussed later, this example also demonstrates how reflections within the intellectual domain are affected by the depth of one’s awareness within the moral domain.

Although many candidates did not progress to the point of focusing on student learning, we did see glimmers of evidence. As a result of writing her journals and attending her weekly student teaching seminar, Jackie eventually raised tentative questions about students’ learning:

What if my expectations for what the [low track] students learn is lower than my expectations for what College Prep students learn? . . . Does that have to mean that I expect my students all to reach the same level of knowledge? I don’t think it does. . . . This idea is more [about] understanding students’ varying strengths and weaknesses. I’m not sure about this.

Despite the uncertainty revealed in this excerpt, Jackie demonstrates an inclination to question her beliefs about student learning. Although she is still unsettled with her ideas, the growth in her awareness is identifiable in her reflection about how she frames her expectations of students.

### *Cultural Dispositions*

Cultural dispositions are teachers’ inclinations to make necessary modifications to meet the needs of diverse learners. They involve teachers’ awareness of their own cultural identity, their awareness of students’ cultures, and the effect of culture on the learning environment and student achievement. The journals we analyzed revealed the difficulty of culture playing a significant role in teachers’ thinking about classroom practice. The teacher candidates described attempts to meet the needs of all learners, but they often viewed students unlike themselves as the other (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Furthermore, despite possessing some awareness of aspects of cultural difference in their students, candidates failed to view themselves as possessing a culture that affected their teaching decisions. Therefore, the categories that emerged from the data mostly dealt with how candidates tried to meet the needs of diverse learners, using the student as the starting point rather than the self. Meeting students’ needs included the importance of knowing and connecting to students and candidates’ view of their obligations concerning diverse learners (see Table 2).

Theresa, from University B, provides a compelling example of how she attempted to understand her students and use that knowledge to meet their needs. Theresa’s field placement took place in a rural school in Appalachia where most students were White and financially limited. She described her thoughts and feelings about many of her students’ lives at home:

I have learned that it is very difficult not to get caught up emotionally with the students’ home lives. There are a lot of students in my class, who come from poor, abusive, and scary homes. It is very difficult to not treat these students differently from the students who

**Table 2.** Categories of Cultural Dispositions

Broad category	Subcategory	Cultural domain definition
Importance of knowing and connecting to students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing students' lives outside of school</li> <li>• Utilizing knowledge to modify instruction to meet needs</li> <li>• Meeting students "where they're at" and challenging students to grow</li> <li>• Maintaining high expectations of all students</li> <li>• Motivating students through making content relevant to their lives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student identity</li> <li>• Modify instruction</li> <li>• Student identity</li> <li>• Student identity</li> <li>• Modify instruction</li> </ul>
Internal or external stance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal—assumes responsibility for meeting needs of diverse learners</li> <li>• External—relinquishes responsibility for meeting needs of diverse learners to others such as specialists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modify instruction</li> <li>• Lack of modifying instruction</li> </ul>
Systemic issues influencing student achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Testing</li> <li>• Tracking</li> <li>• Assimilation versus accommodation of second language students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student identity</li> <li>• Student identity</li> <li>• Student identity</li> <li>• Student identity; modify instruction</li> </ul>
Self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledging stereotypes of students based on appearance and special needs labeling</li> <li>• Plethora of responsibilities teachers hold</li> <li>• How much of <i>self</i> to bring into the classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher identity; student identity</li> <li>• Teacher identity</li> <li>• Teacher identity</li> </ul>
<b>TOTALS</b>		
Student identity	8	
Modify instruction	5	
Teacher identity	3	

come from average, normal families. Mrs. B has taught me some subtle ways to help these students without making it known to them, or to their peers.

Theresa described examples of her cooperating teacher understanding students' various needs, including physical, psychological, and academic. She was impressed that Mrs. B put a snack in one student's desk every day because his family "cannot afford to feed him." Theresa continued,

Mrs. B has also helped a young girl who comes from a trashy family who does not even support her going to school. The girl began hanging out with some older girls that live in her trailer park, and Mrs. B could see her falling into a bad routine. She made this girl the team manager for the dance team. Mrs. B knew that this girl could not afford to pay for any of the things that are needed to belong to the dance team, but as team manager, the girl gets a uniform and all of the other special extras that the girls have. . . . Mrs. B said she could already see such a difference in her performance in school. . . . I thought this was the most special thing, and I am glad that I had the opportunity to witness this.

Although Theresa did not explicitly address classroom instruction, she considered the students' cultural context and its effect on an individual's overall development. Theresa allowed what she knew about her students' backgrounds to influence how she thought about the classroom and the needs of her

students. Theresa's choice of words, however, may lend insight into her assumptions about her students as she described their home situations as scary and trashy, a description she juxtaposed with a description of students who come from average, normal families. Although Theresa observed different ways to help students who are economically disadvantaged, to build awareness of her cultural dispositions she will need to reflect on her own assumptions, including what she perceives as normal.

Analysis of the journals also revealed how candidates perceived they could meet the needs of a variety of learners. Some believed that teaching students with any kind of special needs should be delegated to a specialist; others believed it was, at least in part, their responsibility. We categorized these as external and internal stance, respectively, in thinking about diverse learners. Juliann provides an example of an external stance. In describing her experience observing one student as part of her elementary curriculum internship, she wrote, "From this experience I know that diversity can be a problem in the classroom but there are several ways that one can deal with it such as the ESL teacher and classroom tutors." Teacher candidates like Juliann may assume an external stance because they feel unprepared to work with diverse learners. Because she was unsure how to teach diverse students, Juliann viewed diversity as a problem. Summarizing the research base on how teacher education programs prepare teachers to work in diverse settings, Hollins and Guzman (2005) state, "Studies found that although teacher candidates were generally open to the idea of cultural diversity, they lacked confidence in their ability to do well in diverse

settings” (p. 483). In contrast, some candidates demonstrated an internal stance, viewing themselves as an appropriate resource to work with diverse learners. For example, Liz, from University B, described an inclination to deepen her knowledge base, stating, “Through workshops and other training, I as a regular teacher can learn some ways to help ESL students in the regular classroom environment.” Recognizing that her knowledge and skills were lacking, Liz was inclined to refine these aspects of her teaching so she could most effectively work with diverse learners.

Although an internal stance is vital, Hollins and Guzman (2005) also emphasize the importance of questioning one’s role, claiming that unless teachers have the opportunities to question existing attitudes, the candidates most in need of appropriate learning opportunities will least likely receive them. Leah, an elementary intern, demonstrated this incipient self-awareness when she shared how working with a diverse population of students challenged her stereotypes:

I admit I have been guilty of forming stereotypes and opinions of my students’ capabilities. The funny thing is, almost every time they have proved me wrong. . . . I chose a specific child to do for my observation because she had a learning disability and I figured she would be a good child to observe. I thought that she wouldn’t really progress and I could write a paper on how her behavior was bad, and her home life was bad, . . . and this made her a learning disabled child. She totally proved me wrong. . . . The paper I wrote for this assignment went totally in the opposite direction I had thought in the beginning, and I was excited about it.

The dismantling of stereotypes is rudimentary to developing awareness of one’s cultural dispositions as the ramifications of faulty assumptions and lack of awareness of students’ culture are likely to affect student learning negatively (Gay, 2002; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Another important facet missing in candidates’ journals was their awareness of their own background and how it affected student learning. Candidates could, therefore, not reflect on how their cultures and students’ cultures informed their pedagogical decisions. It follows that teacher educators must encourage candidates like Theresa and Leah to ask many questions, about not just how to meet the needs of all learners but also how to develop an awareness of their own culture and how their own cultural assumptions affect their view of students.

### *Moral Dispositions*

Moral dispositions involve the inclination to think through one’s moral values and how one relates to others. The teacher candidates described value-laden topics that fit into a number of broad categories, from questions about curriculum, including the purpose of what teachers are supposed to teach,

to what it means to care for students (see Table 3). Although the categories and subcategories indicate what the candidates value, how they were inclined to discuss these topics reveals more about their moral dispositions. The coding for this domain required a higher degree of inference than the other domains as candidates did not explicitly mention their values much less how their values affected their teaching. However, we noted that some candidates demonstrated a nascent awareness of their moral dispositions because they were inclined to explore assumptions and ramifications of decisions, thinking through teaching situations from multiple perspectives.

Many candidates grappled with the curriculum, especially what they were supposed to teach and how this related to broad aims of schooling. It should be noted that when candidates considered issues related to moral values and desired ends, their statements were coded as moral. When candidates’ remarks focused on academic content without considering the purposes of the content, they were coded in the intellectual domain. A number of candidates articulated generalizations related to educational aims. For example, Veronica from University B said, “The most important thing in any classroom is to provide a positive learning environment for the students and to make learning enjoyable for the children.” Such statements predominantly could be characterized as “a big, broad ideal, familiar and compelling” (Hansen, 2001, p. 172) but lacking in depth of explanation or justification. In other words, candidates were inclined to articulate desirable goals but failed to make the connection of how these goals are realized in classroom practice.

A few candidates struggled with how to conceptualize their role as the teacher when they disagreed with aspects of the curriculum. For example, Natalie, an elementary intern, questioned the scripted curriculum in her classroom based on what she perceived as its desired ends:

One of my biggest fears in wanting to become a classroom teacher is that teaching seems like it has become so prescriptive. The amount of materials and workbook activities and technological toys, practically take care of the teaching. Yet, I feel it is a kind of teaching that is designed to meet a test. Therefore, is it really teaching? . . . This seemed to lead to a fairly collective attitude of meanness on the part of the teachers. I do not feel these teachers behave that way from their hearts, but rather because they feel they have no other choice.

Natalie does not reach any conclusions but is aware of the tension she and other teachers may feel when their own perception of desired ends conflicts with those of the school.

Danielle, an English student teacher in a racially and socioeconomically diverse high school, also questioned aspects of the curriculum—the efficacy of standardized tests. Danielle wrote fairly extensively about this issue, much of which was coded in the moral domain namely because she questioned

**Table 3.** Categories of Moral Dispositions

Broad category	Subcategory	Moral domain definition
Curriculum and content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tensions between coverage and learning</li> <li>• Desire for academic rigor, higher order thinking</li> <li>• Concern over knowing content</li> <li>• Taking responsibility for student grades</li> <li>• Taking responsibility for student learning</li> <li>• Purpose of what is being taught</li> <li>• Grading fairly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desirable ends</li> <li>• Desirable ends</li> <li>• Responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Desirable ends</li> <li>• Desirable ends; responsibility to others and care</li> </ul>
Motivating students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students who don't do work</li> <li>• What to do about poor test grades—extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivators</li> <li>• Challenging students appropriately</li> <li>• Recognition that many students in lower tracks are intelligent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Desirable ends; responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Values</li> </ul>
Handling inappropriate behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disruptive classroom behaviors and discipline issues</li> <li>• Cheating</li> <li>• Sexual comments, gestures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desirable ends; responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Desirable ends</li> <li>• Values; desirable ends</li> </ul>
Affective aspects of teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of knowing students by name</li> <li>• Knowing students by label</li> <li>• Using personal relationships as means to help students academically</li> <li>• Caring for students vs. being tough</li> <li>• Awareness of social aspects of high school</li> <li>• Awareness that students affected by outside events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Values</li> <li>• Desirable ends; responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Desirable ends; responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Responsibility to others and care</li> </ul>
Issues beyond the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardized testing</li> <li>• Financial inequities of schools</li> <li>• Inequities of tracks; segregation of tracks</li> <li>• Faculty collaboration or lack of it</li> <li>• Parental involvement</li> <li>• Removing bad teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values</li> <li>• Values</li> <li>• Values</li> <li>• Responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Desirable ends; responsibility to others and care</li> <li>• Values</li> </ul>
<b>TOTALS</b>		
Responsibility to others and care	15	
Desirable ends	11	
Values	7	

the fairness of the test, considering desirable ends from the perspective of multiple constituents. She wrote,

Kids don't have to be geniuses to pass the test, but they do have to have decent reading and writing skills. That said, I know a lot of my students probably won't pass it—they don't HAVE decent reading and writing skills. Something went wrong somewhere along the way for these kids, because they're not dumb. Some of it is a question of exposure.

Rather than assume the test was fair, Danielle examined the test and deliberated on whether it was appropriate. She also

reflected on the likely outcomes of her lower track students taking the test. She avoided blaming the students for the apparent inadequacy of their skills in performing well on this assessment. Rather, she considered possible reasons for why they lacked those skills and reasoned that her students were not dumb. She also commented that it was understandable that many elementary schools in the district decided to focus only on reading, writing, and math as they were faced with losing significant funding if test scores remained low.

Danielle demonstrates sophisticated reflection around the assumptions and consequences of the mandated standardized tests. She considers the issue on a number of levels. From a macro level, she considers the rationale for a

schoolwide curricular decision that was based on possible ramifications of federal policy. From a micro level, she considers the reasons why certain groups of students, namely the lower tracks, tend to perform poorly on the tests. Danielle exhibits a greater awareness of her moral dispositions because on multiple levels she considers the desirable ends related to standardized testing, processes for achieving those ends, and some assumptions and consequences of different facets of this issue.

Another broad issue that manifested throughout teacher candidates' journals is how candidates defined their role in relationship to their students. Some candidates experienced conflict in negotiating how to handle discipline while still demonstrating care for students and also motivating students to learn. For example, Whitney decided she made a mistake with an upper level 12th grade class by being too friendly with them at the beginning. About a month into her placement, experiencing a lack of control, she questioned, "How will I teach them if they do not respect me?" A week later she decided to alleviate the problem by adopting an "I mean business attitude" and coming across as a "mean, uncaring teacher." She said she could not pull this off "probably because I really do care." Although she struggled, Whitney's focus shifted to considering the consequences of a lackadaisical relationship on student learning. She also was inclined to think through how to alter her relationship with students to create an atmosphere more conducive to learning. Whitney was inclined to achieve particular ends—fostering student learning—but struggled with the process, specifically her role, to achieve them. She seemed to be struggling with what it means to care for her students. If Noddings's (1992) premise is correct, that care does not occur if it is not received, then Whitney was beginning to ask effective questions to reflect on her relationship with the students and the result on their learning. She was inclined to reflect on her values pertaining to desirable ends and to examine critically her role in the process to achieve those ends.

For Whitney and a number of the candidates, the inclination to consider the moral aspects of teaching on multiple levels sometimes created more confusion than immediate answers. However, we contend that such reflection is more fruitful, if not essential, for the development of one's moral dispositions as questioning represents a growing awareness of how one's values and perceptions of desirable ends translate into effective classroom practice.

## Discussion and Implications

To enhance our understanding of teacher candidates' dispositions, we analyzed how 35 candidates were inclined to think intellectually, culturally, and morally about their teaching, and we examined the adequacy of the ICM framework. Because no additional domains emerged during coding and analysis, the framework appears broad enough to embody candidates'

dispositions; however, we noted considerable overlap of domains in terms of the topics candidates described. We also noted that certain components of each domain's definition were less apparent in the data. This indicates a few things about the framework and how it should be used. First, it is not the existence of topics, rather how the candidates reflect on the topics, that reveals the most about one's dispositions at a given time. Embedded within candidates' reflections are assumptions about teaching, learning, teachers, and students. Because dispositions involve the inclination of a teacher to achieve particular purposes, faulty assumptions will stymie the ability of the teacher to act in ways that are most likely to reach these purposes. Therefore, an important means for developing dispositions is unpacking one's assumptions. For example, Karen does not question her emphasis on instructional methods and grades over student learning, demonstrating the likelihood that she is unaware she possesses preconceptions about teaching that affect her view of events in her classroom (Hammerness et al., 2005; Lortie, 1975; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). According to Nespor (1987), "If we are interested in *why* teachers organize and run classrooms as they do we must pay much more attention to the goals they pursue . . . and to their subjective interpretations of classroom processes" (p. 325). The goals teachers pursue can be fraught with unrecognized assumptions, potentially leading to misguided interpretations of classroom processes if left unexamined. Candidates inclined to question were on the cusp of developing self-awareness of their dispositions. We hypothesize that when candidates are more aware of their dispositions, they will be more purposeful in their teaching and, therefore, more likely to achieve their goals (Dottin, 2009).

Second, the fact that some aspects of the definitions were less prevalent in the data indicates that the candidates engaged in thinking about certain topics and not others. Across domains, one pattern involved the tension between focusing on self and focusing on students, which tended to shift depending on the domain. In the intellectual domain, candidates primarily considered their own actions as the teacher, often neglecting to consider how these actions affected student learning. Because teacher education focuses on teachers' knowledge and skills related to content and pedagogy (Calderhead, 1993; Korthagen, 2001), teachers may be more inclined to assume that student learning is a natural corollary to particular teaching behaviors. In contrast, candidates focus primarily on students rather than themselves within the cultural domain. When candidates consider a classroom of students unlike themselves, their inclination is to focus on student difference, viewing students as the deficient other (Delpit, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Typically, candidates have not had the opportunity to consider themselves as cultured (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) or to develop "an awareness of the ways their culture shapes their views" (Banks et al., 2005, p. 253).

The tension between focus on self versus focus on students is less pronounced in the moral domain. Many candidates considered the ramifications of their actions on the self or the students but often used a narrow lens. In this domain, the candidates most likely to consider their assumptions and who possessed the greatest sense of awareness of their dispositions were those who viewed situations from multiple perspectives or questioned how they were thinking about a situation. As in the cultural domain where candidates did not acknowledge themselves as cultured, few articulated an awareness of their own values and how they affected their teaching. However, some candidates, such as Danielle, demonstrated inclinations to question how they were viewing a situation and demonstrated an ability to view a situation from multiple perspectives.

In sum, our data indicate that candidates who possessed the greatest awareness of their dispositions also had the greatest capacity to unpack their assumptions. Specifically, their reflections demonstrated three characteristics: (a) a propensity for questioning the how and why of their thinking and actions, (b) a balance between focusing on students and the self across all domains, and (c) adoption of multiple perspectives.

The challenge for teacher educators then is how to move candidates to develop their thinking in these three areas so they understand how their dispositions positively and negatively affect their teaching decisions. A number of researchers have already suggested the importance of candidates' considering unexamined assumptions (Banks et al., 2005; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Hammerness et al., 2005; Richardson & Placier, 2001). For candidates to use multiple perspectives to reflect on teaching situations and achieve parity in focusing on students and the self requires time and sequential scaffolding across a program. Similar to recommendations related to exploring personal theories related to teaching (see Borich, 1999; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Korthagen, 2004), we recommend that educators interested in developing candidates' dispositions begin with reflective activities that help candidates better understand the self (Carroll & Carney, 2005; Sockett, 2006). To help candidates build an awareness of the self, such activities should include articulating desired ends, clarifying moral values, and understanding one's own cultural identity. Candidates must then be guided to discern the contexts of different teaching situations so they can achieve their purposes. Given the developmental nature of dispositions, this must be a process addressed and modeled continually throughout the candidates' program (Carroll, 2005). A promising technique is the collaborative coaching suggested by Diez (2007b), which honors the "personal characteristics [of the candidate] in the context of the role demands of the professional educator" (p. 216). Helping candidates achieve self-awareness must be purposeful and ongoing.

## Conclusion

For understanding how candidates develop self-awareness of their dispositions, this exploratory study is only a beginning. We collected data from 35 teacher candidate journals at two institutions. Additional data should include teacher candidates at additional institutions and, for comparison purposes, data from practicing teachers. Data in addition to candidates' written reflections are also necessary. Although we posit that dispositions are at the center of how one thinks through and acts on different teaching situations, a limitation of this study is that it examines only teacher thinking and does not directly observe teacher behavior. In addition, although journals were open ended and graded for completion, candidates still may have expressed thoughts they believed the instructors wanted to hear. Researchers should continue to explore candidate assumptions within each of the domains as well as the nature of the relationships between the domains, examining both candidates' thinking and their corresponding actions.

Most importantly, researchers must explore how programs embrace the challenge of developing teacher candidates' awareness of their dispositions. Such work is imperative in illuminating what Cochran-Smith (2005) calls the "black box" of teacher quality. Only through understanding how teachers are inclined to think and act in different teaching situations will those involved in teacher education engender effective teachers of the highest quality.

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## Notes

1. For a complete description of the framework, see Stooksberry, Schussler, and Bercaw (2009).
2. All proper names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the study participants.

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### About the Authors

**Deborah L. Schussler** is an associate professor of education at Villanova University. Her research interests include teacher moral development as related to their dispositions, teacher care, and learning communities.

**Lisa M. Stooksberry** is the director of certification standards for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Her research interests include standards-based teacher education, teacher dispositions, and performance-based assessment.

**Lynne A. Bercaw** is an associate professor at California State University, Chico. Her research interests include teacher education, service learning, and preparing teachers for diverse learners.