

Clarifying dispositions in teacher education can lead to better teaching

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A teacher working in her classroom. Credit: Penn State

Building an awareness of dispositions in teacher education can help future teachers be better prepared and morally sensible, according to Deborah Schussler, associate professor in Penn State's College of Education.

Dispositions in education are a teacher's quick decisions or

understandings based on the perceptions of his/her environment and how they affect future actions, Schussler explained.

"For example, failing to recognize what a parent means when she tells me that her son is a 'good student' may cause misunderstandings between me, the child and the parent," said Schussler. "That parent's idea of 'good student' may mean the child sits quietly in class. While my idea of a 'good [student](#)' means the [child](#) is intellectually curious."

Teaching the concept of dispositions in a meaningful, concrete manner is often difficult for teacher educators, Schussler noted.

"Accrediting bodies began including dispositions as one element to be evaluated in [teacher education programs](#)," said Schussler. "However, dispositions were frequently watered down to a list of behaviors because this was tangible."

In [teacher education](#), dispositions became this murky, catchall term that included anything from attitudes to beliefs, according to Schussler.

"I felt it was important to formulate some conceptual clarity of the construct and also to probe its practical use for what we do as teacher educators," she said.

Schussler said that this is important because decisions that are based on a list of behaviors may or may not lead to outcomes that are morally worthwhile and intentional.

"If teachers only learn a set of techniques, they will be successful only sometimes," said Schussler. "Understanding their own assumptions and understanding that everything happens within a particular context will help them to actually achieve morally worthwhile ends."

Schussler would like to see the idea of dispositions and the moral aspects of [teaching](#) take a more prominent role in the discussion of how quality teaching is evaluated.

"We cannot ignore the relational and moral aspects of what teachers do," said Schussler. "I think if the science of teaching practice merges with the thoughtful reflection of dispositions, future [teachers](#) will be unsurpassed in their level of preparedness."

Schussler and Lea Knarr co-authored "Building Awareness of Dispositions: Enhancing Moral Sensibilities in Teaching," recently published in the *Journal of Moral Education*.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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