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# The ICCTE Journal

*A Journal of the International Christian Community for Teacher Education*

## Dispositions: Real-Time Active Practice

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### Abstract

This longitudinal case study followed new teachers from one small undergraduate pre-service program into the first years of teaching. The researcher's initial study (Hughes, 2014) examined dispositional awareness and development of participants using personal interview data from program graduates, interview data from program faculty, and archived course artifacts. The current study extends the research and shines a light on dispositional development from pre-service through the fourth year of teaching. Using personal interviews, a focus group meeting, and archived course artifacts, the study affirms the significance of dispositions in pre-service preparation and professional practice. The study validates that participants carry dispositional awareness into the fourth year of teaching and also reveals a variety of strategies that new teachers use to grow dispositions. Of significance is the finding that new teachers require a set of dispositional practices for career longevity. This finding exposes the need for increased professional development opportunities related to dispositions during and beyond the first years of teaching.

### Introduction

In the last several decades, United States' educational initiatives such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Every Student Succeeds Act altered the educational landscape. Linking the ever-changing demands of these initiatives alongside the pre-requisite that teaching is a complex and constructive process, pre-service programs must develop and prepare candidates with content, skills, and pedagogy. Additionally, because of the increasing social-emotional demands placed on teachers, pre-service programs must equip teacher candidates with dispositions and a depth of care that transfers to K-12 students.

In 2011, in an effort to care for and nurture pre-service candidates' dispositions, a formal focus on

dispositions was introduced in the teacher education program of study. Faculty initiated efforts to infuse three dispositions through instruction, collaboration, and assignments. With each new cohort, faculty and candidates made a commitment to seek and nurture dispositions throughout the pre-service program (Dispositions Statement, 2011). In order to identify the program's dispositional expressions and build a profile for dispositional development, the researcher collected data from multiple sources, including personal interviews of graduates in their first year of teaching, faculty interviews, and archived course artifacts. The initial case study from 2014 revealed four program expressions for dispositional development: an early focus on dispositions, modeling by faculty, embedded coursework, and multiple practice contexts. The study validated that dispositions were embedded throughout the pre-service program and graduates carried dispositional awareness into their first year of teaching. Future research was recommended to investigate the impact of the program's dispositional focus after the first year of teaching (Hughes, 2014).

For this subsequent longitudinal study, the researcher sought to widen the program's dispositional lens and add to the initial findings. The program has since added a fourth disposition (Dispositions Statement, 2015). Although the new study does not provide a specific roadmap for dispositional development during or after completion of a pre-service program, it does provide a snapshot into new teacher dispositional awareness and practices. Results can be used to inform the program of study, advance similar sized pre-service programs, and promote dispositional development with school districts that prioritize dispositions with new hires.

## Literature Review

### Dispositions: Significant for Teacher Preparation

In 2001, dispositions were defined as the professional attitudes, values, and beliefs that influence the decisions and actions of educators (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2001). Over the last several decades, researchers agreed that fostering dispositions in teacher candidates contributed to the academic, social, and emotional well being of new teachers (Day, 2004; Giovenelli, 2003; Wake & Bunn, 2016). Today's educational climate, linked with the complexities of teaching, requires pre-service programs to prepare candidates with professional teaching dispositions alongside content knowledge, skills, and pedagogy (Conderman & Walker, 2015; Shively & Misco, 2010). This responsibility validates the approach to educate, care for, and develop the whole person (Cronon, 1999; Holmes, 1975; Noddings, 1984). Recently, the President of the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education affirmed that teachers need to operate with pedagogical and content knowledge, and with professional ethics and dispositions (Denton, 2017).

For the purpose of this study, dispositions are defined as, "the habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie an educator's performance" (Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation, 2016). Two additional terms highlighted in this study are: 1) *dispositional awareness* or the conscious perception or self-awareness to name, define, and understand professional teaching dispositions, and, 2) *dispositional development* or the ongoing process of cultivating and applying professional teaching dispositions in practice.

Dispositions remain a priority in teacher education (Costa & Kallick, 2016; Evans-Palmer, 2016). Over the years, researchers agreed that dispositions are essential to teaching and teacher preparation; empirical research affirms that dispositions impact learning outcomes (Schussler, 2006; Schussler & Knarr, 2013). Educators repeatedly reference philosopher John Dewey's call for dispositions in practice; Dewey first highlighted reflection and

open-mindedness to develop individuals as strong, contributing citizens (1916; 1938). Dewey claimed that reflection led to active thinking and then action. Farrell (2014) revisited Dewey's recommendation and encouraged teachers to listen to the many sides of an issue, consider the impact of instructional decisions, and commit to review teaching practices. Farrell concluded that teachers, often resistant to change, should demonstrate increased open-mindedness. In 2002, one set of researchers recommended opportunities for reflection for teacher development. The team encouraged a focus on contexts for reflection to empower new teachers to make informed instructional decisions (Risko, Vukelich, & Roskos, 2002).

The reviewed literature affirmed increased efforts to infuse dispositions throughout pre-service programs. DaRos-Voseles and Moss (2007) specifically promoted dispositions to foster student achievement naming dispositions as fundamental to elevate the teaching profession. Additionally, pre-service teachers need opportunities in a variety of classroom contexts to develop dispositions (Claxton, Costa, & Kallick, 2016). These softer skills are more than just warm-fuzzy feelings and they do play a significant role in teacher preparation.

In 2016, Phi Delta Kappan's Educators Rising Standards for prospective teachers encouraged reflective practice as a habit of mind fundamental for teacher development (Educators Rising, 2016). This focus was a shift in direction from an educational system previously focused on data driven assessment (Ravitch, 2016). With this shift, researchers recommended making dispositions explicit in practice for further development in teachers and to create meaningful experiences for students (Claxton et al., 2016). Similarly, in 2016, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation or CAEP, released new standards for program accreditation. These new and current expectations require pre-service programs to demonstrate professional dispositions throughout coursework and clinical experiences. This expectation adds strength to the notion that dispositions are habits that can be learned with practice (Costa & Kallick, 2014; Previtis & Bauer, 2013).

In the last decade, new associations between dispositions and growth mindset theory emerged (Dweck, 2006; 2016). The development of a growth mindset encourages habits for student motivation and learning. Similarly, fostering academic mindsets to develop learning habits lends support to thinking about education as a mindset journey for meaningful work and improvement for both students and teachers (Schwartz, 2014).

Since then, California's revised Teacher Performance Expectations for pre-service programs require pre-service teachers to demonstrate dispositions such as caring, support, and acceptance (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016). At the same time, researchers recently linked dispositions for the classroom to attributes such as resilience and flexibility (Evans-Palmer, 2016; Farrell, 2014). Additional research (Smylie & Murphy, 2016) recommended that school leaders create capacity for academic success by looking beyond the individual to prioritize values such as empathy, care, and listening in and outside of school. This focus advances best practices to build emotionally healthy schools and develop thoughtful teachers.

### **Where is the Blueprint?**

Although CAEP affirmed the role of dispositions and set expectations that many teacher preparation programs in the United States follow, programs continue to approach dispositions differently; there isn't a single prescribed approach to infusing and assessing dispositions (Choi, Benson, & Shudak, 2016). Over the years, a variety of models, such as the Disposition Assessment Aligned with Teacher Standards, were created to help programs measure dispositions. Models like this suggested that teacher preparation fails if new teachers do not use the dispositions they have been taught in pre-service (Wilkerson & Lang, 2007). Yet even with sample structures, pre-service programs continue to approach dispositions in unique ways since there isn't a universal framework for dispositional development (Shivley & Misco, 2010). Some programs use pre-assessments or surveys to gauge dispositional development; others, like the program of study, use an embedded approach to connect curriculum, clinical contexts, and modeling for dispositional development (Hughes, 2014). One

collection of case studies recognized a variety of approaches in teacher preparation to develop, implement, and assess dispositions with intentional practice contexts to grow dispositional awareness (Schussler, Feiman-Menser, Diez, & Murrell, 2012).

Conderman and Walker (2015) affirmed that dispositions in teacher preparation lead to exemplary professional practice. An earlier study examined two teacher preparation programs with different models; comparatively, one of the programs emphasized dispositions in coursework, the other focused on dispositions in field experience. Recommendations included connecting theory and practice (Bercaw, Summers, Colby, & Payne, 2012, p. 523). Soon after, another Meidl research team recommended activities like community service to develop dispositions in candidates (Meidl & Baumann, 2015). Additionally, to prepare individuals as effective character educators, pre-service programs can identify expectations for dispositions (Sanger & Osguthrope, 2013). Similarly, one study suggested a pre-service emphasis on dispositions to develop reflection and decision-making (Johnson, Vare, & Evers, 2013). Likewise, Cummins and Asempapa (2013) affirmed that dispositions embedded in pre-service experiences fostered dispositional awareness; the scholars validated action-oriented opportunities in pre-service for dispositional awareness and growth.

### **New Teacher Isolation**

When pre-service programs make dispositions a priority, teachers begin their careers with some dispositional footing (Hughes, 2014). Yet, even when a new teacher is introduced to dispositions in pre-service there are a variety of factors, such as school climate, school leadership, and district support that can impact dispositional growth. Of particular interest, one team of researchers (Previtis & Bauer, 2013) suggested that meaningful professional development and mentoring strengthens the developing teacher's dispositional response. Bialka (2016) suggested that for pre-service programs to focus on dispositions, pre-service teachers must have the opportunity to reflect on their decisions or they will not do so once they are in their first teaching positions. Of particular

interest, Wormeli (2015) cautioned that teachers who ignore the emotional elements of teaching and learning can become isolated. Wormeli invited teachers to cultivate a sense of curiosity, infuse joy, and develop emotional wellness for the classroom; the author also encouraged dedicated time to foster emotional habits needed in teaching, highlighting the idea that dispositions are often overlooked in schools since they are not easily measured (Smith & Skarbeck, 2013). Others affirmed that, like pre-service teachers, teachers in permanent positions need experiences to develop dispositions (Titone, Sherman, & Palmer, 1998).

The reviewed literature exposed new momentum in teacher preparation to acclimate a teacher's thinking to care for and meet student needs, as well as to cultivate personal and professional growth. One educator highlighted that teaching remains a difficult and humbling challenge (Tomlinson, 2015). Soon after, Toshalis (2016) cautioned about inequities found in the educational system, suggesting that teacher isolation and apathy can be overcome with give and take in the classroom and action-oriented practices that demonstrate care and trust with students. Similarly, Aguilar (2016) endorsed prioritizing and cultivating emotional resilience for professional growth.

Hayward (2015) reinforced building self-awareness in teachers; for teachers to nurture attributes in their students, such as grit, teachers need self-awareness. Hayward recommended modeling risk-taking and telling personal stories to build trust with students. This recommendation supported an earlier suggestion to nurture a reflective disposition in teaching; Day (2004) highlighted professional qualities such as reflection, hope, curiosity, and commitment. Likewise, after analyzing teacher dispositions over five years, one study concluded that if a teacher developed a dispositional foundation in pre-service, the new teacher became more responsive to student needs (Previts & Bauer, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

Although much has been written about how pre-service programs integrate dispositions throughout preparation, the direction of dispositional development appears to narrow after the pre-service

experience. The researcher noted a traditionally heavy pre-service focus on content, pedagogy, and skills with less attention directed toward long-term dispositional development. Dispositions appeared to take a backseat to knowledge, skills, lesson planning, and assessment (Wake & Bunn, 2016).

Because the current literature promotes exploring dispositional development to strengthen teacher self-efficacy and teacher performance (Conderman & Walker, 2015; Wake & Dunn, 2016), and recognizing the need to develop dispositions beyond traditional pre-service programs (Meidl & Baumann, 2015), the researcher explored the following questions:

- 1) Do new teachers carry dispositions and dispositional awareness from the pre-service program into the first years of teaching?
- 2) If new teachers carry dispositions and dispositional awareness from the pre-service program into the first years of teaching, what is the impact?
- 3) Are there specific practices that nurture and sustain dispositional awareness and dispositional development in the new teacher?

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

The researcher conducted personal interviews with four original participants from the program's initial 2014 study. At the start of the present study, two of the participants were teaching in elementary classrooms, one in public school, and the other in private school. The other two participants were teaching in public high school classrooms. All interview participants lived and worked in close proximity to the pre-service program. Each participant was interviewed privately in her own classroom for convenience.

The researcher chose to add a focus group meeting with new participants to enlarge the new teacher's dispositional profile. Ten recent graduates teaching in close proximity to the program were invited to participate; five committed to participate. These participants gathered after school in a local elementary school classroom. One of these participants completed the program in 2015 and was in her second year of elementary teaching; the other

four participants completed the program in 2016 and were in their first year of teaching. At the time of the focus group meeting, four participants were public elementary school teachers and one taught in a public high school.

It should be noted that the program of study, although small, produces a consistent number of graduates that teach in close proximity to the program. Since 2009, approximately one third of program graduates landed teaching positions within ten miles of the program. The pre-service program offers prospective students several pathways to earn a bachelor's degree in liberal studies or elementary education, as well as a California Preliminary Multiple Subject Credential or Preliminary Single Subject Credential in four or five years.

The researcher attempted to tell the story of the developing teacher using case study framework (Creswell, 2013). Institutional Review Board approvals were obtained. Interview protocols were followed; each participant signed a consent form and was given the opportunity to opt out of questions. Ethical protocols were followed and detailed field notes were maintained. The researcher chose to ask the all the participants the same group of open-ended questions for consistency and to evaluate growth over time (see Appendix A).

Just like the 2014 study, the researcher served as interviewer and facilitator, giving explicit acknowledgment to former roles with participants to reduce possible bias. Personal interview and focus group meetings were recorded, transcribed verbatim, member-checked for accuracy, and analyzed for patterns and themes. Archived artifacts, including electronic portfolios and end of course essays, were triangulated to highlight additional patterns. The researcher expected the compilation of multiple sources to enlarge the dispositional profile.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The nature of qualitative research is to understand the personal experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013); the researcher welcomed the opportunity to examine new program data. The researcher hoped to extend the program's earlier research about dispositions and contribute to the greater

conversation. Although the sample size was small and could limit larger generalizations, the study's participant pool represented the program's small cohort size. The researcher trusted the data to reveal specifics about the program, add insight to the needs and progress of graduates, and inform pre-service programs, districts, and principals about dispositional development.

The decision to conduct personal interviews with the original participant pool was based on researcher choice and convenience. The researcher intentionally added a focus group meeting to increase the number of participant voices. Although participant perceptions and self-report findings can be considered limiting, details and real-time dispositional awareness among participants emerged as the direction of the research evolved and understanding of the topic grew.

## **Results**

### **Dispositions Build Self-Awareness**

Participant perceptions revealed agreement that dispositions introduced in the pre-service program build self-awareness. "I think they [dispositions] inform what I do. They're subconscious" (Participant D). When asked about the program's dispositions (see Appendix B), participants repeatedly commented that the program's dispositions were "engrained" throughout pre-service preparation. One Focus Group Participant shared, "I had really good practice with [dispositions] with the program . . . and lots of good habits that I've kind of just carried into teaching in a way that works for me." Another affirmed the program's focus on dispositions: "They [the dispositions] helped with dealing with just the practice of student teaching and then transitioning into full time."

Additionally, participants highlighted links between dispositions and self, dispositions and students, dispositions and colleagues; participants appeared to grasp the big picture and their significant role with students. When asked to define professional teaching dispositions, Participant D noted, "They are like characteristics or tendencies or traits that professional teachers should be fostering throughout their career." The participant continued, "They

[dispositions] are guiding principles in the way I interact with my students.” Likewise, Participant A shared, “Dispositions are the plumb-line for where I want to be. I keep the long-term goals in mind. Because I approach teaching with those dispositions . . . I feel like it’s given me a long-term vision of [you’re] doing something greater.”

Participants recognized dispositions in themselves and in colleagues; they named a desire to practice dispositions in their classrooms and shared personal examples where they demonstrated dispositions in and outside the classroom. Examples included creating space for students to reflect about their work, sharing materials with colleagues, practicing humility with colleagues, and reflecting on lessons with colleagues. Notably, when asked about how a teacher demonstrates dispositions, Participant A shared that modeling dispositions for students served as “relational clout that grows exponentially.” Participant B noted, “Colleagues without dispositions are harder to work with and engage with collaboratively. I have seen a difference when colleagues have these dispositions and when they do not.” Participant D affirmed this perception, “It is apparent when you go to meetings, which of your colleagues are compassionate, reflective, and seeking to grow and develop, and which ones aren’t.” Participant D stated in an essay, “To me, being a compassionate professional also means being a team player and working with fellow colleagues in a kind and professional manner.”

Focus Group Participants revealed that dispositions are essential for positive school collaboration: “My team, they’ve both been grateful servants and [that] they’ve generously given me what their class is doing, their lesson plans, the curriculum, they definitely display being grateful servants.” Another participant explained, “I almost feel like it’s something that will be helpful for teachers to have to sit through and say what are the dispositions that you think are most important and why” (Participant D). Yet another Focus Group Participant shared, “It’s really helpful to have the mission or the dispositions as a school because it makes it easier to practice, I think, when everyone’s more aware of them.”

### **Real-time Active Practice**

Participant responses repeatedly named that developing dispositions is a professional choice. One Focus Group Participant expressed that it is a decision to be grateful or compassionate. Another Focus Group Participant shared, “Dispositions are the practices or habits that I want to emulate as a professional.” Another claimed, “They’re [dispositions are] practices that can help strengthen your teaching.” Yet another Focus Group Participant described, “[dispositions are] things that are practices that you want to try and model and hopefully pass onto to students.”

Agreement emerged among participants regarding developing dispositions with purpose. One Focus Group Participant stated, “[Compassionate professional] reminds me to engage with the other teachers and have sympathy and empathy and really build relationships . . . instead of being isolated in my classroom and not helping others or hearing from.” Participant D coined her intentional daily reflective classroom practice as “real-time reflectiveness.”

Participants noted that active practice occurs with one’s self, with students, and with colleagues. This linked back to earlier findings that revealed when teachers develop a sense of dispositional awareness, there is a greater desire to practice and increase awareness (Hughes, 2014). Furthermore, participants expressed a desire for opportunities to experience dispositions in their work. Participant B explained:

We [my students and I] have discussion, class discussions on different topics, learning how to dialogue with each other and then we’ll step back and reflect on how our discussion went . . . and that’s been pretty special, like, they’re [the students] starting to clue in to different things because of that space to reflect!

She continued, “It’s [reflection] definitely a constant, it doesn’t turn off. You’re constantly reflecting on how to make it [the lesson] better.” Participant A stated, “Being able to reflect on your teaching practices constantly is what makes you become a better teacher.” Participant B affirmed,

“If there wasn’t that reflective piece, I think there’s a lot of days where you’d just throw in the towel.” Participants also expressed a desire to build dispositional capacity. Data provided support for real-time practice strategies and action. Citing the disposition of lifelong learner, one Focus Group Participant commented, “I need to bring in something that I am excited about learning. I think my students would really benefit from that, and it would be an easy way to implement [lifelong learner] into the classroom. Another Focus Group Participant stated, “I’ve learned a lot by getting into other people’s classrooms and [to] see how they interact with their students and [how they] treat their students. When asked about colleagues, Participant B responded, “We [colleagues] have lots of conversations before school, after school.” She explained that she “talks and debriefs with colleagues each day.” A Focus Group Participant shared, “As I plan, I ask [myself] what do my students need from this lesson?” An archived e-portfolio revealed, “Every situation and student is so different and I still have much to learn about what compassion looks like in the context of different [student] stories.” These examples further highlight the expressed desire by teachers for regular dispositional engagement and practice.

Agreement among participants was also noted around the idea that when dispositions are modeled, dispositions transfer to students. Examples included participant perceptions linked to reflection and growth mindset theory: “By being able to reflect on what they [students] have accomplished they are more likely to go into upcoming projects with a growth mindset instead of a fixed mindset” (Focus Group Participant e-portfolio). The same participant noted in an archived essay:

Being a life-long learner instills in them [students] an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and curiosity (Philosophy of Education essay). I will do this by modeling my own bottomless pit of inquiry, teaching them about the joy of learning and being interested in all things.

When asked about the impact of dispositions, a Focus Group Participant responded:

Remind them [students] that mistakes are part of learning and that it’s okay to make mistakes. When they have that sort of

mindset then when they get to challenges, they’re able to be more resilient and sort of push through their challenges or ask for help if they don’t understand something.

Another Focus Group Participant wrote in an e-portfolio: “By constantly reflecting I am able to learn things about myself and recognize patterns. From these reflections, I can then make changes to my instruction or management.” Another explained, “I survey students and ask them to reflect on projects. I ask what do you like about this assignment? What are you proud of? What was important in the assignment?” (Focus Group Participant).

### **A Dispositional Toolbox?**

The data underscored that participants repeatedly articulated an understanding of the significance of dispositions for their professional big picture. Participants revealed self-awareness and the ability to focus on others. In particular, Participant A shared, “Building relational emotional skills and emotional intelligence I think is everything in this job. I have had to learn how to be in touch with my own skill set and be okay with what I’m strong at.”

When asked about the role dispositions play in teaching, Participant A stated, “I think it is essential to have [these] dispositions if you are going to survive.” A Focus Group Participant reinforced this response, “I don’t want to become a grouchy old teacher; I need to survive and I wonder about the habit of being compassionate.” When asked about new teacher support at school, Participant C concluded, “I’d say I think when I start to lose those dispositions is when I probably shouldn’t be teaching anymore.” Furthermore, a Focus Group Participant stated, “And so I wonder if five years down the road if I’m not being intentional about it [dispositions] if I’ll kind of lose that.” Participant C shared, “[do not] keep dispositions dusty or rusty, but sharp!” She continued, “Honestly, when I lose the dispositions I shouldn’t be teaching.” These perceptions exposed a concern from participants regarding their professional futures. Participant A reinforced the concern when she explained, “Sometimes I feel like [I’m] on an island. . . I would just love more time with colleagues for building those relationships.” Participant C also shared:



I think when I start to lose that love of learning or that compassionate heart towards students, I think that's a pretty good sign that maybe I would need, maybe it's time for a change for me because it's going really impact students they have a teacher that no longer, I think, values their profession and values the things that are important to being a teacher.

When participants were asked about the role dispositions play in Induction, the state's new teacher mentoring program (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015), responses varied. One Focus Group Participant commented, "I am in the mentoring [Induction] program this year. I joined it so I could clear my credential. There is not an emphasis on dispositions. They do mention the inquiry cycle which I guess sounds like [being a] reflective practitioner but it's not really stated why we are doing the inquiry cycle." Another Focus Group Participant acknowledged, "There is not so much of an emphasis on dispositions, more on curriculum development and classroom management." In contrast, Participant A shared, "I did finish my program two years ago. [Induction] definitely focused on the professional development and passion for your craft. They encouraged us to dig into areas where we wanted to grow, magnify aspects we were passionate about, and implement new things into our classroom." Yet another Focus Group Participant shared: "I [also] have found it helpful to be with other first year teachers who are going through the same thing I am. That sense of support is especially helpful for a first-year teacher."

### **Conclusions**

Data revealed particulars to inform the program of study and encourage greater dialogue in the field. The study's recommendations can be considered by similar-sized teacher education programs, school districts, and principals. Of particular significance is the stated perception and concern by participants regarding their professional futures; three of four interview participants and four of five focus group participants named this concern. Participant responses suggested that it is an individual teacher's decision to develop dispositions in practice; data revealed that any effort to nurture dispositional awareness among participants was essentially

dependent on the individual teacher's actions, rather than a school district's or principal's leading. This implies that the responsibility for dispositional growth often falls to the new teacher alone.

The study revealed strong agreement for creating space for dispositional development in collaboration with colleagues. Participants expressed a desire for space and time to grow dispositions in practice, exposing a need for dispositional strategies, essentially a toolbox of practices, to foster dispositional awareness and build capacity. Furthermore, upon close data analysis, participants named strategies that they use as part of their dispositional practice; examples include being open to receiving criticism, discussing what a class can improve upon, naming what students and teachers are grateful for, and giving grace to students. A suggested toolbox for teachers could include these and other strategies to nurture dispositional growth and practices in the developing teacher. The researcher's next steps are to explore and consider compiling a manual with a collection of practices to promote ongoing dispositional growth in new teachers.

The study's findings point pre-service program faculty to connect with local mentoring programs; participant concerns about professional survival should be shared. Pre-service programs could also review transition plans that follow the pre-service teacher into the first years of teaching. Suggested dialogue could highlight the inclusion of dispositional goals in the transition plan, adding support to new research that recognizes the need for dispositional development beyond traditional preparation (Meidl & Baumann, 2015).

Data also reinforced reflection as a significant disposition for professional development. Participants identified that they engaged in reflection as part of their daily work; they expressed that they tried to model, teach, and transfer reflective skills to students. Acknowledging the role of reflection in teacher practice demonstrates a leap of maturity in program participants, revealing growth since the first study and first year of teaching. This adds validation to earlier research affirming the need for a framework for a new

teacher's dispositional development (Schussler et al., 2012; Schussler & Murrell, 2016).

The study provided a selection of participant perceptions specific to California's teacher mentoring program. Participants expressed a desire for increased focus on dispositions in their first positions. Pre-service programs and school districts should revisit the Francis (1995) recommendation to explicitly link theory to practice and action. Recently, Costa and Kallick (2014) suggested linking cognitive thinking with repetition and reflection to highlight and internalize dispositions. These recommended intentional strategies invite a dispositional commitment and response from teachers and students. Others in the field (Korthagen, Younghee, & Green, 2013) advocate for practices, such as core reflection, to cultivate a teacher's professionalism. Regardless of the method or approach, these endorsements strengthen the need for ongoing dispositional training.

The results of this study point pre-service programs, schools, and districts to consider how to collaborate, support, and develop dispositions in new teachers beyond pre-service. Additional questions for future investigation include: how can pre-service programs elevate their role in the transition from pre-service to the first teaching position? How can pre-service programs strengthen their efforts to care for candidates and increase dispositional awareness and practice? Lastly, can school and district leaders prioritize space for dispositional development? These questions support the latest research that dispositions, knowledge, and skills can be learned for best practice and teacher leadership (Levin & Schrum, 2017).

### Implications

In the first years of teaching, new teachers need both dedicated space to cultivate dispositions and time to gather resources for dispositional development. In addition to traditional expectations for content and pedagogy, developing teachers must collect tools to build dispositional awareness. Participants' concerns for professional longevity should serve as a significant red flag for pre-service programs, especially since this study's participants exposed the need for an explicit focus on dispositions in schools. School leaders and districts should consider reframing professional

development priorities to include time for dispositional reflection and dialogue. Some researchers even recommend restructuring dispositions within the educational system (Costa & Kallick, 2014) and notably, recognize that to internalize dispositions, individuals must choose to engage with them over and over. More research opportunities are needed to care for and support developing teachers personally and professionally (Tomlinson, 2015; Wake & Bunn, 2016), adding validation to the conclusion that education is a long, continuous journey (Thiell, 2015).

This study's results affirm the need for increased dispositional practice and development in teachers. Findings suggest that educators must consider and prioritize the individual and collective roles assumed in a teacher's dispositional development from pre-service, to new teacher, to seasoned teacher. Collectively, educators should be encouraged to pause and ask, "Are we preparing teachers for the short-term or the long-term?" Furthermore, if teaching requires professionals to demonstrate love in practice (Parker, 2015), then pre-service programs, schools, and districts must make a courageous shift and presume a collective, ongoing responsibility to nurture, stretch, and engage teachers in real-time active dispositional practice. This intentional decision of time, space, and care to develop dispositions and the heart of a teacher can only increase the depth of care that K-12 students can receive.

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## Appendix A

### Personal Interview and Focus Group Questions

1. What year did you earn your teaching credential?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. Are you currently teaching in public or private school?
4. What grade level(s)?
5. Please name previous positions and/or grade levels?
6. In your own words, define professional teaching dispositions.
7. Do dispositions inform how you approach and teach? If yes, please give an example. If no, please explain.
8. In your opinion, name the dispositions that you feel are important to teaching and your classroom
9. Please name and describe specific examples/times when you demonstrated specific dispositions in your teaching.
10. In your opinion, do the dispositions you named influence students? If so, please give a specific example?
11. In your opinion, do these dispositions influence student attitudes about learning? Please explain.
12. In your opinion, do these dispositions influence your attitude toward teaching and the profession? Please explain.
13. Describe the pre-service program preparation you received regarding dispositions and teaching.
14. Did dispositions play a role in how you learned to teach? Why or why not? Do dispositions play a role in your daily work? Please explain.
15. If dispositions play a role, please name an example(s) from your daily work.
16. Do dispositions play a role with colleagues?
17. Do you intentionally work to cultivate dispositions in your daily work?
18. Do you feel supported as a teacher in your current teaching position? Please explain.
19. Do you have anything else to share or add?

**Appendix B**  
**Dispositions**

The Department of Education is committed to the **mission** of the college, the profession of teaching, the state of California, and most importantly students' **personal and professional growth** within the context of a **Christian worldview**.

**Dispositions**, as defined by the Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (CAEP), are the habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie an educator's performance (2016).

Education Faculty are committed to nurturing professional dispositions in education students. Although there are a multitude of professional dispositions for teachers, particular emphasis is placed on building awareness and developing the following dispositions:

**Life-long Learner**

*Displays curiosity and passion for learning and transferring enthusiasm to learning to others.*

“Search for wisdom as a hidden treasure.”

Prov. 2:4

**Reflective Practitioner**

*Displays a willingness to think flexibly, adapt, and develop habits for growth and self-awareness.*

“I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw.”

Prov. 24:32

**Compassionate Professional**

*Displays sympathy, empathy, and responsiveness to others' needs.*

“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Col 3:12

**Grateful Servant**

*Displays a humble, appreciative, and professional demeanor dedicated to the service of others.*

“Whatever you do in word and deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God.”

Col. 3:18

**Statement of Commitment**

Education students, along with Education Faculty, commit to seek and demonstrate the above dispositions in credential classes, coursework, fieldwork experiences, and in student teaching. The dispositions are introduced early and are sustained in assignments, lessons, collegial exchanges, reflections, and self-assessments. The program tracks and examines evidence of the dispositions primarily in the e-portfolio assessment.

Candidate Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Advisor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_