Context Matters: Cultivating Dispositions of Responsive and Equitable Teachers for Urban Schools

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Abstract: The relationship between teachers' dispositions for teaching and the various contexts in which these dispositions are acquired is related to successful teaching in urban schools. This qualitative study explores the intersection between the context of urban experiences (program directed and field based) and its function in teacher candidates' dispositions. John Dewey's transactional theory of knowing (1938/1963) offers a framework to explore teachers' dispositions in relation to experiences, actions and consequences for urban teaching and learning. Nineteen teacher candidates from a K-5 certification and ESOL endorsement program were interviewed individually after program completion about understandings of urban school contexts and teachers' dispositions. Teacher candidates viewed teachers' dispositions as important and something they should be mindful of. Teacher candidates expressed that during teaching (actions) dispositions may change based on the teaching context and the students (reflection on experience). Experiences in the teacher preparation program appeared to cultivate core dispositions associated with effective teaching and learning in urban schools such as responsiveness and a commitment to equity. The clinical experiences in partner urban classrooms also provided them with experiences and reflections on understanding the context of instruction in ways that influenced their enacted dispositions (e.g., resilience) that were associated with urban schooling. We found a strong connection between teacher candidates' dispositions and their preparation experiences, their reflections of those experiences and their desire for learner-centered action.

KEYWORDS: clinical practices, equity, teacher dispositions, teacher beliefs, urban schools

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:
1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;

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Teacher preparation programs concur that knowledge of subject matter along with the appropriate pedagogical skills serve as the foundation of good teaching when preparing teachers for service in urban schools (Bair, 2017; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). All teachers, especially those in urban schools, must be prepared to take advantage of the different experiences and academic needs of a wide variety of students as they plan and teach (Cochran-Smith, 2011; Grant & Gillette, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Milner, 2011; Sleeter, 2001, 2015). Teacher educators also recognize that knowledge and skills alone do not make one an effective teacher (Cochran-Smith, 2002; Kindle & Schimdt, 2011; Nieto, 2003; Walker, Brady, Lea, & Summers, 2004). Teachers' dispositions, which include their tendencies to act based on beliefs, values, attitudes and prior experiences, are the driving force for teaching and learning in urban classrooms.

The study of dispositions for effective teaching has become a key topic of reform in public schools, teacher accreditation standards, and teacher education programs over the last few decades (CAEP, 2013; Diez, 2007; InTASC, 2013). Dispositions are used to illustrate the importance of ensuring that teacher candidates understand their salient role in shaping the lives of students and possess the reflective processes appropriate for achieving student success. Focusing on teachers' dispositions suggests that teachers enter the classroom with an entrenched and complex system of beliefs, attitudes, personalities, commitments, and values based upon their personal experiences (Hasslen & Bacharach, 2007; Splitter, 2010; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). This belief system impacts how teachers interpret and filter their response to academic content and subsequent instructional practices (Many, Howard, Hoge, 2002; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009, Ritchhart, 2002). Nespor (1987) argues that teachers' beliefs play a major role in defining teaching tasks and organizing knowledge relevant to those tasks as teachers make sense of the contexts where they teach. Nespor also suggests that examinations of teachers' actions require attention to their goals and their subjective interpretation of classroom processes.

Scholars have long recognized that context plays a significant role in teaching practice. Dispositions are highly and inevitably situational (Sadler, 2002) and connect to "particular kinds of tasks, contexts, and materials" (Carr & Claxton, 2002, p. 11) in "particular contexts *[sic]* and at particular times" (Katz & Raths, 1985, p. 8). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu provides an understanding of teachers' dispositions as they comprise a "set of socially, historically, and bodily inscribed dispositions – including attitudes, values, and ideas – that a person acquires unconsciously over time through socialization in particular fields of activity and social life" (Fellner & Kwah, 2018, p. 520). As teachers are oriented to the practices of a particular context, teachers' dispositions, or the trends in teachers' behaviors, are determined by the social, cultural, and political contexts of past and present lives within the unique dimensions of the community and learning environment in which they are situated (Warren, 2018). The relationship between teachers' dispositions for teaching—including personal theories and philosophies—and the various contexts in which these dispositions are acquired is significant to the discussion of successful teaching in urban schools.

Researchers have previously found that the context of instruction influences teaching practice (Darling-Hammond, 2014). It is also known that teachers' dispositions influence teachers' decision-making and subsequent actions. In another study, it was determined that

intentional school-based teacher preparation practices can support the development of beliefs and dispositions for effective educational practice (Truscott & Obiwo, in press). Still, there is a need to extend this work by exploring the intersect between the context of urban experiences (program directed and field based) and its function in teacher candidates' dispositions.

This study utilizes John Dewey's transactional theory of knowing (1938/1963) as a framework to explore teachers' dispositions in relation to experiences, actions and consequences for urban teaching and learning. The next section includes a discussion of transactional components of knowing for teacher preparation; that is, the function of experience, reflection and action in urban schools.

Experience and Reflection

A central concept of Dewey's transactional theory of knowing is the notion of *experience*, or the transaction of human beings with their environment (Vanderstraeten, 2002). Teachers enter education with experiences, both personal and formalized through teacher preparation programs, that influence their dispositions about people, learning, and how the world should work (Carroll, 2007; Richardson, 1996). Clinical practice and other school-based experiences are features of quality teacher preparation programs and school-university partnerships (AACTE, 2018, Darling Hammond, 2014; Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2015). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that teacher learning occurs through the development of knowledge-*in*-practice:

> From this perspective, the emphasis is on knowledge in action: what very competent teachers know as it is expressed or embedded *in* the artistry of practice, *in* teachers' reflections on practice, *in* teachers' practical inquiries, and/or *in* teachers' narrative accounts of practice. (p. 262)

Teaching, therefore, is a responsive craft that is situated and constructed in response to the different variables of everyday life in schools and classrooms. In a Deweyan sense, this type of experimentation is the only way that we can learn anything at all (Biesta, 2014). To improve teaching, teacher candidates need strategically placed clinical experiences to enhance and make explicit the tacit knowledge embedded in experience through their observations, reflections, and interactions with mentor teachers and an array of diverse students (Berry et al., 2008; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Moore (2003) contends that clinical experiences provide opportunities for teacher candidates to try new things, practice instructional decision making and reflective thinking, interact with the school community, and ultimately, strengthen their practice. These clinical experiences are extremely important for future urban teachers who will have the benefit of equity-based teaching.

Teacher candidates learn through reflection of these experiences. Reflection can be described as "a meaning-making process that moves us from one experience to the next with a deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas" (Rodgers, 2002, p. 845). Connecting across experiences is key to teacher learning. In one study, Durden & Truscott (2013) illustrate the connections between teacher candidates' reflectivity (or the act of making reflections) while learning to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students and their development as new culturally relevant teachers. They concluded that preparing new teachers requires the careful cultivation of educators who consider teaching as a

highly contextual and complex act and can reflect critically on their practice. They also found that purposeful teacher education experiences, both university-based and clinical experiences, build important personal and professional references that teacher candidates drew upon:

> The intersect between what PSTs [preservice teachers] bring and what teacher educators provide is extremely important because we found that PSTs naturally draw on their own personal experiences when making reflections but *also draw on* what they see and experience around them as they learn to be a teacher. With guidance, these connections can be powerful learning tools. (Durden & Truscott, 2013, p. 80)

Teacher education programs should be purposeful in helping teacher candidates examine their knowledge and beliefs about the world and themselves as they struggle with new ideas and are exposed to different beliefs throughout the process of learning to teach (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Grant & Gillette, 2006; Talbert-Johnson, 2006). Dewey's theory of transactional knowing implies that for educational growth to occur, teacher candidates must continually reorganize past experiences in light of new ones. Reflection serves as a powerful tool and a systematic way of thinking for teacher candidates that broadens the relationship between what is thought to be known and new experiences. In this learning process, dispositions can effectively develop into habits when means and ends are reciprocally determined through action (Biesta, 2014; Dottin, 2009).

Action as Equity-Based Teaching

John Dewey's (1938/1963) philosophy and his transactional theory of knowing emphasize that learning is embedded in experience. From this perspective, knowing is understood as "a way of doing" and our understanding of the relationship between our actions and their consequences (Biesta, 2007). Effective teachers are instrumental in establishing educational opportunities by laying the foundation for student learning (Diez, 2007), and therefore, teacher actions resulting from experience and reflection are critical for what happens in classrooms.

Multiple studies contextualize urban schools as meeting places of culture and community that are densely populated by diverse students of varying ethnic, racial, linguistic, and geographical origin (Welsh & Swain, 2020). And yet while the urban school context is characterized by culture and community, unequal and inadequate educational outcomes are still persistent (Darling Hammond, 2014). In a review of empirical articles focused on the preparation of teachers for urban contexts, Anderson and Stillman (2013) argue that the urban context represents "sites of contestation" in which different people bring different individual and collective understandings (p. 7). Attending more fully to the complexities of the urban context and culture involves attending to learners, to the social and situated nature of their learning, and to relationships between their lives and the schooling experience. Equity-based teaching recognizes these complexities and centers students, culture, and community.

Teachers' dispositions about students and their communities can significantly shape the expectations they hold for student learning and influence equity-based teaching. Teacher candidates' experiences do not occur in a vacuum, nor are they productive without support and guidance in using these experiences to cultivate dispositions associated with equity-based teaching. There is a need to examine the context of urban experiences in relation to teacher candidates' dispositions. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore teacher candidates'

perceptions about teacher dispositions, and whether they believe that the context of instruction impacts dispositions, and subsequently actions. This work builds on research that argues that context matters when considering transactional components that extend the boundaries of context beyond brick and mortar. The guiding research question for this study is: *What are teacher candidates' perceptions about teacher dispositions in relation to the context of instruction?*

Methods
The Context of Teacher Preparation and Teacher Candidate Participants

The teacher education program in this study is a one-year alternative certification program at a large southeastern urban university committed to preparing and supporting teachers for urban schools. The program uses equity-based pedagogies through cross-curricular applications using a cohort and school-based model. Teacher candidates who completed the program were eligible to receive K-5 teaching certification and a teaching endorsement for work with English Language Learners from the state credentialing body.

The teacher preparation program's mission statement expects that all program graduates should be pedagogically competent, equity-oriented, caring, and empowered individuals. During preparation, teacher candidates were charged with serving as change agents inside and outside the classroom. The teacher preparation program uses Ladson Billings' *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Students* (1994, 2009) as an anchor text and three core tenets for all experiences: (a) academic success, (b) cultural competence, and (c) critical consciousness/sociopolitical critique. Teaching emphasizes the value of students' skills and abilities for academic learning. Teachers help students appreciate and celebrate different cultures and take learning outside of the classroom by pushing students to critique cultural norms, values, and institutions in order to create positive change. Teachers also situate themselves as learners and promote collective empowerment in their school learning communities.

The teacher preparation program places student learning at the center of all school-based activities and evolves to meet the needs of the school. The majority of the teacher preparation activities occur in local urban schools who prioritize equity-based practices and were long-term partners with the department. Teacher certification courses (e.g., literacy, classroom management, social studies, science) are taught at the partner schools in various semesters. Teacher candidates participate in a co-teaching and collaboration model with trained mentor teachers for prolonged clinical experiences during both the school year and summer- and community-based camps. Mentor teacher training emphasizes engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness. Both mentor teachers and supervisors, who are retired teachers and administrators from the local urban schools, observe teacher candidates. Supervisors attend regular faculty meetings and direct curriculum revisions, assessments, and program development. During the summer, teacher candidates also gain clinical experience in literacy and science summer camps hosted by the local urban schools and teacher education program.

Based on the gap in the literature regarding teacher candidates' dispositions and their perceptions of experiences in a teacher preparation program focused on urban schools, this study explored the perceptions of the 19 teacher candidates who participated during the 2014-2015 academic year. Teacher candidates represent a diverse group compared to other traditional teacher preparation programs within the same institution with ages ranging from 23-60 and the

majority (73%) self-identifying as being from a minoritized racial or ethnic group such as "Black" or "Hispanic". However, as is the case nationally, the majority of participants were female (National Center of Education Statistics, 2019).

Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of the program, and before they assumed their first teaching positions, teacher candidates were interviewed individually using directed questions and probes exploring what they knew about teachers' dispositions and how teachers' dispositions might differ depending on where they taught. The semi-structured interviews included a series of 20 questions regarding the teacher candidates' experiences in the classroom and teacher preparation program. Two questions specifically about teachers' dispositions were used in the analysis of this study. The questions include: (1) What are your thoughts on teachers' dispositions? and (2) Do you think teaching dispositions can differ depending on where you teach? Why or why not? All individuals were audio-taped, transcribed by a third-party and de-identified to maintain confidentiality. In asking teacher candidates to talk about teaching dispositions, researchers avoided directing teacher candidates to a particular definition of teachers' dispositions in order to remain open to the multiple perspectives but similar educator preparation experiences.

The transcripts were first read by each researcher independently to identify meaning units for analysis. A meaning unit could be a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph that directly related to the context of urban schooling and teachers' dispositions. Researchers compared these units and agreed upon 46 meaning units for coding. Next, each meaning unit was coded by each researcher independently to develop initial open codes using the elemental methods of descriptive and In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2015). Researchers then compared and discussed the codes and built consensus on what constituted a code (e.g., caring). This coding agreement was then applied to all meaning units again. The next level of analysis focused on examining open codes for patterns in frequencies, redundancies, and outliers resulting in the development of categories. Finally, an analysis of the relationships between, and among, categories resulted in overarching themes concerning perceptions about the role of context and teachers' dispositions. A data matrix was constructed that housed meaning units and independent & combined codes and served as an audit trail of all phases of analysis. Throughout the coding process, each researcher maintained analytic memos to promote researcher reflexivity (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). The analysis was determined to extend beyond acknowledgment that teachers' dispositions matter. Multiple cycles of independent analysis, mutual agreement on developing arguments, and interpretations derived directly from the data supports an understanding of how context (preparation & practice) influences dispositions and importantly, how the experiences of the settings influence dispositions-in-action.

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Findings

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Overview of Findings

At the end of the urban teacher preparation program, teacher candidates were asked to discuss their thoughts about teachers' dispositions. The majority (13 of 19) of teacher candidates viewed teachers' dispositions as important using words such as *critical, crucial*, and *important* when defining them. Teacher candidates described dispositions as impacting how a teacher performs and, thus, something that teachers should be mindful of. One candidate explained,

"So, I think as a teacher, I think that you have to just really be mindful of your own dispositions when you come into the classroom and maybe leave a lot of your personal ones at home, if they exist, and be open minded enough to maybe change those based on your students and be kind of progressive."

This statement illustrates the connection between experience, reflection and learner-centered action.

The majority of teacher candidates (16 of 19) stated that dispositions change based on the context of instruction, but not always. Close analysis revealed that teachers refer to what we coded as "core dispositions" that serve as a foundation for their teaching purposes and actions, no matter the instructional setting. These core dispositions may not, or should not, change depending on the context of instruction. However, candidates expressed that during teaching (actions) dispositions may change based on the teaching context and the students (reflection on experience). These expressions represent enacted dispositions bound by context. The next section provides description of how the context influences the enactment of core dispositions for emerging educators.

Perceptions of Teachers' Dispositions
Context & Experiences

When asked a question about context and teachers' dispositions, 17 of 19 teacher candidates reported that teachers' dispositions differ depending on where one teaches. We did not direct the interview to any particular level of context (classroom, school, district, community, state, nation). However, the majority of respondents referenced the classroom or school (17 of 19), and many candidates (15 of 19) talked about students ("kids") directly. A learner-centered focus was a strong theme found in the discussions.

The teacher candidates' experiences in the schools during their preparation program appeared to influence their ideas about teachers' dispositions and context. The urban schools used for school-based activities were considered more challenging by teacher candidates than those found in other communities. When asked whether they thought dispositions changed based on where they taught while in the program, most candidates said "yes" and then described contextual conditions that necessitated the need for change such as a lack of resources, teacher isolation, administrative policies, and parental involvement. At first, such references to negative attributes of urban schools gave us pause. However, further examination of the data found that the teacher candidates did not appear to hold deficit views of the culture of schools. Instead, they described them as *different* from other schools and just hard to teach in. The culture of students also emerged as a prominent influence on the need for dispositional change. Because many of the teacher candidates equated dispositions with practices (rather than beliefs that influence actions), they described the importance of being flexible and adaptive to meet the expectations of diverse contexts as a difference in dispositions based on context. They remarked that they needed to be "ready" or "willing" to change to meet the needs of students. Teacher candidates strongly believed that in order to be responsive to student needs, their dispositions needed to change.

Despite the fact that most teacher candidates (17 of 19) thought dispositions differ depending on the context, others said that dispositions should not differ based on the context, and/or that dispositions differ for some teachers, but not for them personally. In this sense, the

proposition that dispositions differ depending on the context is viewed negatively. One teacher candidate expressed, "I feel like teaching dispositions shouldn't be different for that *core* (emphasis added) part of what you're showing to the students. I really don't feel like that should be that different, depending on what school you go to." Teacher dispositions considered "core", or those that should not change, appear to be those that generalize across contexts, although learners as a subset remain the center of the consideration.

The Enactment of Core Dispositions
Core dispositions are those that were described by teacher candidates as important for teachers and ones they believed should not change, but might. Several candidates (6 of 19) talked directly about core beliefs using words like "foundation", "who you are" and "sense of self" suggesting that these dispositions do not change or differ depending on the environment. Analysis revealed two core dispositions in this study: Responsiveness and Equity.

It is important to clarify that in this study core dispositions are uniquely different from teacher candidates' references to personality traits (which some scholars may consider as core). Teacher candidates mentioned personality traits such as "enthusiasm", "patience", and "warmth" when describing teachers' dispositions as illustrated by this candidate comment,

> "I think it's important to – I guess I think in my disposition, I try to be very positive and very upbeat in the classroom. I think that's important, especially working with younger kids, because – I don't know. It's just something about being that light in the classroom is helpful, especially when you're the teacher."

Although many of the teacher candidates included personality traits when talking about dispositions, only 3 of 19 respondents mentioned personality traits when talking about dispositions suggesting that personality traits and core dispositions may not be the same.

In addition to describing personal and professional beliefs that appear as core, we found that these teachers' dispositions serve as the impetus for dispositions associated with practice or action within a given context. We coded these teachers' dispositions as "enacted". As one teacher candidate asserted, "I think also though that the teacher is who they are at the core. And I think it's just having the right type of environment to be able to express that." Two associations between core and enacted dispositions were found in this study: 1) responsiveness (core): classroom management (enacted); and 2) equity (core): resilience (enacted). These enacted dispositions are described next in relation to the perceptions of the context that bound them.

The majority of teacher candidates in this study associated teachers' dispositions with teaching practices and actions rather than as the antecedents to instructional decisions. The following quote illustrates the strong connection between dispositions and practice.

> "Yes. I think that it can differ for sure because I think also that sometimes, you know, you may have to – you can handle a situation one way in one place with a certain set of kids and then if it's another place with another group of kids, you know, same situation you might have to handle it a little bit differently. . . . So again, and that goes back to being responsive and connected, knowing your students, knowing what they respond to, and you know, how effective you can be with them."

Because candidates viewed teachers' dispositions as teacher actions, their beliefs and attitudes, as they related to the act of teaching, were bound by the context in which instruction took place. Pattern analysis found a strong connection between perceptions of the culture of the

school and students and the enactment of being responsive. Teacher candidates' work in the teacher preparation program appeared to cultivate core dispositions associated with effective teaching and learning in urban schools (responsiveness and equity). The clinical experiences in partner urban classrooms also provided them with experiences and reflections on understanding the context of instruction in ways that influenced their enacted dispositions associated with urban schooling. One example of this is in the area of classroom management.

In this study teacher candidates' descriptions of the need for classroom management was related to their concerns for being responsive. The following comment illustrates this point, "If I am a strict teacher, that's okay to be more strict. But understanding all the time that you need to teach every child, need to treat every child differently according to where they come from." The need for, and importance of, classroom management is one example of how enacted dispositions were influenced by teacher candidate perceptions of the context. It is not surprising that candidates considered classroom management as important to them. Novice teachers often report classroom management as an area they felt needed the most support. However, the teacher candidates in this study described their need to shift their dispositions, and not just their practices, related to management. We acknowledge that it is not clear as to whether their associations of classroom management with responsiveness were influenced by their observations of others while working in the schools, or their own development of learning to be responsive. Nonetheless, the context of experience appears to influence teachers' dispositions in complex ways.

Teachers' dispositions serve to initiate action and that does not occur in isolation. In this study, teacher candidates actively thought about classroom management in particular ways in order to maintain their need to remain responsive. Another example of how the context influenced enacted dispositions is in response to equity, another core disposition.

Equity as a core disposition was revealed through descriptions of importance of culture, and specifically being culturally responsive. The majority of teacher candidates (15 of 19) referred to some aspect of being culturally responsive as they talked about the need for contextually specific dispositions. An example is illustrated in this description by one teacher candidate, "We have to be culturally responsive. So, depending on who is in our population, we may have to use different strategies." Other teacher candidates described the importance of assuming responsibility in the face of challenging settings,

> "I think some stressors may be different . . . but your job, I think it is always going to be the same. It's what you decide to do with that responsibility and that opportunity. There is this, you know, it's kind of an honor to be with someone's and several people's children. I think you're highly responsible for them. So, I think you have to take it as a very serious thing."

Still other candidates argued that dispositions may need to change in order to keep a check on biases and challenge stereotypes of schools they may be unfamiliar with, thereby addressing equity head on. To demonstrate, one teacher candidate stated,

> "[T]eachers are people and so we always have those biases and those ideals that we come into a school with, . . . especially if you are teaching outside of a culture or a neighborhood that you are familiar with. It can definitely have a detrimental effect. So I think it's all about being culturally responsive – making sure that you have good

information instead of just coming in with your preconceived ideas and your stereotypes."

Yet, teacher candidates also described challenges to their commitment to equity in response to the work environment with examples of difficult policies, limited resources, and finding other educators who advanced equity-based teaching. As candidates described why dispositions needed to change, they did so in response to their perceived need to keep equity at the forefront of their teaching practices. Words such as "stay true", "stay positive", and "stand on beliefs" represent what we term as the enacted disposition of resilience.

In summary, we found that teacher candidates believed that dispositions are contextually bound and that although there are core beliefs that teachers share across different types of teaching settings, these dispositions may look different when in practice. Teacher candidates viewed teachers' dispositions as important and something they should be mindful of. Candidates expressed that during teaching (actions) dispositions may change based on the teaching context and the students (reflection on experience). Teacher candidates' experiences in the teacher preparation program appeared to cultivate core dispositions associated with effective teaching and learning in urban schools (responsiveness and equity). The clinical experiences in partner urban classrooms also provided them with experiences and reflections on understanding the context of instruction in ways that influenced their enacted dispositions associated with urban schooling. We found a strong connection between teacher candidates' dispositions and their preparation experiences, their reflections of those experiences, and their desire for learner-centered action.

Discussion

Teacher candidates' descriptions of dispositions and teaching contexts appeared transactional in nature suggesting that while individual beliefs undergird teachers' dispositions, the actions resulting from these dispositions serve as experiences guiding and guided by those dispositions. These experiences coupled with reflectivity about expectations, teaching purpose and outcomes (aka, "means-ends" connections) further develop teacher candidates' "habits of mind" (Dottin, 2009; Katz, 2002, 1993). The connection between teacher candidates' dispositions and their preparation experiences, their reflections of those experiences and their desire for learner-centered action have implications for the types of productive strategic field experiences needed in teacher preparation. We acknowledge that "different school contexts shape the learning opportunities available to teacher candidates" (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016, p. 487) and argue that teacher preparation programs should be deliberate in the types of experiences offered. Teacher preparation programs who take advantage of rich diverse urban teaching and learning settings for clinical practice must recognize that with equity-based teaching come teacher beliefs and dispositions that matter (Durden, Dooley & Truscott, 2016; Durden & Truscott, 2013; Lazur, 2013; Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, & Schussler, 2010; Paris & Alim, 2014). School-university partnerships can offer opportunities to build the types of experiences that support the cultivation of teachers' dispositions that can benefit students, teacher educators, mentor teachers, and emerging teachers (AACTE, 2018; Truscott & Stenhouse, 2018). These relationships propel mutual goals of preparing teachers who can implement complex teaching practices successfully (Zeichner, 2010).

The idea that some dispositions may be perceived as core suggests deep-rooted, stable ideologies. This brings to question what constitutes a "core" belief and the implication of generalization across settings (e.g., openness, care). It also calls into question whether some "core" beliefs are grounded in prerequisite understandings, beliefs, values and commitments (Haberman 1995; Haberman & Post, 1998; Williamson, Apedoe, & Thomas, 2012). In this study, two core dispositions surfaced: the notion of responsiveness and the importance of equity. However, we found that core dispositions when enacted are influenced by the context of instruction and agree with Hammerness & Matsko (2012) who claim that "knowledge about context can and might be *particularized* for specific settings" (p. 575).

Teacher candidates strongly believed that in order to be responsive to student needs, their dispositions needed to change. The presence of responsiveness as a described teachers' disposition is not surprising given the fact that this cohort of emerging teachers completed a teacher preparation program that built coursework and experiences around cultural relevancy and equity-based teaching. The finding that teacher candidates reported responsiveness as a core, or foundation, disposition supports our argument that context matters and that teacher preparation programs can be the first context that new urban educators experience.

The focus on classroom management in relation to being responsiveness makes sense and is supported by other studies. Classroom management is a common area of concern for new teachers, especially those working in schools that serve low socioeconomic populations (Schafer & Barker, 2018). The goal of responsive classroom management is to shift from a traditional, teacher-centered understanding to an understanding of classroom management as complex, multifaceted, and student centered (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009; McCaslin & Good, 1998; Schwab & Elias, 2014). In order for teachers to implement classroom management techniques that both bring order and at the same time remain responsive to students, teachers must have knowledge of their students' cultures, understanding of the broader social, economic, and political systems in education, and development of a caring classroom (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). A case study by Schafer & Barker (2018) explored four urban teachers' use of responsive classroom management in urban schools and reported that "Although all four teachers had different personalities, they had similar core beliefs and expectations that guided their similar classroom management methods" (p. 34). In this sense, responsiveness as a core disposition may have served as the foundation for approaches to classroom management considerate of the learning context and sensitive to the culture of the school and students. However, we are cautious of this inference. It is also possible that as new teachers their concerns about management were more related to their own needs to maintain control. Further, we agree that discussions of management issues need to avoid stereotypes about differences in social and cultural expectations (Hammerness & Matsko, 2012) and envisioning urban classrooms as chaotic spaces necessitating discipline.

Resilience is another enacted disposition associated with equity. Johnson and Kardos (2008) report that new teachers enter the profession, in part, because they have confidence in their abilities to "make a difference in the lives of their students" (p. 456). Indeed, other researchers describe the drive of teachers to persist in efforts to support student learning as a factor in why teachers remain in challenging educational settings (Patterson, Collins & Abbott, 2004). Among many common characteristics that describe excellent teachers includes teachers who are "resilient in the face of difficult situations" (Nieto, 2005, p. 4). Resiliency and

persistence also are identified as critical teaching dispositions for urban teachers (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004; Williamson, Apedoe, & Thomas, 2012). Williamson, Apedoe, & Thomas (2012) argue that teacher preparation and support can facilitate "deep context-knowledge and context-conscious mindsets" which allows new teachers to learn dispositions and practices that will disrupt the norms that reproduce inequity (p.1191).

Both the notion of responsiveness and the importance of equity are foundational for asset-based pedagogies such as culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), culturally relevant practices, and culturally sustaining practices. A recent study found that a focus on the need for learner protection and authenticity were teachers' dispositions found associated with equity-based pedagogies. "Learner protection (or putting learners first) was characterized by child-centered statements and references to learning that is connected, authentic, relevant and empowering. Authenticity also emphasized relevance, connection and sense of genuine learning opportunities for students" (Truscott & Stenhouse, 2018, pp. 18-19). The significance of this study provides further support for the importance of the learning experience and how teachers' dispositions can be cultivated by them. Ultimately, this supports our conclusions that *targeted* clinical experiences have the potential to nurture those teachers' dispositions associated equity-based practices.

Equally important is that equity-based practices, such as CRP also provide a means for teacher candidates to learn as it occurs. In another study, we found that CRP offered teacher candidates a framework to cultivate dispositions by providing direction for them to develop lessons and teach with the learner in mind within the context of instruction (Truscott & Obiwo, in press). The learner-centered focus fostered dispositions associated with urban learning as teacher candidates used a culturally responsive lens to view schools, communities, students, and their families.

In this study, teacher candidates also believed that dispositions *would need to change in response* to teaching and learning situations, a finding supported by related studies (Buehl & Fives, 2009; Villegas, 2007; White, 2000) and extended by the notion of adaptability of beliefs (see Olafson & Schraw, 2006). Sensitivities to context-specific sociopolitical influences avoids the trap of easily adopting "context-neutral mindsets" (Milner, 2012) and is important for schools and universities who support urban communities. We also acknowledge that teachers who believe dispositions differ depending on the setting do so based on epistemic beliefs that every context is unique thereby considering that "every student, teacher and situation are different from every other, and all are in a constant state of change. Because people are changing constantly, so are situations" (White, 2000, p. 291). The idea that dispositions can be both core and responsive within a given context presents a paradox reported by others (Anderson & Stillman, 2013). We, however, argue that the function of experience, reflection of that experience and the desire for learner-centered action represents enacted core dispositions that cannot be anything but contextually bound.

Finally, envisioning the complexities of the urban classroom coupled with a professional commitment to support all student learners implies a level of sophisticated reflectivity usually found in more experienced teachers, not new ones. The teacher candidates in this study did not describe dispositions, nor the context, simply. Indeed, these newly certified educators demonstrated sensitivities to the contexts in which they saw their futures as teachers. In doing so, personal and formal experiences nurtured dispositions associated with successful urban practice

(e.g., learner focused, responsive classroom practices, equity-based). This study is supported by other research suggesting that new urban teachers embrace a professional ethical and moral obligation to help students find success and view their advocacy for student learning as integral to their daily lives (Barker, 2016; Warren-Grice, 2017).

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