

# 2<sup>nd</sup> National Symposium on Educator Dispositions

Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY      November 20-21, 2003

## Session P: Nurturing Five Dispositions of Effective Teachers

Room 210 Perkins Center      1:00-2:00pm Friday, November 21

### Presenters:

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### Agenda: 1-2pm

1. Names, ice- breakers, warm-up, establishing an atmosphere for participation. Two activities: “Name Game” and “Cross the Room If”; Letitia. (5-8 min.)
2. Identifying Five Dispositions of Effective Teachers. Handout, brief explanation; Dick (5-8 min.)
3. Creating two Tableaus; Empathy and Authenticity; Letitia (15-18 min.)
4. Developing Stress Breakers; practicing skills to manage stress using Five Self-Administered Tools; Abdominal Breathing, Focusing, Imagery, Progressive Relaxation, and Auto-Suggestion; Mary (20-25 min)
5. Nurturing the Dispositions of Effectiveness through physical, mental and spiritual involvement— understanding three primary conditions for personal learning: a) creating an atmosphere, b) providing experiences and information, and c) exploring and discovering personal meanings related to need. Raising issues in the assessment of dispositions. Supportive literature. Discussion. Dick (15 min- whatever time is left).

# Background and Introduction

The late, distinguished scholar, practitioner and researcher, Arthur W. Combs (1912-1999) in his most recent book, *A Field Approach to Psychology (1999)* listed findings from a series of studies designed to investigate the basic premise that what a helper *believes* makes the difference in the effectiveness of his or her professional performance. The five areas of belief that discriminated clearly between good and poor helpers were:

1. Beliefs about the significant data. Good helpers are people oriented; they are sensitive or empathic.
2. Beliefs about people. Good helpers hold more positive beliefs about the people with whom they work.
3. Beliefs about self. Good helpers hold positive beliefs about themselves.
4. Beliefs about purposes or priorities. Good helpers hold beliefs about purposes that are more people oriented, broader and deeper, and concerned with freeing rather than controlling.
5. Beliefs about personal openness. Good helpers hold beliefs that allow them to be more self-revealing than self-concealing. They are characterized by authenticity in their beliefs.

## Teacher Dispositions

Dick Usher reformulated Combs' five areas of belief of good helpers into five dispositions of effective teachers and has subsequently used them in his continuing work with teachers. The basic assumption for this reformulation is that behavior is only a symptom and that the effectiveness of a teacher is resultant from the perceptual "state" of the teacher at the time of his or her actions; that to understand the dynamics of teacher behavior and its effectiveness we must direct our attention to the nature of the practitioner's personal meanings or dispositions. The term "disposition" has been revived in recent years and serves well to displace the more confusing term, "belief".

The National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education (NCATE) Online Glossary has the following definition: *Dispositions. The values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation and development as well as the educator's own professional growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility and social justice. For example, they might include a belief that all students can learn, a vision of high and challenging standards, or a commitment to a safe and supportive learning environment.*

The following definition, gleaned from a Thorndike-Barnhart Dictionary entry, serves to guide the author's use of the term: *Dispositions. Qualities that characterize a person as an individual: the controlling perceptual (mental, emotional, spiritual) qualities that determine the person's natural or usual ways of thinking and acting.*

## Five Dispositions of Effective Teachers

1. **EMPATHY**- Seeing and accepting the other person's point of view. Believes that a true grasp of the learner's point of view, and an accurate communication of that understanding, is a most important key to establishing a significant teaching/learning relationship. Commits to sensitivity and to establishing a relationship with each learner. Sees that the beginning point of learning is dependent upon a clear acceptance of the learner's private world of awareness at the time. Respects and accepts as real each person's own unique perceptions.
2. **POSITIVE VIEW OF OTHERS**- Believing in the worth, ability and potential of others. Believes that trust and confidence in the learner's worth, ability and capacity for change is a key to learning. Sees other people in essentially positive ways. Honors the internal dignity and integrity of each learner and holds positive expectations for her or his behavior. Typically approaches others feeling that they "can" and "will" rather than that they "can't" or "won't".
3. **POSITIVE VIEW OF SELF**- Believing in the worth, ability and potential of themselves. Having an established self concept that is fundamentally positive and provides an overall sense of self-adequacy. Sees himself/herself as essentially dependable and capable and thus is accepting of inadequacies. Sees herself/himself generally but not exclusively in positive ways—with a positive, abiding and trustworthy sense of actual and potential worth, ability and capacity for growth. Honors the internal dignity and integrity of self and holds positive expectations for his/her own actions.
4. **AUTHENTICITY**- Feeling a sense of freedom and openness that enables her or him to be a unique person in honesty and genuineness. Seeks ways of teaching (procedures, methods, techniques, curricular approaches) that are honest, self-revealing and allow personal-professional congruence. Sees the importance of openness, self-disclosure and being "real" as a person and teacher. Develops a personal "idiom" as a teacher and melds personality uniqueness with curricular expectations. Does not feel that one must "play a role" to be effective.
5. **MEANINGFUL PURPOSE AND VISION**-Committing to purposes that are primarily person-centered, broad, deep, freeing and long range in nature. Feels a compelling and abiding sense of allegiance to democratic values, the dignity of being human, and the sacredness of freedom. Sees the importance of being visionary and reflective as a teacher. Commits to growth for all learners in mental, physical and spiritual realms through a sense of "mission" in education. Seeks to identify, clarify and intensify knowledge and personal beliefs about what is really most important.

# Nurturing Dispositions

Dispositions are primarily learned as a consequence of experiences that are related to the self of the person. The proposed five dispositions of effective teachers are natural outgrowths of the basic human need for self-adequacy. It is not necessary to force, make, cajole or bribe people to develop these dispositions, it is only important that they be free so as to grow in these directions. If they are truly free--free from restriction, and free to be and become-- these five dispositions will develop. The development of these perceptual qualities also requires other people. We are social beings and we are free to be and become when we feel loved, wanted, respected, and revered by others. Only when we have a deep sense of identification with others can we grow into the larger, non self- centered Self that is able to successfully minister to the learning needs of students.

Dispositions of effectiveness are nurtured through experiences that are not only perceived as self-related but that are also engaging for the whole person—body, mind and spirit. Experiences that involve a physical investment (movement, touch, etc.), a mental effort (thoughts, feelings, etc.) and a spiritual sense (inspiration, release, faith, etc.) are the most potent and contributory experiences for the nurturance of dispositional growth. Activities that engage the whole person in a meaningful way contribute to the growth and nurturance of dispositions. Session “P” emphasized aspects of the whole person with the use of such activities as; person-focused introductions, information provision, dramatic and creative tableau formation, stress breakers and relaxation training, and, though the presenters failed to anticipate time wisely, discussion about what these ideas mean to the group. It was the intention of the presenters to focus on nurturance of the *participants’* dispositions so as to better understand how such ideas might be infused into teacher education.

## Three Primary Conditions for Personal Learning

Three major issues are involved in designing opportunities that may foster growth in one’s dispositions: 1) creating an atmosphere that makes involvement and participation possible, 2) providing relevant information and/or experiences, and 3) exploring and discovering personal meaning. These three primary learning conditions may serve as guidelines for the facilitation of effectiveness dispositions in a variety of formats: individual projects, lessons, workshops, courses, units and entire programs of study. The current “Session P” was designed to reflect these three conditions within the severe time constraint presented.

**1. Some characteristic ingredients of an atmosphere that is most conducive to personal learning are:**

- empathy and acceptance
- positive regard
- genuineness
- attuned to learner needs and interests
- challenging and non-threatening
- safe
- a sense of identification and belonging

- clear and flexible limits
- freeing
- open for diversity and uniqueness
- fun and fluid
- interpersonal warmth
- elimination of barriers

In Session “P”, Letitia’s activities and introductions were attempts to create and foster an atmosphere conducive to nurturance and growth; Mary’s stress breaker skills were designed to eliminate barriers to learning caused by stress.

**2. Some characteristics of an effective provision of information and experiences are:**

- information related to need
- active involvement
- focused on important principles, structures
- whole person involvement (body, thought, emotion, spirit)
- diverse approaches used
- variety of formats used
- creative problem solving approaches used
- pacing is individualized
- “best practice”

Session “P” information provided by Dick, including the full write-up of the sessions’ contents; information facilitated by Letitia in the group formation of an “empathy” tableau; and, information and practices provided by Mary on the nature of stress coping skills were designed to meet this condition.

**3. Some approaches to promote the exploration and discovery of personal meaning are:**

- reflection
- discussion groups
- in the personal discovery of meaning it is the student who knows
- time is provided
- evaluation is modulated
- comfortable and stimulating conditions
- relaxed structure and timing
- warm, friendly guidelines
- safe, non-hurtful limits
- variety of modes, styles, intelligences, media, activities
- silence
- commotion
- minimizing rules, regulations and requirements

It was intended by the presenters in Session “P” to provide a final discussion, question and answer and reflection time. Unfortunately, time constraints were encountered in this phase. Providing adequate time and opportunity for such exploration has been historically the weakest link in teacher education and the experience of this session helps illuminate that same problem.

# Assessing Dispositions

Human dispositions are unique and personal qualities. They are internal tendencies, beliefs and meanings that provide the source of an individual's thoughts, feelings and actions. They are not directly observable and they are not directly linked to certain behaviors or patterns of behavior in a one-to-one fashion. Thus, they are not readily assessable using the instruments of measurement that have become rather standard in the social sciences—checklists, inventories, and self report. The measurement of perceptual qualities requires research approaches that are indirect and less familiar than those that have been typically utilized. However, the problems faced in the assessment of dispositions do not forgo the need or the capability for accomplishment.

## Problems of Assessment: Self Report

Psychology has long struggled with the problem of accurate, dependable assessment of an individual's personal perceptions. When attempting to measure teacher dispositions, one is attempting to understand the rich, available and extensive field of meanings, beliefs, values and feelings from which teacher behavior emanates. This has long been a problem facing research: how do we achieve some kind of confidence in the measurement of a person's internal perceptual world as it was at the instant of his or her actions? According to perceptual theory, behavior is always a result of the totality of the behavior's perceptions of self, other people, the world in general, the nature of the situation and other people involved, and the task and purposes at hand. It is not difficult to realize the difficulty in attaining reliable and accurate measurement of such a complex and dynamic internal field of meanings.

Fortunately, the difficulties in measurement for an accurate assessment may be modulated by several factors that are operative in the system. The most stable and enduring portions of the entire perceptual field are those perceptions the individual holds about herself or himself. The self concept is the most stable and influential core of the entire personal perceptual field. As the perceptual field developed over time, the meanings one has accumulated about the nature of self have become the most persuasive elements in the entire system, the least changeable, and thus most likely to be open to some kind of more accurate assessment. The initial focus of measurement should be the assessment of the self concept.

Most attempts to assess self concept have centered around attaining some sort of self report from the person whose perceptions we wish to understand. But, self report is itself a behavior. As such, it too is a result of the operation of a total field of meanings which has restructured itself around the problem at hand—that of being asked to “look at” and “report

about” the nature of one’s own self concept! self report represents a sample of behavior, not a measure of self concept.

To mistake self report as a measure of self concept is the single most common and confusing error in the measurement of internal personality dynamics. What makes the crucial difference in the effectiveness of one’s behavior is not what one might be able and willing to report about self perceptions but rather what those perceptions were actually like the moment his or her actions took place. This is a more profound problem than the usual cautions that are frequently given-- that people may not be reporting an accurate picture of themselves because of social pressure, expectation, threat, the promise of payoff, and the problems of language and conceptualization. There are some dimensions of self that people *won’t* report and many more that they simply *can’t* report. When a person is asked to focus and report on his or her self that request changes the very nature of the self. Self report is not self concept; it is not self concept even when it is a self report about one’s own self concept. It is a behavior and our task is to assess dispositions from which behavior takes its meaning.

The basic approach of all scientific assessment is 1. Observe the subject under consideration, 2. Make inferences as to the possible causes and/or origins of those observed phenomena, and 3. Test those inferences to determine if they “hold water” over some time frame. The measurement of a person’s self concept needs to follow a similar pattern in order to be of some use in understanding the present and predicting the future.

### ***1.Observing***

- on site; teachers in their classroom with students
- samples of behavior; writings, interviews, recordings, responses to tasks, protocols, etc.
- non work settings
- self reports

### ***2.Making inferences***

- inferences made by at least 3 observers
- checked against requirements for reliability and validity
- checked with, or done by trained observers
- use Likert scale or rubric

### ***3.Continuing tests with different forms of observation and inference.***

## **Summary Statement on Assessment**

The scientific model of human assessment is what must guide a useful, reliable and accurate measurement of Teacher Dispositions. Disposition is a concept that means to understand the effectiveness of a person performing the job of teacher is in large measure a question of understanding the internal dispositions from which their efforts came. “Disposition” means that there are certain more stable, characteristic and reoccurring perceptions of self, students, the job and its purposes, people and the world-in-general which are operative in a teacher’s perceptual world and render much of the

effect of their efforts. Thus, the persistent problem of understanding the effects of teaching—how different teachers do essentially the same things and yet have different effects; how teachers may do quite different things and yet have similar effects; how teachers may have differing knowledge bases and yet similar effects; how teachers may have similar knowledge bases and yet different effects; how it happens that there can be no real guarantee of teacher effectiveness by assuring similar experience, knowledge, skill, preparation and method—remains; waiting for the creativity and insight of future research.

## Related references

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