

Uniting the Five Core Propositions and Effective Teacher Dispositions

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National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2006), National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 1994), and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 1992) are all interested in assuring our teachers are equipped to lead in ways that impact their students' lives in positive ways. The critical dispositional qualities necessary to facilitate this positive change in students has always been a woolly issue to authentically quantify. Dispositional characteristics are patterns of behavior that are shown over a period of time – not a short checklist of attributes to satisfy.

Many teacher education programs struggle to integrate teacher competencies with teacher dispositions. In such cases, dispositions become a separate entity that educational programs seek to quantify to satisfy accreditation bodies. This bifurcated system results in segmenting what teachers should know and be able to do from the character issues, preferred dispositions, surrounding effective teaching.

If dispositions are to become an integral, integrated part of teacher education programs, then it seems that we need to seamlessly embed them into our programs. The five core propositions established by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 1994) provide an excellent model for seamless integration of the key dispositional qualities.

NBPTS Overview

Before exploring what the NBPTS model provides, it is important to first consider the strength of the program as a whole. Since its inception in 1987, there are nearly 50,000 National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT). Intense scrutiny has come along with this growth, and justly so since the state incentives can be as high as \$75,000 over the life of the ten year certification. For many states, the extra incentive pay is seen as an attempt to provide merit pay in an equitable way by removing the local bias of administrators. NBPTS reports that greater than 150 studies have been conducted to measure the National Board Certification (NBC) process and over 75% of these studies have found significant, measurable impact on teacher performance, student achievement, student learning, and student engagement (NBPTS, 2006).

While numerous studies are still currently underway, many studies have yielded some valuable findings. In a study of 48 longitudinal comparisons, students in classrooms lead by a National Board Certified Teacher gained, on average, equivalent to spending an extra month in school (Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, & Berliner, 2004). Both the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the two largest teacher's unions, willingly endorse the National Board Teacher Certification process. The NEA states that NBC is the highest credential for teaching

professionals (NEA, 2006). Perhaps most relevant for this paper are several studies that found that NBCT were particularly effective in helping to increase the performance of low performing African-American and Hispanic students (Cavalluzzo, 2004; Goldhaber, 2004). Such findings quickly stifle critics who insist that NBCT perform better solely because they are working with the best students.

NBPTS outlines five core propositions that all teachers should know and be able to do in order to attain certification (NBPTS, 1994). The propositions are:

1. Teachers are committed to students and learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

These propositions are used as the framework for all teachers at all grade levels and all teaching domains. The resulting framework emphasizes the merits of knowing students well, possessing strong content and pedagogical knowledge, managing a classroom effectively, reflecting deeply on teaching and learning, and engaging in the professional community. This core framework, when considered in its entirety, embodies what it means to be a life-long learner.

Identifying Effective Teacher Dispositions

So how do we identify, integrate, and then measure the key dispositions, or effective temperaments, of effective teachers? The dispositions are issues of character and thus cannot be meaningfully separated from our daily interactions and performance as teachers. NBPTS provides and measures the dispositional qualities of teachers as part of the overall assessment process. Let us begin by looking at some of the effective teacher temperaments that are embedded within the five core propositions.

Proposition one that states that teachers are committed to students and learning addresses numerous dispositional issues. The focus of the proposition is on relations and understanding the developmental issues associated with our students. The onus is placed on the National Board applicant to provide evidence that the belief that ALL students can learn and be successful is realized in many ways as he/she works with students. Success comes when teachers truly recognize and then adapt to the individual differences that exist within the classroom. No longer does the factory model suffice whereby everyone is taught as automatons that just need to be programmed. A balance needs to be sought between effectively managing our classrooms (prop. 3) and creating a personable, motivating learning environment for all (prop. 1).

Despite the many positive attributes of NBTC, teacher education programs have a huge advantage over NBTC because pre-service teacher training is a longitudinal endeavor. True temperament issues are evidenced over time. National Board looks at the comprehensive picture of the teacher (content, pedagogy, interactions, and management), but unfortunately these assessments only capture a small snapshot of the entire teacher. So, despite the powerfulness of the framework, it is an imperfect system. An ironic example of this imperfection includes: even though NBTC encourages strong teacher

dispositions, some teachers become NBC because they mastered the algorithm instead of being meritorious. However, it seems that these cases are the exception and not the rule – otherwise the studies would be reporting very different findings.

Using diverse instructional strategies to impact student learning is often misconstrued to simply mean “mix up” the instruction. Providing variety for the sake of variety is not effective beyond the short-term novelty effect that may be created. Purposefully matching the instructional strategies to the needs of the learner, the learning styles of the learner, and the objectives of the lesson have all been shown to have an impact on student achievement (Marshall, 2004; Marzano, 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

What Can Be Learned?

NBTC provides one of many models that seek to measure the abilities, skills, and dispositions of effective teachers. Much can be learned from this model. First, the foundational core must be clearly articulated. NBPTS uses the five core propositions for its foundational underpinning. Any comprehensive structure for effective teacher training should integrate skills, knowledge, and dispositions. To assess teacher dispositions as part of, instead of separately from, the academic structure, as modeled by NBPTS, many programs will need to increase the rigor of their training programs. For instance, for a pre-service or in-service teacher to successfully demonstrate a belief that ALL students can learn and be successful, he/she will need to show an ability to clearly identify the needs of the students and then differentiate the instruction based on the needs and abilities of the students in relation to the objectives of the lesson (Gardner, 1983; Tomlinson, 2003). To demonstrate such expertise requires much greater skill than demonstrating the ability to write and teach a lesson effectively. The later emphasizes planning and implementation; whereas, the former emphasizes understanding students in relationship to programmatic objectives.

To develop powerful, intentional learning communities, we need to make sure that our pre-service teachers are trained and equipped in ways that allow key dispositional qualities to be evidenced in their daily interactions in schools while working with students and teaching professionals. One path that can lead to success uses the model from NBPTS. This model promotes a level of rigor that encourages pre-service and in-service teachers to reflect and to improve their skill and knowledge in helping students, ALL students, grow and thrive in meaningful ways.

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