Negotiating understandings of teaching dispositions within an early childhood initial teacher education community of practice

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Abstract

Teacher educators from an early childhood education initial teacher education provider in Aotearoa New Zealand conducted a longitudinal study within a community of practice methodology. The research explored how shared understandings of professional teaching dispositions might be negotiated within intense, nuanced and contextual teaching and learning processes and networks of relationships. Participants were the teacher educators/researchers and a cohort of Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) student teachers. Discussions within each of these groups showed indistinct and multiple definitions of teaching dispositions. As core, expert members of the community of practice, teacher educators discussed complexities of defining, teaching and assessing dispositions. Student teachers were novices to the community and discussed instrumental understandings of dispositions as shaping teachers and showed awareness of networks of power relations within the community teaching, learning, and assessment processes.

Keywords

Teaching dispositions; early childhood; teacher education; community of practice.

Introduction

Professional dispositions to teach have been influential in initial teacher education as a key component of assessment of students' teaching practice. However, teaching dispositions provide student teachers, teacher educators and initial teacher education (ITE) providers with challenges and opportunities. Tensions exist between requirements to assess student teachers' professional teaching dispositions and multiple, indistinct understandings of the concept. Accordingly, teaching and assessment processes within relationships among teacher educators and student teachers can be complex and contested.

This article reports on research by a group of early childhood education (ECE) teacher educators in Aotearoa New Zealand. Understandings of teaching dispositions within teaching and assessment processes and relationships among teacher educators and a group of student teachers were investigated over a three-year period, 2014 to 2016. The research question addresses how our initial teacher education

community might develop shared understandings of teaching dispositions. Sub-questions address how students' and teacher educators' understandings, and teaching and assessment practices of dispositions changed over three years. Our answer to the research question is that our community of practice is complex and dynamic, where members have diverse roles, competencies and experience. Student teachers and teacher educators engage in intense, nuanced and contextual teaching, and learning processes where understandings of teaching dispositions are continuously negotiated within networks of relationships. These findings can inform teacher educators as they work with student teachers to induct them into the teaching profession through developing shared understandings of key concepts, of which dispositions is just one example.

This article proceeds with a review of literature about teaching dispositions, a description of the methodology and methods used, a report of data analysis and findings from the student and teacher educator learning communities. We return to the research question to suggest some implications for early childhood teaching and teacher education with regard to teaching, assessing and developing shared professional understandings.

Literature review: Teaching dispositions

The notion of dispositions in teacher education is supported across various jurisdictions, including Australia, New Zealand and the United States (Martin & Mulvihill, 2017). According to O'Neill et al. (2014), it is likely that support for their consideration emanates from a widely held view that teachers require more than knowledge and skills to be effective teachers. The United States has been the leading proponent for several decades, utilising dispositions across all stages of ITE programmes, to assess candidates to enter programmes and to assess coursework as criteria for exit of programmes. Whilst the Teaching Council New Zealand-Matatū Aotearoa endorses the value of dispositions, stating, "We're working with our profession to create a more future-focussed initial teacher education system—one that attracts the right applicants with not just the right-thinking abilities, but the right dispositions" (Stoop, n.d.), the work on dispositions in teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand has not been well-defined or systematic. This situation contrasts with the United States where teaching dispositions have been regarded widely as foundational to teachers' effective practice since the 1980s.

According to Thornton (2006), the concept of dispositions is complex, stemming from the domains of philosophy and psychology. This dual origin may in part explain the challenges to achieving a shared understanding and language about dispositions in education. The term is closely associated with several diverse terms such as tendencies, habits of mind, traits and values which can lead to a lack of clarity in respect to its meaning and make it a tricky concept to build on (Katz, 1988; Kim & Zimmerman, 2017; Ruitenberg, 2011). A tension arising from this lack of clarity is whether dispositions are conceptualised as inherent, stable qualities in the individual or behaviours that can be taught. This raises the notion of dispositions being conceived as personal or professional constructs. Kim and Zimmerman (2017) reason that dispositions are a fusion of external influences and internal subjective meaning-making and maintain that personal growth is fundamental to dispositions. On the other hand, Ruitenberg (2011) disputes a personal and confessional approach to dispositions and argues that ITE programmes should clearly delineate between an individual's predispositions, that is, the commitments they bring with them and the professional dispositions they will be expected to demonstrate: "In the end, what matters is what student–teachers will actually do when they are teachers" (p. 50). There is a danger that student teachers will conceal their personal values and beliefs if they do not align with those promulgated by the ITE.

Whilst dispositions are variously understood, there seems to be a consensus that they provide links between values and beliefs, and behaviours (Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007). The behavioural component has been described as central to the concept of teaching dispositions. As Claxton (2007) points out "a disposition is merely an ability that you are actually disposed to make use of" (p. 119). Da

Ros-Voseles and Moss (2007) view dispositions as being committed to and demonstrating ways of behaving as teachers. Jung and Rhodes (2008) also describe behaviour competence-related dispositions, such as a disposition towards a certain strategy that incorporates

- willingness and intention to embrace strategy;
- beliefs in values of strategy with positive attitudes regarding use;
- intention to increase capability to use strategy;
- sense of confidence and controllability;
- use of strategy in educational context.

Claxton and Carr (2004) summarise this view of dispositions as being ready, willing and able. In this way dispositions convey an orientation that combines with a propensity to act frequently in particular ways. Katz's (1988) definition of dispositions as "habits of the mind, tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways" (p. 30) became iconic and well-used in early childhood literature. This early work on dispositions by Katz and by others, such as Dweck (1989) in the United States, was built on further in Aotearoa New Zealand by Carr (1998a, 1998b) and incorporated into the 'learning story' model of assessment which was developed to complement early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Āhuatanga is the term used as a translation for disposition within the initial teacher education framework by Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand. As an early childhood teacher education provider in Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Rito Maioha celebrates the bicultural partnership between Indigenous Māori and non-Māori (www.ecnz.ac.nz). Āhuatanga is defined as a "way, aspect, likeness, circumstance, characteristic, property, feature, function, attribute, trait, phenomenon" (Moorfield, n.d.); however, the word disposition is not mentioned. The term āhuatanga is also used in *Te whatu pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori assessment for learning* (Ministry of Education, 2009) as "ngā āhuatanga o te tamaiti: ways of being" (p. 57). The writers suggest the Māori child is born with unique personality traits: wairua, mana, and mauri. The role of the teachers and adults is to develop these āhuatanga o te tamaiti. Mead (2003) explains that 'āhuatanga Māori' (as presented in the Education Act of 1989) refers to "knowledge and practices which have the character and form of being Maori" (p. 12) and links the term closely with tikanga Māori. Thus, from te ao Māori perspective, the term āhuatanga brings conceptions of spirituality and of knowledge handed down through the generations to our understandings of dispositions.

As stated above, there are challenges in operationalising the concept of dispositions in teacher education because of the lack of clarity around how the concept is understood and the language that is used. The subjective nature of dispositions means that they are open to different interpretations. Katz (2002) describes dispositions as "very resistant to precision" (p. 53) and Shivley and Misco (2010) suggest that ratings of teacher educators can consequently be "fraught with reliability issues" (p. 13). Diez (2006, cited in O'Neill et al, 2014, p. 40) identifies four problem areas that can challenge the credibility of teacher educators' efforts to assess candidates for teacher education: "reductionism; disconnectedness; superficiality; and compliance". Thus, the highly interpretive nature of dispositions means that clarity around teaching and assessment can be challenging.

Scholarship in the area of dispositions in teacher education has delved into areas such as the identifying and tracking of teaching dispositions in action, the effective teaching of specific dispositions, and assessment of dispositions in student teachers including candidates for teacher education programmes. Thornton's (2006) three-year study of schoolteachers in a model school for at-risk students in Aotearoa New Zealand endeavoured to identify and track the dispositions of teachers. It was found that teachers who demonstrated dispositions of responsiveness were highly effective teachers and made a difference in the lives of students. Further research into dispositions in action was called for. Baum and Swick (2008) theorised ways for teacher educators to strengthen specific dispositions deemed necessary for working with families. The authors discuss their view of a set of "positive, yet realistic dispositions" (p. 580) for working with families: a positive orientation to families, an empowerment perspective, an orientation to partnership, the valuing of diversity, a commitment to effective

communication, and lastly that student teachers see themselves as learners. Baum and Swick (2008) conclude by encouraging teacher education institutions "to recognize the importance of fostering the development of these critical dispositions in emerging teachers" (p. 583). Da Ros-Voseles and Moss (2007) discuss ways that teacher educators can support positive student teacher dispositions. It is important that teacher educators nurture a sense of professional autonomy and decision making, this being underpinned by a willingness to listen and learn from others. Participation in discussions about practice and case studies can lead to reflection and self-awareness about values and multiple viewpoints.

Shively and Misco (2010) draw on their experience of integrating dispositions into teacher education and outline a four-step process to achieve effective assessment of dispositions. Firstly, there needs to be shared understanding of the concept of dispositions so that a clear working definition is evident to all parties. Secondly, a set of key dispositions are to be identified, and in this regard the authors warn against compiling too long a list: "To try to advance and measure too many dispositions would create a risk of doing nothing well" (Shively & Misco, 2010, p. 11). Thirdly, decisions need to be made about how and where each disposition will be assessed, for example, portfolios, case-studies, self-assessment, logs, observations, performance and interviews. Lastly, as assessments are incorporated and completed, data is collected and analysed which then leads to the revision and improvement of the programme. Clear and explicit communication about dispositions is seen as a critical element; students must be aware of dispositional expectations and how dispositions will be introduced and assessed within the programme (Shively & Misco, 2010).

This brief review of literature relevant to understanding and using teaching dispositions in ITE in ECE has highlighted the importance placed on these, the difficulty of pinning down definitive agreed understandings, and complex nature of teaching and assessing student teachers' dispositions. Sociocultural theories provided methodological tools to explore how a group of teacher educators and a cohort of student teachers negotiated understandings of dispositions through networks of teaching and learning processes and relationships.

Methodology

The qualitative, constructivist methodology of this research is based in theories which frame learning within social and cultural contexts. Related concepts of communities of learners, communities of inquiry and communities of practice are associated with sociocultural theorists such as Barbara Rogoff (1994) frames learning as "a process of transforming participation in shared sociocultural endeavours" (p. 210). A community of learners actively engages in processes that include leading, communicating, supporting and observing. Members collaborate and contribute according to their experience, knowledge, and skills (Kilpatrick et al., 2003; Rogoff, 1994).

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), a community of practice is a dynamic entity with relations of power comprising of "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (p. 98). As newcomers participate in the cultural practice of a community, they gradually gain access to sources which enable deeper involvement and understanding. Cherrington and Thornton (2015) investigated professional learning communities (PLCs) of ECE teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand. They facilitated four PLCs and noticed that each developed in different ways, influenced by enabling or constraining structural and relational factors.

Members of communities of practice learn collectively and build competence through working together on shared projects, in mutual trusting relationships, with a repertoire of communal resources (Wenger, 2000). Boundaries of communities of practice are relevant to this research where the teacher educators are core, experienced members of a community of practice focused on ECE teaching and learning. As new community members, student teachers are introduced to shared resources, such as study skills, assessment processes and concepts of professional teaching dispositions. Student teachers

belong to multiple communities of practice: the teaching base community of teaching staff and students, their class group who met weekly, and their communities of teaching and learning practice in their ECE centres.

Research participants were a group of teacher educators and a cohort of student teachers in a field-based Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) programme. These student teachers completed 12 hours weekly in an ECE 'home centre'. At that time (2014–2016), they experienced four teaching practice assessment visits each year which included assessment of their teaching dispositions. Student teachers were expected to demonstrate their dispositions to advocate for social justice, to be reflective, relationally connected, transformative, inquiring and critically aware, and curious, playful and creative (Te Rito Maioha, n.d.). Seven teacher educators were involved in the research, with four participating from beginning to end. A total of 22 first-year students consented to participate, 16 in February 2014 (of these, four did not proceed into the second year of study), and six in June 2014. There are two intakes into this BTch (ECE) programme each year, which meant that the class is always composed of a tuakana group who are six months ahead of the teina group. Three more students joined the class and consented to participate mid-2016, near the end of the study. The research methods and consent forms were approved by the research and ethics committee of the ITE provider.

Data was generated by students in small group discussions: at the beginning (Set A), middle (Set B), and end of 2014 (Set C); and in the middle of the year in 2015 (Set D) and 2016 (Set E). The teacher educators met to plan, discuss the topic of teaching dispositions, and analyse data. Data was generated by notes taken of five discussions in 2014 (Sets 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7), one in mid-2015 (Set 8), and at the beginning and end of 2016 (Sets 9 and 10). Two additional documents were not analysed: feedback from a conference presentation (Set 4) and an individual reflection (Set 6).

Findings: Teacher educators

Teacher educators discussed their understandings, and processes of teaching and assessing student teachers' professional teaching dispositions. Inductive analysis of codes and themes in discussion notes led to findings about defining dispositions, influences of social construction, the part that practice plays, and tensions in processes and practices of assessing teaching dispositions. These themes are framed by processes of teaching and learning within communities of learners. Data quoted here are not attributed to individuals because discussions were recorded in summaries and mind maps.

Defining teaching dispositions

Both the teacher educator and student teacher groups discussed definitions of dispositions. Teacher educator discussions moved from 'quick answer' definitions to understandings reflecting complexities and messiness. Everyday understandings of dispositions as behaviours were expressed as "ways of being and doing. It is the way one tends to think and act" (Set 1, p. 4). Dispositional behaviours may be understood as habitual, as a "trend of a person's action" and the "tendency to act in a certain way" (Set 1, p. 2).

Teacher educators discussed complexities and messiness in defining dispositions. Conflicting definitions were noted, such as "inherence and malleability, positive and negative" (Set 5, p. 8). Dispositions were perceived as sometimes inherent. One participant suggested that, "it is what you do, who you are" (Set 1, p. 2). However, processes of teaching and formative assessment assume some malleability of student teachers' teaching dispositions. Paradoxical understandings of dispositions led to participants accepting multiple understandings. One participant stated, "I see them as influential and significant. Still see them as both malleable and inherent but focusing on the malleable side" (Set 5, p. 8). Participants discussed how te ao Māori understandings added the term āhuatanga, "which is close in

meaning to disposition, also brings with it the meaning and spirituality of previous generations and so dispositions to some degree are seen as inherent in us when we are born" (Set 1, p. 4). As teacher educators explored complexities of teaching dispositions, they discussed teaching and learning interactions among teacher educators and student teachers.

The influence of social construction

Teacher educators discussed social construction of dispositions within discursive practices of teacher education and moral judgements. Discursive values and beliefs are expressed in language and processes specific to teacher education, where teacher educators are positioned as experts. This means that "[student teachers] are coming into [teacher educators'] discursive space" (Set 1, p. 6). For example, one teacher educator expressed a belief in dispositions being teachable, saying, "I believe that people can learn to adopt and strengthen the demonstration of these behaviours" (Set 1, p. 4). Student teachers and teacher educators engage together in complex and intense teaching and learning processes, where teacher educators seek to stimulate change. One participant claimed that there are "many different ways that people make shifts. Sometimes by being confronted and challenged" (Set 7, p. 2). As experts in these discursive practices, teacher educators exercise professional judgement. For example, participants recalled times "when [they hadn't] seen disposition but has decided to pass on basis of discussion" (Set 5, p. 7).

Moral judgements shape teacher educators' responsibilities, as seen in discussion about assessing students' displays of behaviours or their personal professional values and beliefs. Teacher educators "can't make assumptions about what is in [student teachers'] heads" (Set 1, p. 2). They said "what right do we have to dictate students' values and beliefs?" This awareness of social construction and moral judgements shaping teacher education processes led to consideration of how teaching practice is involved in building shared understandings of dispositions.

The part that practice plays

Intense professional discussions in the teaching practice assessment process encourage student teachers to build understandings of dispositions in their own teaching practice. Working with student teachers to identify examples in their teaching practice can effectively build understanding and confidence. Teacher educators described complex negotiated assessment processes:

> Good to start with what they can identify rather than starting with what we've noticed. Then [we] can add 'this is what I saw'. Putting responsibility on them. Dispositions about how they did what they did. Easy for students to think about what they were doing, leads naturally into how they were doing it. (Set 4, p. 4)

Teacher educators discussed visibility of dispositions, using examples from practice, and performativity. Teacher educators observe student teachers' practice and discuss visible dispositions and those that need to become more visible. However, some dispositions may not be visible, and one participant wondered, "to what extent do we need to see the disposition in practice to say that it has passed, and what do we do when we have doubts?" (Set 5, p. 6). Teacher educators recognise complexities of learning processes and want to "emphasise the progression rather than the compliance. Three-year career journey" (Set 5, p. 5).

Student teachers are under pressure to perform teaching dispositions, which raises questions of authenticity or performativity. A participant wondered, "if people know that the dispositions have an assessment component, does it entice people to express things that are not really in their being?" (Set 5, p. 10). However, teacher educators suggested that habitual performance could itself be transformative

and performance become more authentic. One participant pondered, "Can performing something change how you think about it? That's hopeful—if we encourage students to habitually behave in ways that we consider are important, then perhaps that changes the way they think too" (Set 5, p. 11). Student teachers learn about dispositions while they are being assessed through discussions with teacher educators, where multiple tensions of understanding and assessing dispositions arise.

Tensions in processes and practices of assessing dispositions

Teacher educators discussed tensions in diverse understandings of dispositions, programme expectations, requirements of teaching practice assessments, and the subjective nature of assessment. Te ao Māori perspectives are in tension with 'mainstream Westernised' understandings of teaching dispositions. For example, 'āhuatanga' indicates a culturally specific understanding of the innate nature of dispositions. A teacher educator suggested that there is a "lack of deep knowledge of dispositional terms in te ao Māori. Do indicators encapsulate the tikanga Māori meanings?" (Set 1, p. 3).

Practical and ethical tensions exist within the subjective and interpretive nature of assessment of teaching dispositions. Participants suggested that "we can bring our own lens to assessment guided by dispositions but might lean towards particular dispositions in a particular way" (Set 7, p. 1). The assessment process is challenging and unwieldy, occurring over three hours in an ECE centre and incorporating observation and discussion. Professional judgements are used to interpret multiple ways of displaying dispositions. For example, "if only one or two bullet points [aspects] addressed—what level is required? Visiting teacher educators are doing interpretations all the time" (Set 1, p. 5). A teacher educator wondered, "How much of a disposition needs to be evident for us to pass it?" (Set 5, p. 6).

Teacher educators discussed teaching dispositions and their teaching and assessment on eight occasions considered here. As researchers, they planned student teachers' discussions of their perceptions and experiences. Student teachers' data indicate quite different concerns that raise questions about how shared understandings of teaching dispositions are negotiated within this teaching base community of practice.

Findings: Student teachers

Student teachers' data came from four small-group discussions of questions posed by the teacher educators. These discussions occurred without teacher educators present and anonymised responses were recorded. At the beginning of 2014 (Set A), most students were new to the programme and some had been studying for six months. The discussion question was 'what does the term 'disposition' mean to you?' At subsequent discussions in the middle (Set B) and end (Set C) of 2014, and mid-2015 (Set D), students discussed these questions:

1. What is your understanding of the term '[ITE provider] teaching dispositions'?
2. How has your understanding changed since your [previous] focus group discussion?
3. If there are any changes in your understanding of the term 'teaching dispositions', how did they come about? (For example, tutorials, reading, discussions with other students, other teachers, visiting teacher educators, other influences.)
4. What is helpful and unhelpful about dispositions as a way of assessing your teaching practice?
5. What suggestions do you have for discussions and assessment of [ITE provider] teaching dispositions in [the next] semester?

Three themes were produced from data analysis: A prominent theme, 'what shapes the teacher/āhuatanga o te kaiako?' A minor theme, 'what shapes the person/āhuatanga o te tangata?' And a theme addressing 'who has control?'

Teaching dispositions: What shapes the teacher/āhuatanga o te kaiako?

Across the data sets, student teachers expressed understanding that teaching dispositions shape them as teachers by requiring compliance, guiding teaching practice, and enabling professional growth. They were aware that they must be assessed as demonstrating teaching dispositions to graduate from the BTch programme. In the second discussion in mid-2014, they responded that dispositions are "expected of us as a teacher", and "the standards we need to meet not only in our practice, but also in a visible way for our teaching visits" (Set B, Q. 1). At the third discussion, six months later, awareness of compliance requirements was more specific, and students knew that "they are related to the NZ Teacher Council's Graduating Teacher Standards" (Set C, Q. 1).

Understanding that dispositions guide teaching practice was expressed in three student discussions (mid-2014, end-2014, mid-2015), with definitions such as, "guidelines to be a good teacher" (Set B, Q. 4) and "the teaching practice we always follow" (Set B, Q. 1). By the end of 2014, student teachers asserted that "dispositions underline our practice as a teacher", understanding dispositions as shaping "general description of a holistic teacher in Aotearoa" and "ideas and strategies that inform our teaching practice" (Set C, Q. 1). Awareness of dispositions as guiding teaching practice continued in the mid-2015 discussion, as student teachers described them as "what leads our teaching practice" and stating that "dispositions are characteristics shown during practice" (Set D, Q. 2).

Student teachers' professional growth as teachers was linked to teaching dispositions, especially in discussions in mid-2014 and end-2014. They described a steep learning curve early in their study, describing their learning journey in terms such as "[gaining] greater understanding of the dispositions", from a starting point where they "had no ideas what the dispositions were at the beginning". Student teachers grew in their "understanding [of] the relevance of the teaching dispositions to our teaching practice" (Set B, Q. 2). At the end of 2014, student responses showed awareness of their learning journeys and deepening knowledge. Individual students stated, "I now understand in better depth different ways to interpret the dispositions and standards", and "I have a better grasp on many early childhood concepts that I did at orientation, though I still have more to learn" (Set C, Q. 2). Students drew on everyday understandings of dispositions as shaping the person in the earliest discussion, and understandings of dispositions as shaping them as teachers developed as they became more experienced.

Dispositions: What shapes the person/āhuatanga o te tangata?

The theme of dispositions shaping the person came through most strongly in the first discussion at the beginning of 2014, which addressed the question, 'what does the term 'disposition' mean to you?' Student teachers' responses reflected everyday understandings as they provided definitions such as, "how we are all individual"; "creates the person you have become"; "a person's inherent qualities of mind and character—mild, angry, pleasant, confident, loud, shy"; "person's beliefs, habits, spiritual"; "the attitude a person has toward a situation i.e. aggressive nature" (Set A). These responses remind us that, as teacher educators, we have co-opted the term 'dispositions' to specific purposes in terms of expectations of students' teaching practice. When we seek to achieve a shared understanding of teaching dispositions within our teaching base community, it is important to remember these everyday interpretations. In Set D (mid-2015), everyday understandings of dispositions as shaping the person persist in responses such as, "different for each individual/unique"; "our personalities are shown through the dispositions we have" (Set D).

Teaching dispositions: Who has control?

Four discussions (beginning, middle and end of 2014, mid-2015) addressed questions of control in understanding, enacting and assessing teaching dispositions. Student teachers, teacher educators and the BTch programme all have control in diverse ways. Student teachers understand that they have the "ability to improve situations" (Set A), and control over "how we represent ourselves as teachers" (Set B, Q. 1). In mid-2014, students saw themselves as having control over using new understandings, as they gained "better understanding of the dispositions and how they can be included in your practice" (Set B, Q. 5). This response was echoed at the end of 2014 and mid-2015, when student teachers stated that dispositions "give you ideas on ways you can implement these in your teaching" (Set C, Q. 4) and "give insight into your practice" (Set D, Q. 2).

Student teachers perceived teacher educators' control at teaching practice assessments, as they described "discussions with visiting lecturers and being able to discuss/give examples of how these teaching dispositions are shown in our teaching practice" (Set C, Q. 3). Teacher educators would lead discussions about examples where teaching dispositions are evident, and student teachers noted that "they could tell us what they have noticed in our teaching practice" (Set B, Q. 5). Student teachers welcomed constructive criticism and explanations from teacher educators that provide "students with opportunities to concentrate on different dispositions as seen through [the] eyes of different lecturers" (Set D, Q. 3). However, they were critical of teacher educators with differing interpretations, seeing these as "unhelpful in the variety of interpretations that can be made, especially regarding assessment" (Set C, Q. 4). Student teachers wanted teacher educators to decide on shared understandings, "to have more uniform understanding/interpretation for more accurate assessment" (Set C, Q. 5).

For the student teachers, requirements of the BTch programme exerted control over how teaching dispositions were understood and assessed. In mid-2014, student teachers linked programme materials to dispositions, describing them as "good guidelines to use with your practice" (Set B, Q. 4). Understanding programme expectations was a concern, and student teachers sought clarification about "what is expected of us especially when it comes to the discussion" (Set B, Q. 5). Programme requirements that support learning about dispositions were appreciated, such as when "home centre tasks in year one focused on dispositions which helped students to unpack what they were and could relate back to their teaching practice" (Set D, Q. 1), and student teachers found "self-assessment for visits helpful" (Set D, Q. 2).

Themes from student teacher discussions were markedly different from those from teacher educator discussion, reflecting different roles, knowledge and concerns of the two groups. In terms of a teaching base community of practice, teacher educators are core members and experts, while student teachers are novices. Student teachers' interest in how they are being shaped as teachers and who has control are understandable.

Discussion

It is timely to discuss professional teaching dispositions and the processes of learning, teaching and assessment of student teachers' dispositions in the context of an ECE ITE community of practice. ITE programmes are undergoing review as Teaching Council New Zealand Mātatu Aotearoa bring dispositions into focus linked with values of whakamana (empowerment), manaakitanga (welcoming, caring, respect), pono (integrity) and whanaungatanga (positive and collaborative relationships). As O'Neill et al. (2014) concluded, the view that teachers' dispositions are integral to effective teaching alongside knowledge and skills is widely held and influential. Teacher educators and student teachers in this research study were aware of teaching dispositions as a crucial focus of teaching practice

assessment and associated tensions and challenges within complex learning, teaching and assessment processes.

The research question asked: How can our teaching base community develop shared understandings of teaching dispositions? We answer that shared understandings are negotiated through complex teaching and learning processes in a community of practice. In unpacking this response further, we consider multiple, uncertain and dynamic understandings of the concept of teaching dispositions; and learning, identities and relationships (including power relations) within this ECE ITE community of practice.

Understandings of teaching dispositions

While a clear working definition of teaching dispositions may be desirable and productive of shared understandings among teacher educators and student teachers (Shively & Misco, 2010), it is far from the case in this ECE ITE teaching base community of practice. Teacher educators and student teachers acknowledged everyday meanings of dispositions such as "inherent qualities of mind and character" (Student teachers, Set A) and "ways of being and doing" (Teacher educators, Set 1). Complexities that challenged clear working definitions swiftly arose in both groups. Teacher educators were concerned about whether dispositions are inherent or malleable, given their role of assessing student teachers' professional dispositions demonstrated in practice within expectations of progress over a three-year period. Discussion of how values, beliefs and behaviours shaped dispositions led to questions about performativity and authenticity, a concern that was also expressed by Ruitenberg (2011).

Teacher educators' discussions explored the 'slippery' nature of teaching dispositions, echoing concerns in the literature about the lack of clarity in understandings of a concept that is used for high-stakes assessment of student teachers. Some complexities may be associated with diverse disciplinary origins (Thornton, 2006) or being both internally and externally derived (Kim & Zimmerman, 2017). In this ECE ITE programme in Aotearoa New Zealand, te ao Māori conceptualisations of dispositions are referred to as āhuatanga. In the context of tikanga Māori, this term is not a simple translation but has implications of spirituality and intergenerational knowledge. Teacher educators expressed concern that mainstream Westernised understandings exclude te ao Maōri understandings of dispositions in teaching and learning materials and processes.

Student teachers' perceptions of teaching dispositions were more instrumental in their interest in what dispositions do rather than what they are. Perceptions of dispositions as what shapes a teacher formed a thread through the four discussions over a two-year period, with increasing awareness of mechanisms by which this shaping is achieved. Consideration of teacher educators' and student teachers' diverse understandings of teaching dispositions within one community of practice and our interest in shared understandings brings our focus to communities of practice and how learning happens within our community.

Community of practice

Teacher educators and student teachers engage in complex teaching, learning and assessment processes focused on ensuring that student teachers demonstrate teaching dispositions associated with effective and desirable ECE teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand. Members of the teaching base community of practice have diverse roles, competencies and experience that constantly change within contexts and relationships. According to Wenger's (2000) definition of social learning, members of a community of practice interact to share social competencies through collaboration. Core expert members (such as teacher educators) progressively induct novices (such as student teachers) into the concepts, language

and tools valued by the community of practice. Through social learning processes, community members develop identities and roles and their sense of trust and belonging (Wenger, 2000).

Complex, nuanced teaching and learning processes are required in this educational context of indistinctly defined dispositions that reflect values, beliefs and behaviours, and are expected to be partially inherent and progressively develop over time. These processes largely happen during teaching practice assessments based on observation and discussion. The teacher educator and student teacher together engage in intense negotiation of shared understandings of what teaching dispositions are, look like, and whether the student teacher has reached the required standard. The teacher educators unpacked these complex processes as they considered social construction and moral judgements, the part that practice plays, and tensions in assessing dispositions.

Networks of power relations are interwoven through the ECE ITE teaching base community of practice. Student teachers are initially learning at the boundary of the community of practice, "an experience of being exposed to a foreign competence" (Wenger, 2000, p. 232). Their awareness of dispositions as what shapes the teacher sits alongside concern about who has control. The ITE programme sets expectations and teacher educators enact these through teaching and assessment. Student teachers appreciated guidance, sought clarity and gradually gained confidence over the research period. Teacher educators also showed awareness of power relations as they discussed how they negotiated programme requirements using their own moral and professional judgements. They recognised the teaching practice assessment as a complex occasion of teaching and learning processes, where entangled power relations lead to intense negotiations focused on teaching dispositions.

Conclusion and educational implications

Crucial aspects of coming to belong to a community are learning language and concepts and being able to increasingly use these as apprentices develop gradually into experts. The longitudinal study involving a team of teacher educators and a cohort of student teachers has explored understandings of the concept of teaching dispositions and teaching, learning and assessment processes within a community of practice bounded within a particular ECE ITE programme during a specific time period. Programmes, requirements, expectations, processes and relationships constantly change, so the outcomes of this research cannot be claimed to be repeatable or generalisable. However, our research and findings might help teacher educators and student teachers think about how teaching and learning can act as negotiated processes aimed at shared understanding of key concepts within communities of practice.

The community of practice provided a useful frame to understand teaching, learning and assessment processes as complex negotiations of understandings of the indistinctly defined yet crucial concept of teaching dispositions. Other teacher educators and student teachers may find our discussions and conclusions recognisable. For us as teacher educators, a key outcome of this research was a realisation that we feel entangled in complexities as we seek to teach and assess teaching dispositions at teaching practice assessments. Our research has shown that these complex, intense, nuanced and contextual processes comprise a professional, thoughtful and insightful approach to negotiating shared understandings of teaching dispositions that we value and struggle to pin down within our community of practice of teacher educators and student teachers.

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