

# **Teacher Identity Development: A Formative Approach to Pre-service Teachers' Dispositional Development**

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## **Abstract**

As teacher shortages increase across the United States, educator preparation programs are tasked with preparing a new generation of teachers equipped to succeed in an increasingly challenging landscape. Along with ensuring that candidates develop deep content knowledge and effective pedagogical skills, national accreditation bodies also require educator preparation programs to monitor and support pre-service teachers' dispositional development. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand teachers, administrators, clinical experience supervisors, and education faculty members' perspectives of the dispositional qualities that pre-service teachers need to develop to be successful educators. Our goal was first to gain an understanding and then to use it to develop a tool to teach and evaluate the dispositional characteristics pre-service teachers need to successfully transition into their teaching careers. We collected data from 30 participants via an open-ended survey and a subsequent focus group of five participants. Using open and focused coding followed by code mapping, three themes emerged including a commitment to (1) professionalism, (2) relationships, and (3) learning. We used these three themes and their 12 subthemes, along with feedback from our participants, to create a *Teacher Identity Development* tool. With specific indicators of each disposition, this tool can be used by educator preparation programs not only to monitor and assess pre-service teachers' discrete dispositional skill development but, more

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importantly, to facilitate the development of a teacher identity as candidates journey toward becoming effective educators in our current educational landscape.

*Keywords: dispositions, pre-service teacher development, teacher preparation, teacher identity development*

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What makes a good teacher? Few would argue that good teachers have strong instructional skills and a passion for their content matched by depth of knowledge. Yet, the best teachers—the most impactful—arguably have something more, something less tangible. They seem to have a human capacity that supports and yet transcends instructional skill and content knowledge, giving them a heightened ability to succeed in a complicated and often conflicted institution. This capacity, or disposition, reflects specific values and beliefs that guide decisions and behavior; it is crucial to teacher development (Ellis et al., 2009). Dispositional development is complex and develops throughout the career of the educator as new experiences are encountered (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017). Consequently, it is an issue that needs to be raised early and consistently in educator preparation programs (EPPs) as a key piece of professional development. There is now greater urgency on the topic as school districts across the country replace scores of veteran teachers with new hires, some of whom will have yet to complete their educational preparation and therefore will have not yet solidified a thorough awareness of their own dispositional qualities.

While pre-service teachers are working to develop their dispositional qualities, EPPs and education scholars are grappling with the particulars of disposition (e.g. Casey et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 2009; Truscott & Stenhouse, 2022; West et al., 2018). What makes up teacher dispositions and how can their development be evaluated? Better yet, what does the word “disposition” even mean and when did it take such importance in teacher education? Since the term disposition dates back to the 14th century, (Merriam-Webster, 2022), clearly the idea that humans have varying dispositional natures is not new. However, the notion that teachers should have a particular set of dispositional qualities is only a few decades old. It was first formalized with the work of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) in 1992,

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followed by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in 2002 (Karges-Bone, 2009). The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, 2022) currently requires that EPPs help students develop professional responsibility (Standard 1.4) and provide clinical experiences that “develop candidate’s knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions to demonstrate positive impact on diverse students’ learning and development” (Standard 2). CAEP also requires EPPs to monitor and support students’ progress throughout the program (Standard 3). These standards give the current parameters within which accredited EPPs guide their students’ development and analyze programmatic success. CAEP adopted InTASC’s definition of dispositions as “the habits of professional action and moral commitments” that guide an educator’s performance (CCSSO, 2013, p. 6); InTASC provides further guidance for EPPs via their delineation of 43 critical dispositions.

Despite accreditation requirements, many challenges exist for EPPs in addressing dispositional qualities. The various interpretations of the word dispositions is one major obstacle identified by several scholars (e.g., Casey et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 2009; West et al., 2018). Others have questioned the validity of assessing the construct of dispositions due to its abstract definition and its limited capacity to be observed (Cummins & Asempapa, 2013; Diez & Raths, 2007). However, despite disagreements regarding how to define and assess such qualities, there is widespread agreement that a focus on dispositions is necessary for teacher development (Ellis et al., 2009). Scholars have noted that pre-service teachers do not consistently enter EPPs with the dispositions necessary to be an effective teacher for all students (e.g., Garza et al., 2016; Saultz et al., 2021). Therefore, EPPs have a responsibility to monitor and assess pre-service teachers’ dispositional development.

In a study of the ways in which EPPs across the United States are engaging in this work, Ellis et al. (2009) found wide variations across institutions regarding how EPPs identify, assess, and teach educator dispositions. For example, some institutions identify dispositions as teacher behaviors while others focus

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on teacher characteristics, teacher perceptions, or a combination of these categories. Furthermore, institutions use a variety of methods for selecting which dispositions to assess. Faculty surveys and conceptual frameworks were most commonly utilized, however few institutions sought feedback from PreK–12 partners or other stakeholders (Ellis et al., 2009). Casey et al. (2020) argued that the contribution of these partners provides an authentic lens into the multiple perspectives of dispositional qualities and their importance.

As identified in Ellis et al.'s (2009) work, several methods and tools have been created to identify and assess teacher dispositions. For example, Bradley et al. (2020) created a 25-question, survey tool via “assessment of teacher education faculty and administrator needs” (p. 54) and a review of literature including existing tools and professional standards. Their survey identifies five main dispositional areas, including responsibility, integrity, enthusiasm, communication, and reflection. Bair (2017), on the other hand, surveyed faculty in EPPs along with their colleagues in the liberal arts and sciences, school administrators, and classroom teachers and created an exhaustive list of desired qualities resulting in broad categories such as professionalism, communication, relationships, and leadership. Other researchers have focused on developing assessment tools in select dispositional areas such as empathy, commitment to responsive instruction, or awareness of school policy (Bullough, 2019; Evans-Palmer, 2016). Ultimately, while Casey et al. (2021) also developed an assessment tool, they argued against a “one-size-fits all approach to defining and selecting which dispositions to measure” (p. 22).

Once an EPP determines its focus regarding dispositional development, accrediting agencies require ongoing assessment of their success in achieving that focus which can lead to further complications, such as reducing dispositional development to a checklist of expected outcomes rather than focusing on instructional efforts to promote students' growth. To avoid this tendency, Bair (2017) suggests EPPs resist developing a “single measure” of dispositional development and instead utilize a “complex, multifaceted assessment” (p. 224) with an emphasis

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on growth and development. By introducing dispositional assessment early in EPPs, students are able to develop a clear understanding of the dispositional expectations in the field (Cummins & Asempapa, 2013). Continued dialogue and reflection on these areas may support the development of pre-service teachers (Garza, et al., 2016; Graus, et al., 2022).

Researchers have taken different approaches to understanding the ways in which dispositions develop and the impact those dispositions have on the field of education. Saultz et al. (2021) examined the dispositions of 164 pre-service teachers at the beginning of their education course work. Given that the majority of those entering EPPs remain white females from predominantly middle-class backgrounds, (King et al., 2016). Saultz et al. (2021) suspected most pre-service teachers would not believe intuitively that the educational system is inequitable, since this demographic generally lacks the lived experience of a marginalized group. Their survey results confirmed “that our entering [pre-service teachers] will more than likely bring dispositions that will lead them to reproduce inequalities if we do not use our [EPPs] as an educative space to support critical consciousness” (p. 26). Consequently, Saultz et al. concluded that structured opportunities for pre-service teachers must include immersion in schools which serve highly diverse student populations. Conversely, Thornton (2013) examined whether such a focus on dispositions in EPPs can be sustained once educators are in the field. Thornton focused on the degree to which middle-school pre-service teachers remained committed to responsive teaching methods and confirmed that unless the participants had a strong commitment to highly responsive instructional practices, they struggled to avoid complying with systemic expectations even when it conflicted with their teacher education training. The implication of both studies emphasizes the importance of helping pre-service teachers develop a strong dispositional foundation through their EPPs that allows them to engage with the educational system in a committed manner. Without such a foundation, pre-service teachers may struggle to effect change as professional educators within the system even when it is unjust or in

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conflict with their knowledge or dispositional inclination.

Although research regarding pre-service teacher dispositions has been conducted over time, the increasingly challenging landscape teachers are experiencing requires a new understanding of the dispositions EPPs need to cultivate to support teachers' desire to remain in the profession. Furthermore, such a tool needs to be created in collaboration with PreK–12 stakeholders who are experiencing the fluctuations that are present in the current educational system. Just as we teach content and pedagogy, we believe that it is our responsibility to teach pre-service teachers how to navigate the current educational challenges by developing dispositions that support their success. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand participants' perspectives of the dispositions and skills EPPs need to nurture in pre-service teachers and, subsequently, to use that understanding to develop a tool to teach and evaluate those dispositional characteristics. Our research was guided by the following question: What are the dispositional characteristics and skills that EPPs need to teach and assess?

### Method

We used a basic qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to understand better the necessary dispositional characteristics and skills from the perspective of individuals invested in the development of pre-service teachers. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), while all qualitative research focuses on the construction of meaning, as humans engage in the natural world, the “*primary* goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings” (p. 25, emphasis in the original). As researchers, we ascribe to a social constructivist worldview and recognize that meaning is subjective and dependent upon personal life experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, we believe that any tool we create to teach and evaluate pre-service teachers' dispositions may also be used in subjective ways, reflective of the personal, cultural, and societal experiences of the individual using the tool. As faculty and staff in a private, liberal arts EPP, we worked to set aside our own experiences and biases regarding pre-service teachers'

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dispositional development by interrogating our beliefs during multiple team research meetings. During these meetings, we acknowledged that each member of our team values certain dispositional characteristics and skills more than others. This enabled us to have discussions regarding our individual interpretations of the data and arrive at consensus during the analytical process. To engage both widely and deeply with participants, we designed and implemented the following two-phase approach.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Phase One**

We selected our participants using maximum variation sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) to capture the voices and perspectives of multiple stakeholders and identify common patterns among them. Using this approach to sampling, we purposefully included individuals representing four different roles in pre-service teacher development: administrators, teachers, clinical experience supervisors, and university faculty members. We also included individuals from a variety of schools, districts, and universities to capture differences that existed across communities of education. We began by piloting an open-ended survey that solicited the perspectives of five participants (including at least one member of each role listed above) regarding pre-service teacher dispositions. Following the pilot survey, we adapted some of the questions and added an additional question to elicit more robust data (See Appendix A for our revised open-ended survey). Following revisions, we sent out a recruitment email to an additional 60 individuals, 25 of whom agreed to participate for a total of 30 participants. Table 1 displays the educational roles of the individuals who participated. Each participant completed our revised online survey that included two parts: a demographic questionnaire and a series of open-ended questions regarding their perspectives of the dispositional skills and characteristics that pre-service teachers need to develop in a teacher preparation program.

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**TABLE 1**  
*Current Roles of Survey Participants*

	PreK-6	Grades 7-12	Postsecondary
Teachers	6	8	1
Administrators	5	3	–
Teacher Educators	–	–	13
Clinical Experience Supervisors	–	–	5
Total*	11	11	19

*Note.* \* The table does not add up to the total number of participants since some participants served in multiple roles.

After collecting the survey responses, we uploaded the data to MAXQDA.22 and engaged in open coding, primarily using In Vivo codes to capture the unique sentiments of the participants (Saldaña, 2016). Two members of our research team collaboratively coded the entire data set and engaged in rich discussion regarding the coding scheme to increase the validity of the findings. This resulted in over 100 codes and 1000 coded segments. Although we reached saturation mid-way through the data analysis process, we continued to analyze all of the remaining survey data, which allowed us to move from an inductive to a deductive analytical approach, whereby we focused on testing our emerging codes and categories against the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Our full research team met to engage in focused coding (Saldaña, 2016) during which we condensed the codes into 35 categories that fit under three broad themes.

## **Data Collection and Analysis Phase Two**

To delve deeper into participants' views and triangulate our data, two members of our research team conducted a focus group in which we presented and discussed the emerging categories and themes. While focus group size can vary from four to 12 participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), we purposefully selected five of our survey participants. These participants had particularly insightful responses to our survey and represented a variety of positions, workplaces, experiences, and

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identities. Table 2 provides the educational roles of the focus group participants (all names and places are pseudonyms). The focus group lasted for 90 minutes and was conducted via Zoom so that we could be inclusive of participants who lived in a broad geographic range. Participants received a \$25 gift card as compensation. During the focus group, participants viewed the preliminary themes and corresponding categories and codes. Then they provided additional data regarding dispositional skills or characteristics that needed to be added or removed, reasons for the inclusion of dispositional characteristics and skills, potential biases in creating and using a teaching and evaluation tool, and the dispositions that might be difficult to cultivate in the current educational climate (See Appendix B for the semi-structured protocol).

**TABLE 2**  
*Focus Group Participant Demographics*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role(s)</b>	<b>Grade(s)</b>
Nicholas	Teacher; Teacher Educator	PreK-6; Postsecondary
Evelyn	Teacher; Teacher Educator	7-12; Postsecondary
Nadia	Teacher; Teacher Educator; Supervisor	PreK-6; Postsecondary
Franklin	Teacher	7-12
Sally	Teacher; Administrator; Teacher Educator Supervisor	PreK-6; 7-12 Postsecondary

We recorded the focus group session, transcribed it, and uploaded the transcription into MAXQDA.22. We coded the data from the focus group session and combined these codes in the larger dataset. We used the new data to collapse codes, rename codes, and recategorize codes to represent participants' voices. Following this phase, we drafted a tool to be used to support the teaching and evaluation of pre-service teacher dispositions. To enhance validity, we engaged in member checking. We sent the draft to all 30 participants and elicited their feedback regarding the tool's composition, relevance, and ease of use. Thirteen participants submitted feedback, which we utilized to make revisions to the tool. Some of these revisions included removing redundancies, reordering of indicators,

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clarifying language, and including two additional open-ended questions.

## Findings

During the initial survey process and subsequent focus group, participants resoundingly shared that there was a strong need to address the work of dispositions within EPPs. Without eliciting this feedback, one participant offered: “I’m so glad you are working on this. This is important work.” Another participant added that “to get really strong educational leaders, you have to have really strong pre-service teachers.” These messages and participants’ expansive responses to our open-ended survey reiterated the purpose and importance of delving into the work, which resulted in the emergence of three main themes and 12 subthemes. We will briefly address each of these themes and their corresponding subthemes before explaining and introducing the teaching and evaluation tool that encompasses a comprehensive overview of the data. Table 3 includes an overview of the themes, subthemes, and examples of codes.

**TABLE 3**  
*Overview of the Findings*

Themes	Subthemes	Example Codes
Commitment to Professionalism	Exhibits a strong work ethic	Work ethic, persistence, organized, timeliness, attendance, initiative, reliable
	Utilizes effective and professional communication skills (speaking, listening, writing, body language)	Speaking, listening, body language, writing
	Demonstrates self and contextual awareness	Contextual awareness, emotional regulation
Commitment to Relationships	Exhibits nurturing attributes when working with others	Friendly, empathy, patience, respect, kindness
	Displays a collaborative spirit that fosters community building	Collaborative, community

**TABLE 3**  
*Overview of the Findings, continued*

Themes	Subthemes	Example Codes
Commitment to Learning	Demonstrates a willingness to put the good of others ahead of self	Vulnerability, humble, courage, altruistic, integrity
	Engages with others in ways that promote diversity, equity, inclusion	Equity (others), inclusion, culturally proficient
	Displays characteristics of a self-directed learner	Competence, reflective, goal oriented
	Demonstrates an eagerness to learn from others	Learning from others
	Exhibits the characteristics of a <i>thinker</i> in the field	Autonomy, self-efficacy, creativity, curiosity, inventive, risk-taker
	Works to deconstruct personal biases to advocate for inclusivity	Self-equity, open minded

**Theme One: Commitment to Professionalism**

Participants described the importance of pre-service teachers developing a set of skills and characteristics—particularly important during challenging times—related to being a professional teacher dedicated to strengthening the goals of the school community. To demonstrate a commitment to professionalism, participants indicated four subthemes: (1) exhibiting a strong work ethic; (2) utilizing effective and professional communication skills, including speaking, listening, writing, and body language; (3) demonstrating a professional presence; and (4) displaying self and contextual awareness. For some participants, such as Franklin, many of the skills and characteristics in this theme were simply “common sense” and therefore he said he didn’t write about them in his survey. Others such as Nadia noted that during her tenure in the educational field, what once had been considered common sense is now something that “you really have to push in order to see those pieces really happen.”

Specific skills and characteristics highlighted by participants included being reliable, persistent, organized, and timely.

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Participants also indicated the importance of having a positive attitude. One survey participant described the need to “keep away from negative thoughts and comments.” During the focus group, participants emphasized the need to avoid “toxic positivity” which Sally related to the “ostrich syndrome” wherein individuals bury their heads in the sand rather than confront difficulty. Participants believed positivity isn’t an avoidance of difficulty or a failure to acknowledge difficulty, but rather developing a positive outlook and approach to responding to challenges. Participants also indicated pre-service teachers need to demonstrate engagement and overall “presence” in the work they are doing, whether they are in their field experiences or their college courses.

While many of the skills in this theme are transferable to other professions, such as maintaining professional levels of attendance and being organized, participants indicated that teachers need to develop a unique ability to understand their role in various contexts. As participants noted, pre-service teachers are tasked with assuming a professional role earlier than some of their college-aged peers. One teacher summed up this expectation: “As soon as they walk into the building/profession they are seen as professionals. They should exhibit the same qualities as an educator already in the field.” As pre-service teachers confront the reality of their dual roles as both college students and professional teachers during their field experiences, they must develop a great deal of self and contextual awareness and other professionalism skills earlier than peers. Furthermore, participants stated pre-service teachers must “remain calm under pressure,” “have control of their emotions in difficult and stressful situations,” and develop the “ability to self-advocate when they are overwhelmed or struggling.” Considering the recent changes in our educational landscape, demonstrating a commitment to professionalism as described by participants may require much more than “common sense.”

### **Theme Two: Commitment to Relationships**

The second key theme was a commitment to establishing and maintaining relationships that foster genuine collaboration.

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To demonstrate a commitment to relationships, participants identified four subthemes: (1) exhibiting nurturing attributes when working with others, (2) displaying a collaborative spirit that fosters community building, (3) displaying a willingness to put the good of others ahead of oneself, and (4) engaging with others in a way that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion. The significance of this theme can be identified by Franklin's statement during the focus group: "Relationships are really the heart of everything we do." Relationships are a critical aspect of being able to have a vision for shared goals that maintain high expectations for all students.

One of the key characteristics identified in both the survey and focus group discussion was the need for teachers to have nurturing attributes when working with others. As Nicholas stated, "If we are not teaching people to be empathetic, or courageous, I think we are in the wrong field." Characteristics such as kindness, courtesy, and compassion stood out as attributes necessary for cultivating relationships with students, families, other educators, and community stakeholders. Participants believed these characteristics are essential in promoting an environment that values and respects diverse backgrounds and promotes inclusivity.

Beyond these key traits, participants also noted the importance of acting in a selfless manner to contribute to the service of others and the profession and doing so in a collaborative manner. A word that frequently appeared throughout the survey was "humility." During the focus group, participants were asked to think of a colleague who had strong dispositional qualities and to describe what that colleague was like. Nadia replied:

Part of what I would see as that delicious bit of specialness would be the sense of humility. And with that humility is the moment I can say... "I don't know how to do this, and I'm okay with that."

Having the ability to look beyond oneself and seek out others for resources and collaboration is essential to contributing to a positive school culture and climate.

Many of the participants of the focus group believed that

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relationship building was one of the hardest dispositional elements to cultivate. As Franklin stated, “You can tell somebody to be more personable, you can tell somebody to be more relational... it's just some people just lean into that, and some people are much more hesitant just through who they are.” Focus group participants identified relationship building as an area in which teacher educators must be thoughtful and intentional about creating opportunities to practice and teach these skills.

### Theme Three: Commitment to Learning

The final emerging theme was a commitment to learning, which includes a commitment to personal and professional self-growth. Within this theme, participants identified four subthemes, including (1) displaying characteristics of a self-directed learner, (2) demonstrating an eagerness to learn from others, (3) exhibiting the characteristics of a *critical thinker* in the field of education, and (4) working to deconstruct personal biases to advocate for inclusivity. Participants shared the importance of pre-service teachers exhibiting a growth mindset in their current experiences that drives them through their entire career.

Importantly, learning from others was described actively by most participants, wherein pre-service teachers not only accepted feedback, but also sought feedback, asked questions, and demonstrated a willingness to request help. Participants suggested that pre-service teachers should be open to constructive feedback and purposefully act upon it to improve their effectiveness, while “showing appreciation for opportunities” provided to them. However, participants felt that pre-service teachers also need to take ownership of their learning by using effective and reflective goal setting to develop competence as a teacher. Franklin’s comment during the focus group discussion noted the importance of developing this ability to learn and grow by “understanding that best practice isn't a destination but a journey.” Sally added that pre-service teachers need to “know no matter how good you are that you can get better.”

Participants noted that one of the ways to grow as a teacher is to become a critical thinker in the field of education, which

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involves creativity, curiosity, and innovative thinking. However, participants emphasized the current educational climate often stifles these dispositions in teachers. When reviewing the data from the open-ended survey, focus group participants were distressed at how much more frequently participants noted other dispositional skills, such as timeliness and appropriate dress, in comparison. Franklin expressed his fatigue in trying to combat teachers' lack of autonomy in today's educational context, stating, "Can this get better at any point? Or am I just a drone?" Nicholas recalled his first year of teaching: "It was very much like, 'Here's your book, do it the way it's been done. If and when you master this, then we can talk about doing engaging lessons.' And that was very troubling to me." Participants felt it was necessary for teachers to develop a sense of autonomy or "to be able to do what's right for kids based on [their] professional knowledge."

Participants' sentiments also signified the importance of being able to deconstruct personal biases to learn to advocate for inclusivity. They indicated that pre-service teachers must be able to reflect on their personal experiences in a way that allows them to recognize their own biases. This work is important so that pre-service teachers "believe deeply that every single student, regardless of what they bring to school, can learn at high levels." By expanding their knowledge related to topics of diversity, equity and inclusion, teachers can affect the power structures of schools. Sally shared an enlightening perspective built off of Nadia's previous insight with the focus group: "I like to think of [reflectiveness] as...the way we build relationships, the way we treat people, what our deep beliefs are, our biases... Because, as Nadia said, the heart and mind, move the hands." Ultimately, participants felt that a focus on students' commitment to learning in EPPs will help to create the habits of heart and mind that are necessary to move the hands in a way that meets the needs of all learners.

### **Discussion**

Throughout data collection and analysis, we were confronted with the unique dispositions pre-service teachers

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need to develop in the current educational context. However, participants problematized the term *disposition* since it meant different things to each of them. Their concern echoed the contrasting definitions of this term across institutions of higher education (Casey et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 2009). Since the most common dispositional category used across U.S. institutions was teacher characteristics (Ellis et al., 2009), we were concerned that the word *dispositions* connotes potentially fixed and innate personal characteristics rather than learnable behaviors. In fact, some institutions consider dispositional proficiency as a criterion for entrance into their EPP (Brewer et al., 2011) rather than as objectives that can actively be taught along with pedagogical knowledge and skills. Our participants resoundingly indicated the importance of viewing the development of these skills as a teachable and malleable process.

Garza et al., (2016) indicated the importance of teaching students the dispositional qualities that are necessary to “shift from self-as-student to self-as-teacher” (p. 19) as they continue to grow professionally. Based on our research and interactions with our participants, we argue that such a transition, from student to teacher, requires more than acquiring discrete characteristics, perceptions, and behaviors, but rather a holistic transformation of being. According to Beijaard and Meijer (2017), teacher identity is a complex and dynamic interaction of the personal values and beliefs one holds interlaced with the professional space in which individuals interact. In addition, teacher identity is actively constructed (Trent, 2010) and is influenced by pre-service teachers’ educational contexts, prior experiences, and learning communities (Izadina, 2013). Jones and Kessler (2020) noted the particular importance of context given the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting increased need for teachers’ identity to encapsulate the “ethic of care” (p. 2), while Quezada et al. (2020) stressed the inescapable role the pandemic would play in the teacher identity of those pre-service teachers whose development journey intersected COVID-19. Due to the socialized nature of teacher identity development, Izadina, (2013) argues:

“[F]ailing to incorporate a realistic and sophisticated

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understanding of teacher identity construction into teacher education amounts to failure to fulfill the most fundamental aim of teacher education, which is helping teachers learn to teach” (p. 709).

Therefore, we believe EPPs have the responsibility to provide the contexts, experiences, and learning communities necessary to weave a discrete list of dispositions into a complex web of actional and observable behaviors that support the development of a meaningful teaching identity. As a result, rather than use the term disposition we named our tool *Teacher Identity Development* (Appendix C).

As dictated by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, 2022), EPPs have a responsibility to help students develop “professional responsibility at the appropriate progression levels” (Standard 1.4). This language reifies the importance of the developmental foundation of our Teacher Identity Development Tool whereby pre-service teachers are given the opportunity to demonstrate their growth over time. Specifically, CAEP requires that EPPs provide evidence that pre-service teachers engage in professional learning, act ethically, take responsibility for student learning, and collaborate with others. The Teacher Identity Development Tool teaches and monitors these four areas, along with several others that our participants noted as essential in the current educational climate.

Since many institutions rely on the InTASC standards for programmatic guidance and development, we analyzed how our 12 identity characteristics align with the 43 critical dispositions outlined by InTASC (CCSSO, 2013). InTASC integrates dispositional elements throughout each of its ten core teaching standards, noting specific characteristics that align with those standards. We conducted a comparative analysis of our 12 evaluation areas on the Teacher Identity Development tool and found that all of the critical dispositions identified by InTASC are incorporated into at least one of the three overarching themes on the Teacher Identity Form. Therefore, EPPs that use this tool will also be supporting their pre-service teachers’ development of the critical dispositions outlined by InTASC.

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Interestingly, two of the twelve areas of development identified by our participants as necessary in the current educational landscape are absent from the InTASC critical dispositions. Specifically, we found no evidence in the InTASC standards regarding the ability to “display self and contextual awareness.” Our participants resoundingly shared the need for EPPs to teach pre-service teachers how to adapt their behavior and display appropriate interpersonal boundaries with children and adults as they represent themselves as an emerging professional. They saw this as something that the pre-service teachers currently struggle with as they navigate their dual roles of college students and clinical field teachers. Developing the skill to foreground certain parts of their identity according to context may also be helpful for pre-service teachers later in life as they seek to sustain a work/life balance.

The second area not identified by InTASC is the ability to “display a willingness to put the good of others ahead of oneself.” Indicators of this characteristic include demonstrating humility, exuding courage by doing the right things for the right reasons, practicing vulnerability, acting in ways that illustrate a student-centered belief system, and demonstrating integrity by being trustworthy and honest. Due to the current demands of the educational field, teachers are often expected to display this characteristic at an unsustainable level. Thus, while we recognize that educators must learn to put the good of others before themselves, we also acknowledge that teachers must learn how to advocate for themselves when necessary to avoid burnout. Assisting students and providing feedback in this area throughout their pre-service years can help to prepare them for success in the professional world.

### **Recommendations**

In opposition to discrete dispositions, we recommend a comprehensive focus on teacher identity that highlights the importance of the developmental process students experience from the point at which they enter their first education course until they are ready to move into the profession. A more comprehensive focus also emphasizes the ways pre-service teachers

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develop that are distinctive to the teaching profession, as their identity shifts from student to teacher (Garza et al., 2016).

We encourage cooperating teachers, clinical experience supervisors, education faculty members, and the students themselves to utilize the Teacher Identity Development tool to teach, assess, and monitor students' progress in each of the 12 identified areas throughout their period of pre-service development. Central to the form are the indicants which describe examples of the ways in which pre-service teachers can outwardly display their developing identity as a teacher. These indicators, derived from participants' own words, should be used as the primary points for explicit teaching and should inform the conversations regarding areas for continued growth. Importantly, since we believe that neither dispositions nor identity can be objectively measured, all indicants are of observable behaviors, and the evaluation choices reflect the frequency of the observed behaviors. Therefore, we recommend evaluators do not attempt to measure the extent to which a pre-service teacher has developed their teacher identity, but rather that they document observable behaviors. These examples can be used to initiate conversations with pre-service teachers about how to make such an identity visible to others (Graus et al., 2022).

The development of teacher identity is essential to the success of all educators; however, focus group data suggests that each characteristic manifests differently by context. Pre-service teachers must learn to be mindful of how the pressures of these characteristics vary among different districts, schools, content areas, and grade levels. Curriculum revisions should address ways in which EPPs can intentionally teach the importance of context in teacher identity development. Participants expressed that these learning opportunities should be implemented throughout the EPP to help students align their beliefs and actions with the expectations of the profession. Pairing early immersion in diverse field experiences with explicit instruction regarding the themes, subthemes, and specific indicants on the Teacher Identity Development tool can help pre-service teachers develop their own identity in meaningful ways. In addition, cooperating teachers, field experience supervisors, and EPP

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faculty who exhibit a strong teacher identity should be purposefully selected to mentor students. EPPs can also encourage students to self-evaluate their own progress using this tool. Self-evaluation combined with mentor feedback and discussion can help students identify their strengths and areas for future growth (Leeferink et al., 2019).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

During data collection, the use of an open-ended survey enabled us to include a larger but still limited number of perspectives. Such an instrument, however, may have narrowed our ability to capture more complex thoughts or beliefs from the participants. It also limited the ability of participants to ask clarifying questions and engage in a more in-depth discussion surrounding this topic. To best mitigate these concerns, our methodological design included a focus group session with maximum variation sampling, which allowed focus group participants to review the data that had been collected and offer feedback regarding the initial themes.

Furthermore, while we sought to include a wide range of voices, people of color and other marginalized populations are strikingly underrepresented in the educational field (King et al., 2016). Although this survey had a large response rate (46%), our participant demographics are reflective of the educational population and therefore were also limited in diversity. A more diverse participant pool would ensure the research results are informed by and represent the beliefs and experiences of the larger population. In future studies, including an additional sampling criterion focusing specifically on diversity would be beneficial. While utilizing the Teacher Identity Development tool developed in the present study, it will be critical for users to monitor its sensitivity to racial and cultural differences.

Although this tool has potential to support pre-service teachers' development, we are cognizant of the ways it can be both limiting and subjective based on the experiences of individuals who are using it. Nicholas aptly stated: "There's strengths to words and there's limitations to words," indicating that such a tool, no matter how comprehensive, can be

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understood differently by different audiences. We acknowledge that work must go into teaching others how to use and interpret this tool for it to be used effectively. Our individual biases regarding the importance of specific teaching qualities were mitigated via research discussions, and similarly, individuals using this tool may benefit from explicit training and discussions regarding its utilization to decrease the influence of their life experiences, perceptions, and biases on their use of the tool.

The findings from this study hold important implications for the future of EPPs. The Teacher Identity Development tool created through this study can inform EPPs of the characteristics and skills that faculty need to teach and assess in pre-service teacher preparation programs. However, it is important that future efforts are aimed at identifying appropriate methods for utilizing this tool and considering how the data will be collected, used, and reported. One of the difficult factors in assessing pre-service teacher identity development is the inability to consistently observe the qualities and behaviors identified as essential. Based on our research, we suggest this form be used as a formative tool to foster conversations between pre-service teachers and their cooperating teachers, clinical experience supervisors, and education faculty members throughout their program. Effective assessment of these skills should be done continuously and openly so that teacher educators can give meaningful and necessary feedback to teacher candidates. Future researchers should investigate ways in which EPPs intentionally implement practices that strengthen the qualifications and skills necessary to be effective teachers.

Finally, researchers should continue to explore the alignment of the identified characteristics and qualities with success in EPPs and in the teaching profession. Through our experiences as faculty in a liberal arts EPP, we have often observed characteristics of teacher identity that have been associated with success, or lack thereof, in program completion. Further investigation of the use of this tool to guide curriculum additions and adaptations in EPPs is warranted to determine effective approaches to support students in developing their teacher identity. Continuing to address content knowledge and pedagogy without direct

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curricular attention to developing teacher identity development is an injustice to the teacher profession, especially given challenges of the current educational climate.

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## Appendix A: Survey

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### Pre-service Teacher Disposition Survey

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#### Demographic Data

1. Please select your position (mark all that apply)
    - Teacher
    - Administrator
    - University Supervisor
    - Teacher Educator
  2. Please indicate the level of students with whom you work.  
Select all that apply.
    - Elementary PreK-6
    - Middle Level (4-9)
    - High School (7-12)
    - Post-secondary
  3. Please write the name of your affiliated school and/or district. (Please note that this information will be used only to demonstrate that we have received feedback from multiple districts and will not be linked directly to your responses in reporting of the data.)
- 

#### Open-Ended Questions

1. What characteristics do college students need to develop in order to exhibit the professionalism of effective teachers?  
Please list (and explain as needed) as many characteristics as you can think of.
2. How do pre-service teachers demonstrate professionalism?  
Please list (and explain as needed) as many ways as you can think of.
3. What additional qualities of mind and character, if any, do college students need to develop and demonstrate in order to become an effective teacher?
4. What experiences/learning opportunities might colleges provide to help pre-service teachers develop those skills and characteristics?

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5. Please include any additional comments you might have regarding these topics.
- 

### **Focus Group Recruitment**

Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up focus group to respond to the preliminary findings? By participating in the focus group, you will receive a \$25 Visa gift card for your participation.

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.  
Your response has been recorded.

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## Appendix B: Focus Group Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

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### Focus Group

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#### Introduction

Thank you so much for first completing our survey and then joining us for this focus group session. We are so excited to have you with us. Each of you provided us with really insightful information and the group of you demonstrate a variety of educational roles. During our conversation tonight, we encourage you to share your thoughts and insights freely as we explore this topic on a deeper level. Please know that we will be recording this meeting but anything you share will remain anonymous. We ask that you also keep the ideas that others share in this session confidential. Let's start off by introducing ourselves. Please share your name and a little bit about yourself.

---

#### Content Questions

1. Think about a colleague with really strong dispositions. Tell us about them.
2. Take a look at the data collected from the survey. What are your initial thoughts?
3. Consider a pre-service teacher needing support on their dispositions. What might be missing from the themes/categories that you see?
4. Consider all of the experiences you have had with pre-service teachers. In which of these areas do the pre-service teachers demonstrate they need the most support?
5. Which dispositions, if any, transcend content and grade level? Are all of these necessary for success?
6. Is there bias to having a set of expected dispositions that keeps certain people out of the teaching profession based on their identities and cultural experiences?
7. Which of these in the current educational climate are hardest to cultivate?
8. Do you have any additional information you would like to share with us?

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### **Closing**

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this focus group. We will use this information to further refine our work. Then we will email each of you, along with all of the individuals who completed the survey, a copy of our disposition rubric in order for you to provide us with any additional feedback you might have. We will also mail a \$25 Visa gift card to you as a thank you for participating.

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## Appendix C: Teacher Identity Development Assessment

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Directions: Thank you so much for taking the time to fill out the Teacher Identity Development Assessment. We are committed to helping our pre-service teachers develop into effective practitioners. As you complete this questionnaire, please help us identify areas that will enable us to support this pre-service teacher's growth. We will use this information throughout their program to support their growth toward becoming an effective teacher. Your individual results will not be shared with the pre-service teacher or used as summative assessments, rather they will be used to promote discussion of how their behaviors are perceived across contexts.

When filling out this form, please rate each of the 12 statements, thinking about the indicators as you make your determination. Please know that you may not observe all indicators in all settings, but you will assess based on the overall statement. Some of these statements are harder to observe than others. If you are unsure if you have had the opportunity to observe one or more of the 12 statements please use the "not observed in this setting" option. We encourage you to use the comment section to provide examples and/or to further explain your rating.

### **Open-Ended Questions:**

1. Effective leaders are always learning and developing a professional disposition. What are two strengths you feel this teacher has developed?
2. What are two suggestions you have for this pre-service teacher to grow their identity?

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<b>Commitment to Professionalism</b>					
<i>Demonstrates a commitment to being a professional teacher that is dedicated to strengthening the community goals.</i>					
<b>1. Exhibits a strong work ethic.</b>					
Circle:    Not observed in this setting    Consistently    Frequently    Sometimes    Rarely					
<b>Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Arrives punctually and fully prepared</li> <li>● Maintains professional levels of attendance</li> <li>● Follows through on commitments</li> <li>● Demonstrates a willingness to go above and beyond</li> <li>● Takes the initiative</li> <li>● Organizes in a way that supports efficiency and reliability</li> <li>● Demonstrates accountability</li> <li>● Perseveres through difficulty</li> </ul>					<b>Comments:</b>
<b>2. Utilizes effective and professional communication skills (speaking, listening, writing, body language).</b>					
Circle:    Not observed in this setting    Consistently    Frequently    Sometimes    Rarely					
<b>Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Speaks clearly, courteously, and respectfully</li> <li>● Shifts language usage/style according to the context and the individual(s)</li> <li>● Listens thoughtfully and responsively</li> <li>● Uses inviting body language and facial expressions</li> <li>● Written communicating, including email, is appropriate and timely</li> </ul>					<b>Comments:</b>
<b>3. Demonstrates a professional presence.</b>					
Circle:    Not observed in this setting    Consistently    Frequently    Sometimes    Rarely					
<b>Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Portrays a positive attitude and outlook</li> <li>● Exhibits flexibility when changes occur</li> <li>● Conveys interest/engagement across contexts (e.g. asking questions, taking notes, nodding)</li> <li>● Participates actively and appropriately in conversations and tasks</li> <li>● Uses technology appropriately, for instructional purposes and responsibilities</li> <li>● Displays a polished appearance and dress</li> </ul>					<b>Comments:</b>
<b>4. Displays self and contextual awareness.</b>					
Circle:    Not observed in this setting    Consistently    Frequently    Sometimes    Rarely					
<b>Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Demonstrates awareness of self as a student in relation to professionals</li> <li>● Displays appropriate interpersonal boundaries with children and adults</li> <li>● Adapts behavior to appropriately match a variety of contexts</li> <li>● Acts as a role model in public settings, including social media</li> <li>● Represents self as an emerging professional</li> <li>● Behaves sensitively to school culture and climate</li> </ul>					<b>Comments:</b>
<b>Commitment to Relationships</b>					
<i>Demonstrates a commitment to establishing and maintaining relationships that foster genuine collaboration</i>					
<b>5. Exhibits nurturing attributes when working with others</b>					
Circle:    Not observed in this setting    Consistently    Frequently    Sometimes    Rarely					
<b>Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shows care and kindness to each and every student and adult</li> <li>● Provides help to others in a variety of ways</li> <li>● Demonstrates empathy</li> <li>● Exhibits behaviors that are friendly, collegial, and courteous</li> <li>● Treats each person with respect</li> <li>● Demonstrates patience with others and gives grace while providing accountability</li> </ul>					<b>Comments:</b>

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<b>6. Displays a collaborative spirit that fosters community building</b>						
Circle:	Not observed in this setting	Consistently	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	
Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:					Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contributes to building a positive culture and climate (e.g. greets others, smiles, initiates conversations, gets to know others, etc.)</li> <li>Contributes to collaborative conversations</li> <li>Takes time to encourage others and celebrate their successes</li> <li>Participates actively on a team and by working to meet shared goals</li> <li>Positively impacts the success of others via personal actions</li> <li>Shares and welcomes ideas, materials, and resources</li> <li>Recognizes personal strengths and those of others</li> </ul>						
<b>7. Displays a willingness to put the good of others ahead of oneself</b>						
Circle:	Not observed in this setting	Consistently	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	
Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:					Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates humility</li> <li>Exudes courage by doing the right things for the right reasons</li> <li>Practices vulnerability</li> <li>Acts in ways that illustrate a student-centered belief system</li> <li>Demonstrates integrity by being trustworthy and honest</li> <li>Demonstrates selflessness in service to others and the profession</li> </ul>						
<b>8. Engages with others in ways that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion</b>						
Circle:	Not observed in this setting	Consistently	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	
Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:					Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates value and respect for others with diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, and worldviews</li> <li>Invites and considers the perspectives of others</li> <li>Implements equitable practices to ensure all students are highly engaged</li> <li>Balances the knowledge of culture/care with high expectations</li> <li>Takes actionable steps to promote inclusive educational practices</li> <li>Confronts negative stereotypes and language that further suppresses marginalized populations</li> <li>Actively seeks to disrupt rather than maintain inequitable power structures</li> </ul>						
<b>Commitment to Learning</b>						
<i>Demonstrates a commitment to personal and professional self-growth</i>						
<b>9. Displays characteristics of a self-directed learner.</b>						
Circle:	Not observed in this setting	Consistently	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	
Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:					Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effectively works to improve upon essential teaching competencies</li> <li>Identifies areas of strength and areas of growth</li> <li>Uses effective and reflective goal-setting</li> <li>Monitors and evaluates progress on set goals and adjusts goals as needed</li> <li>Applies new learning in future work</li> <li>Exhibits a growth mindset</li> </ul>						
<b>10. Demonstrates an eagerness to learn from other</b>						
Circle:	Not observed in this setting	Consistently	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	
Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:					Comments:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively seeks feedback</li> <li>Utilizes constructive feedback to support growth</li> <li>Asks for help or advice from professionals in the field</li> <li>Proactively seeks out opportunities/resources to support learning</li> <li>Respects the knowledge and experience of in-service teachers, leaders, and course instructors to support personal/professional development</li> <li>Shows appreciation for the opportunities provided</li> <li>Engages in networking opportunities and activities</li> </ul>						

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<b>11. Exhibits the characteristics of a <i>critical thinker</i> in the field of education</b> Circle:    Not observed in this setting    Consistently    Frequently    Sometimes    Rarely	
<b>Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Demonstrates a curiosity about teaching and learning</li> <li>● Makes purposeful, thoughtful decisions to best meet students' needs</li> <li>● Asks complex questions to stimulate thinking and isn't satisfied with easy answers</li> <li>● Seeks out research to inform thinking and answer questions</li> <li>● Make autonomous decisions based on professional judgment and resources</li> <li>● Thinks creatively to support the learning process</li> <li>● Takes risks by learning and trying new things</li> <li>● Works towards innovative solutions to problems in the field</li> </ul>	<b>Comments:</b>  
<b>12. Works to deconstruct personal biases to advocate for inclusivity</b> Circle:    Not observed in this setting    Consistently    Frequently    Sometimes    Rarely	
<b>Possible Indicators of Observed Behavior:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Examines how personal experiences may influence beliefs</li> <li>● Develops an awareness of one's own cultural biases</li> <li>● Displays an open mind by viewing a situation/topic from multiple perspectives</li> <li>● Seeks out new ideas/information to expand understanding of topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion</li> <li>● Acknowledges and acts on one's responsibility in working towards a more equitable reality for all students</li> <li>● Critically considers how privilege and power influence schooling</li> </ul>	<b>Comments:</b>  