Dispositions for Inclusive Literacy: Fostering an Equitable and Empowering Education for Academically Diverse Learners

Kristina M. Valtierra[1,*] & Lesley N. Siegel[2]

[1]Colorado College, U.S.A.

[2]West Chester University, U.S.A

*Correspondence: Education Department, Colorado College, 14 East Cache la Poudre, Colorado Springs, CO, 80903, USA. Tel: 719-389-7146. E-mail: kvaltierra@coloradocollege.edu

Abstract

This article offers teacher educators' practical methods for, and shares findings from a study of, developing teacher candidate dispositions for inclusive literacy. Based on the extensive teacher disposition literature, the authors discern that dispositions for inclusive literacy include the *belief* that all students have valid ways of being literate; the *value* of inclusive literacy experiences for all students; and an *attitude* that all students should be participants in meaningful literacy experiences. Using a within-site case study approach, qualitative thematic analysis of three assignments used in a literacy teaching methods course suggest that it is possible to shift narrow dispositions to broader and more inclusive conceptualizations that support struggling readers and students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Conclusions suggest that dispositional development toward inclusive literacy can support teacher candidates' implementation of inclusive literacy practices; thus, fostering an equitable and empowering education for academically diverse learners.

Keywords: teacher dispositions, inclusive education, literacy, teacher preparation, struggling readers

1. Introduction

1.1 Dispostions for Inclusive Literacy

There is a lack of empirical studies in the field of teacher preparation that link teacher dispositions to inclusive literacy practices (Powell & Righmyer, 2011). Research illustrates that dispositions can be cultivated and directly relate to teacher performances (Diez & Murrell, 2010; Mansfield & Volet, 2010). However, the literature does not explicitly address the relationships between teacher dispositions and inclusive literacy practices. Given that literacy is necessary to independent living and vital to democratic participation, the authors contend that a teacher's disposition; or beliefs, values and attitudes (Hochstentler, 2014) toward literacy are crucial to ensuring that students with disabilities and struggling readers are included in meaningful literacy experiences in the general education setting.

Taking cues from the extensive teacher disposition literature (Hochstetler, 2014; Murrell, Diez, Feimen-Nemser, & Schussler, 2010; Sharma & Jacobs, 2016; Wilkerson & Lang, 2011), the authors conceptualize that dispositions for inclusive literacy include the *belief* that all students have valid ways of being literate; the *value* of inclusive literacy experiences for all students; and an *attitude* that all students should be participants in meaningful literacy experiences. Without explicit attention to a teacher's disposition for inclusive literacy, we run the risk of compromising struggling readers' access to meaningful instructional experiences alongside their peers, which can ultimately exclude them from reaching their full literacy potential.

This article shares how attention to teacher candidates' dispositions for inclusive literacy can inform their instructional practices in the general education classroom. Concurrently, the authors share established pedagogical practices that support teacher candidate's dispositional development.

1.2 Scholarly Context

Teacher dispositions are considered both a cognitive and an affective dimension of teaching and pertain to the ethical and moral beliefs, attitudes, and values that inform a teacher's performance (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Krebs & Torres, 2011). Scholarship demonstrates that teacher dispositions can be cultivated in teacher preparation (Murrell, Diez, Feimen-Nemser, & Schussler, 2010; Schussler & Knarr, 2013; Thornton, 2013), are contingent on knowledge and skills (Diez & Murrel, 2010), and are predictive of the practices teachers will choose to employ in their classrooms (Thornton, 2013; Wilkerson & Lang, 2011).

Given the lack of empirical studies that link teacher dispositions to inclusive literacy practices, the authors draw parallels from the expansive scholarship on teacher dispositions in the field of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2012; Gay, 2010; Haberman & Post, 1998; Gay & Howard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The delivery of multicultural education is found to be requisite of attitudes and values that challenge conventional beliefs about education. The scholarship indicates that multicultural teachers believe that all students contribute something unique and valuable to the learning environment (Banks & Banks, 2012). Multicultural educators also emphasize the belief that learning is a communal act (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Further, multicultural education scholars call on teachers to scrutinize their socially conditioned beliefs about student diversity and achievement gaps; ultimately challenging teachers to make substantial changes in their perceptions of students from diverse backgrounds (Gay, 2010). Each of these beliefs, values and attitudes are in line with the authors conception of dispostions for inclusive literacy.

Research indicates that there is a direct correlation between teacher dispositions toward diverse students and learning, their instructional practices, and student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Haberman & Post, 1998; Gay & Howard, 2000; Kahn, Lindstrom, & Murray, 2014; Emdin, 2016). Inclusive teacher dispositions are found to support constructivist approaches, teachers' commitment to learning about students, their delivery of appropriate and relevant instruction, and a sense of responsibility and agency for social change and equity (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

1.2.1 Standards for Dispositions

While years of multicultural education scholarship helps substantiate the important role that teacher dispostions play in the enactment of equitable practices, the adoption of new accreditation standards by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) help set a precedent for teacher educators in the United States (U.S.) to pay attention to the moral and ethical development of teachers (2010). NCATE proposes that teacher dispositions are "guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility and social justice" (NCATE, p. 7).

Taking cues from NCATE, in 2013, the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium's (InTASC) released the Model Core Teaching Standards that detailed specific teacher competencies that have since been adopted by many U.S. teacher preparation programs. Recognizing the complexity of teacher practice, InTASC delineates Critical Dispositions, Essential Knowledge, and Performances as interconnected facets of each of their ten standards. According to InTASC, Critical Dispositions designate "the habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie the performances and play a key role in how teachers do act in practice" (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2019, p. 6). Essential Knowledge indicates the declarative and procedural knowledge necessary for effective practice. Finally, Performance represents the observable culmination of essential knowledge and critical dispositions.

Three of the inTASC standards align with the authors' conception of dispositions for inclusive literacy. Standard two, *Learning Differences* expects teachers to believe "that all learners can achieve at high levels" (CCSSO, 2019, p. 11) and are therefore committed to helping each learner reach their full potential, consistent with the conception that teachers with a disposition for inclusive literacy believe that all students have valid ways of being literate. In line with the authors' notion that teachers with a disposition for inclusive literacy value accessible literacy experiences for all students, InTASC standard seven, *Planning for Instruction* emphasizes teachers respect "for learners' diverse strengths and needs" and commitment to using this information to plan effective instruction (CCSSO, p. 16). Finally, standard eight, *Instructional Strategies* includes the critical disposition wherein "the teacher values the variety of ways people communicate and encourages learners to develop and use multiple forms of communication" (CCSSO, p. 17). This disposition relates to the notion that teachers with promising beliefs and values relative to inclusive literacy have a positive attitude toward incorporating academically diverse learners as participants in meaningful literacy experiences.

1.3 Hypothesis

Although the topic of teacher dispositions is prevalent in contemporary practice and scholarship, the literature lacks specific exploration into the relationships between dispositions and inclusive literacy practices. In an effort to fill this grap, in a previous study, the authors found that a teacher's definition of literacy can shed light on their dispositions for literacy (Siegel & Valtierra, 2017). Taking this finding a step further, in this article, the authors hypothesize that a specific focus on the development of inclusive literacy dispositions in teacher preparation could influence a teacher's implementation of inclusive practices that would consequently result in equitable access to rich literacy experiences for students with disabilities and struggling readers.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Dispositions for inclusive literacy entail perceiving literacy as a human right, a form of power, and as socially constructed. The authors call upon two of Scribner's (1984) metaphors for literacy to inform their approach to dispositions for inclusive literacy, including the position that all students should have the right to engage in rich literacy experiences. Scribner first imagines literacy as a means for survival, in its pragmatic form. Keefe and Copeland (2011) and UNESCO (2008) echo that literacy is a human right and necessary for survival in contemporary society. Therefore, all persons must be able to navigate the world around them, read and understand their rights (Stromquist, 2009). As such, the authors contend that teachers who believe that all students have valid ways of being literate are more likely to provide rich literacy experiences to students with disabilities and struggling readers.

Scribner's second metaphor equates literacy to power, as an instrument for social liberation and change, echoing Freire (1970) that literacy has the power to create social change. However, typical conceptions of literacy are limited (NCTE, 2016; Ohio Literacy Resource Center, 2015) and often oppressive to students with disabilities and students who are struggling readers (Rapp, 2014). Limited perceptions of literacy contribute to "socially imposed illiteracy" (Kliewer, 1998, p. 98) in which students are deemed illiterate when society and teachers do not recognize their ways of *being literate*. As such, in order for teachers to empower students with disabilities and struggling readers, they must value inclusive literacy experiences for all students.

While literacy is a universal right, necessary to both daily living and social agency, it is not enough to believe that all persons should be literate; educators must understand literacy as a social and interactive experience. Literacy is a social enterprise that is culturally transmitted, requires interaction, and it occurs in social contexts (Keefe & Copeland, 2011; Kliewer, 1998; Scribner, 1984). Kliewer established the argument that if educators expand *how* they define what it means to be literate, students with disabilities and struggling readers could participate in the construction of meaning alongside their grade-level peers, and therefore realize literate capacities.

As the authors conceptualize literacy from a socially constructed perspective, this study was framed from a "social constructivist stance on inclusion" (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014, p. 22). The authors envision the "presumption of competence" (p. 23) that defines a social constructivist view of inclusion guiding the development of inclusive dispositions for literacy, building in general educators the belief that all students can be literate and the value of all voices in their classrooms.

2. Method

The authors hypothesize that an intentional teacher preparation curriculum focused on the development of teacher candidates' dispositions for literacy will influence how they provide inclusive literacy experiences in the K-12 general education classroom. The following research questions guided this qualitative case study:

1. In what ways do teacher candidates' dispositions for inclusive literacy evolve from the beginning to the end of a literacy teaching methods course?

2. What are the relationships between teacher candidate dispositions for inclusive literacy and their self-reported instructional practices?

2.1 Study Population and Sample

The authors carefully studied one cohort of 5th year Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) candidates (N=13) seeking certification as general education teachers at a small private liberal arts college in the Southwestern United States. This MAT program is an intensive 14-month program beginning in June and ending in July of the following year. Using a within-site instrumental case study approach (Yin, 2014), the authors inquired into the dispositions and evolving practices of the cohort from the beginning to the end of a literacy teaching methods course.

Eight of the teacher candidates identified as White, two as Black, two as multi-ethnic and one as Asian. Five candidates were male with an age range of 21-47 and an average age of 32. Of the studied cohort, six were working toward elementary licensure, 2 K-12 art, 1 K-12 Latin, 2 secondary English, and 2 secondary social studies.

2.2 Course Context and Pedagogical Practices

The literacy methods course is a two-unit class that is the final teaching methods course before entering full-time student teaching. The course combines K-12 teacher candidates and meets every morning for three hours over eight weeks. Students spend their afternoons in their student teaching placement where they practice implementing course material under the guidance of a mentor teacher. Differentiated instruction is emphasized throughout the course, and teacher candidates practice lesson design and delivery through the lens of adapting content, process, and product based upon students learning profiles, readiness, and interests (Tomlinson, 2017).

In order to develop inclusive dispositions for literacy, teacher candidates initially participated in foundational coursework on the topics of neurodiversity and inclusive lesson design. As the course evolved, they participated in a role-play activity, a self-reflection exercise, and a field-based case study project. These three course-embedded activities served as data sources for this study.

2.2.1 Foundational Coursework and Literacy Definitions

On the first day of the course, teacher candidates completed an entrance slip to help the course professor gauge their initial beliefs and attitudes around literacy via the prompts: *What is literacy?* and *What does it mean to be literate?* Informed by the pre-assessment, the beginning of the course focused on neurodiversity and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Center for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2019). Readings, lectures, a documentary, and a UDL lesson planning assignment were the sources of building teacher candidates' foundational knowledge, understandings, and skills.

2.2.2 Role-play Activity

Building off of teacher candidates' established understandings of neurodiversity as it relates to literacy, halfway through the literacy course, the authors facilitated a presentation that comprised of a lecture, role-play activity, and discussion. The presentation began with a lecture that reviewed principles of UDL and introduced teacher candidates to a continuum of communication (Washington Sensory Disabilities, 2016) that shows the various ways a person can be understood: body language and facial expressions, vocalizations, gestures, touch cues, object cues, symbols, sign language, spoken language and written language. The second step in the presentation was the facilitation of a role-play activity that asked the teacher candidates to engage in a heterogeneous book discussion. The evening prior, teacher candidates were assigned the same story to read, but in different formats. Some read the traditional print representation, some read a graphic novel representation, and others read the story using Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS). After participating in a heterogeneous role-play book club discussion that included literal, interpretive and applied comprehension prompts, the teams were asked to reflect upon the experience as described in figure 1 (Siegel & Valtierra, 2017).

Thinking about your book club:

1. Were there certain types of questions that were easy to answer, regardless of the version of the text you read?

2. Which questions were more difficult to translate across textual representations?

3. How did the independent reading experiences compare between those who read the traditional text and those who read the graphic representations?

4. Did participation vary based on text assignment?

5. Are the experiences equally valid?

Figure 1. Dispositions for Inclusive Literacy Role-Play Prompts

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In line with the teacher education scholarship, the use of a pedagogical activity that offered an authentic experience wherein participants were asked to role-play allowed the participants to be active contributors in their learning and dispositional development (Adams & Mabusela 2014; Mogra, 2012).

2.2.3 Self-reflection Exercise

Toward the end of the course, teacher candidates completed written reflections on the same prompts they began the course with: *What is literacy?* and *What does it mean to be literate?* The following day, teacher candidates completed a self-reflection exercise of their beginning and end of course literacy definitions. This process taught them how to use qualitative "values coding" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) to analyze their beginning and end of course literacy definitions from a dispositional lens. The exercise followed the four steps indicated in figure 2.

Step 1: Read your early definitions of literacy and what it means to be literate at least two times. Look for phrases or words that reflect your initial dispositions (*values, attitudes & beliefs*) for literacy.
List the top 2-5 phrases or words.

Step 2: Read your most recent definitions of literacy and what it means to be literate at least two times. Look for phrases or words that reflect your current dispositions (*values, attitudes & beliefs*) for literacy.
List the top 2-5 phrases or words.

Step 3: Compare and contrast the word/phrases. Reflect and write on the question: What was your experience analyzing your disposition for literacy from a *teacher-researcher* lens?

Step 4: Based on your findings, what are the implications for your practice?
    a. Specifically, what actions can you take in your student teaching to enact your current disposition toward literacy?
    b. What actions do you envision taking in your first year of teaching?

Figure 2. Dispositions for Inclusive Literacy Self-Reflection Exercise

2.2.4 Case Study Project

A cornerstone of the literacy teaching methods course is a two-month field-based case study project of three academically diverse learners. Throughout the course, teacher candidates closely followed and collected extensive formative data on one typically developing reader, one struggling reader receiving special education services, and one non-heritage English speaker in their student teaching placement. Along with collecting and analyzing behavioral, interest and literacy data for each learner, this project required candidates to research and implement evidence-based literacy methods that would meet each learner's unique needs as well as strategies that could be adapted to meet the needs of all learners. The project culminated with an executive summary of the teacher candidates' findings and personal reflections.

2.3 Data Sources and Analysis

The authors examined three course-embedded sources of data. First, the authors' analyzed the teacher candidates' beginning and end of course literacy definitions. Next, the authors examined teacher candidates' self-reflections of the same definitions. Finally, the authors studied the case study executive summaries for evidence of how inclusive literacy dispositions did or did not stand out. As the executive summary assignment did not explicitly prompt candidates to address their dispositions, the authors were looking for authentic transfer of their beliefs, values, and attitudes.

2.3.1 Literacy Definitions

Transcriptions of each set of beginning and end of course literacy definitions (N=13) was independently read and coded by two researchers using the same inductive "values coding" approach informed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) that the teacher candidates completed in the self-reflection exercise (2.2.3). In line with the literature on teacher dispositions, values coding is an affective method that applies three associated codes onto qualitative data to analyze a participant's values, beliefs, and attitudes. Beginning and end of course codes were reduced into short phrases or words and analyzed for patterns among each case. Following second-cycle pattern coding, patterns were

quantified to determine the mean score of responses that fell into a continuum of three categories ranging from narrowly ability focused to broadly inclusive. The authors deduced these categories via the values coding process.

2.3.2 Self-reflection Exercise

Teacher candidates' self-reflections of their beginning and end of course literacy definitions were collected and transcribed into a matrix where rows reflected each of the four prompts in figure 2 (2.2.3) and columns reflected each participants' responses as an individual case. Each case was independently read and analyzed by two researchers and then reduced using thematic analysis. Next, cases were merged for cross-case analysis that considered salient themes across all individual cases. Themes were identified, named, and crosschecked to ensure generalizability, credibility, and reliability (Saldana, 2016).

2.3.3 Case Study Project

Case study executive summary papers (2.2.4) were initially holistically coded for evidence of inclusive definitions of literacy, inclusive pedagogical practices, and reference to any of the disposition-oriented course experiences. After coding of individual papers, trends were sorted, merged, reduced, and re-coded using a deductive thematic analysis. Themes were identified, cross-checked between two researchers and then named (Yin, 2014).

3. Results

Findings suggest that the focus on dispositions for inclusive literacy was fruitful for this cohort of teacher candidates. The role-play activity, self-reflection exercise, and the field-based case study project enabled teacher candidates' dispositions for inclusive literacy to evolve from the beginning to the end of the course. Moreover, for all 13 participants, findings suggest a positive relationship between teacher candidates' dispositions and self-reported instructional practices.

3.1 Literacy Definitions

Analysis of teacher candidates beginning and end of course literacy definitions indicated that their dispositions for literacy fit into a continuum of three categories ranging from narrowly ability focused to broadly inclusive:

- Level 1: Words and phrases that were ability focused and exclusive to a narrow conception of literacy concentrated on reading and writing print.

- Level 2: Words and phrases that were more inclusive in that they prioritized meaning-making over the act of decoding or encoding print.

- Level 3: Words and phrases that were most inclusive in that they indicated recognition of multiple ways to represent text and universal access to literacy. These units of analysis prioritize literacy as a broad concept focused on communication and recognized affording appropriate access as crucial (Siegel & Valtierra, 2017).

As shown in Table 1, units of analysis were 47% level one and 42% level two at the beginning of the course. By the end of the course, the words and phrases had shifted to an encouraging 51% level three and 38% level two.

Table 1. MAT Pre and Post Instructional Intervention Dispositions for Inclusive Literacy.

	Beginning	End
Level 1	47%	11%
Level 2	42%	38%
Level 3	1%	51%

The beginning of course definitions commonly began with "being able to" or "the ability to" such as: "Literacy is being able to read and write effectively." End of course definitions were promising as they revealed expanded definitions of literacy and inclusive literacy dispositions. Use of the words "ability" or "able" were notably reduced, and definitions of literacy were expanded. As one teacher candidate put it:

"Literacy is way more than just reading and writing. Literacy is a basic human right, and it is a way to make sense of the world. Literacy is comprehension of some form of text, whether that is physical, written text, spoken, visual, etc. Literacy is also being able to communicate one's ideas in whatever way is most appropriate to them."

End of course definitions suggested that this cohort of teacher candidates viewed literacy as a broad concept focused on communication and recognized the teachers' role in providing equitable access to literacy experiences. The expanded definitions of literacy revealed inclusive attitudes regarding who can partake in a highly literate-dependent society.

3.2 Self-reflection Exercise

Findings from teacher candidate's self-reflection exercise suggested that they each recognized their end of course dispositions for literacy as expanded, inclusive, "holistic," and "more complex." For instance, one teacher candidate reflected, "My earliest definition of literacy seems to be very shallow." Another mused, "I realize that there is a lot more for me to learn because I am currently unable to define literacy in a way that satisfactorily captures the complexity and depth of literacy and what it means to be literate."

Data revealed that this cohort of teacher candidates prioritized comprehension and communication, and they recognized literacy as an act that takes place in various forms and modalities:

> "... I understand that it [literacy] is not primarily reading, but the essence of reading and writing, which encompasses the umbrella of communication. Through this new lens of communication, comprehension, and understanding is the major focus."

> "Now, I have a clearer understanding of the more broadly defined interpretation of literacy in its product outcome of comprehension and expression, as well as the myriad of ways these skills are demonstrated."

This cohort of teacher candidates often related literacy to civic participation and as a life-long process:

> "I have now broadened my view to include, the lifelong process of developing into a literate being and thus, a generative member of society. I have come to the realization that literacy is relative... regardless of culture or background, literacy is a key component to functioning in society. "

> "...literacy encompasses multiple things...everyone is literate in some area. The challenge is to find a way to relate their literacy—that may appear to lack value—to something that does."

Moreover, teacher candidates were consistently able to name methods to incorporate inclusive literacy practices, including the use of formative assessment, ensuring relevant topics, and integrating "multiple modalities" into their instruction. For example, one teacher candidate wrote, "I envision students listening to audiobooks...I want students to become literate beings through multiple modalities". And another teacher candidate reflected, "I'd also like to change the types of products I ask for and the way I deliver my content so that all types of learners have equitable access to learning."

All thirteen teacher candidates seemed to find value in self-analysis of their dispositional shifts relative to inclusive literacy via the reflection exercise discussed in 2.2.3. In turn, they were able to recognize how their beliefs, values, and attitudes for inclusive literacy will shape their future classroom practices. One teacher candidate reflected:

> "I think having a broader conceptualization of literacy is helping me be more open-minded, which in turn will make it easier to differentiate for my students in the future because I will not be pigeon-holed into a narrow definition of literacy that would limit what adjustments I would be willing to make for my students."

3.3 Case Study Project

The culminating executive summaries of the two-month case study project examining three academically diverse learners (2.2.4) revealed dispositional themes that were evident across teacher candidates' papers. These themes are promising given that the assignment didn't prompt teacher candidates to attend to their dispositions for inclusive literacy, suggesting transference of beliefs, values, and attitudes that predict inclusive pedagogical knowledge and skills (Diez & Murrel, 2010).

Foremost, similar to teacher candidate's self-reflection exercise, they articulated a broad conception of literacy as communication that goes beyond reading and writing print. As one teacher candidate put it: "Reading and writing aren't natural, but communication is." Moreover, another reflected, [The case study project and role-play exercise] "led me to deeply speculate what it means to be literate, how one becomes literate, why one wants to be literate..."

Moreover, nine of the thirteen teacher candidates explicitly wrote that they viewed literacy as a universal human right that is "vital to access" and "critical to survival." As one teacher candidate reflected: "...literacy is for everyone ... How to provide literacy for everyone is different".

Teacher candidates articulated an appreciation for learning differences, showcasing a promising attitude toward supporting the literacy of students with disabilities and struggling readers. For example, one teacher candidate wrote, "Instruction and assessment provided to students that do not value varying forms of expression and intelligence has very adverse outcomes on student achievement, self-esteem, and self-efficacy."

Moreover, several of the teacher candidates articulated that it is their professional responsibility to develop and ensure equitable access to literacy for all learners. As one K-12 art teacher candidate put it:

> "It is important to understand the complexities of what each student brings to the classroom. I have realized that even though I am to be an art teacher, I should be critically aware of the literacy levels of each of my students and strategies I should implement in order to aid my students. I should be mindful of how I structure my lessons and curriculum so that I can scaffold strategies and help strengthen weak areas of literacy for all of my students."

Finally, all thirteen teacher candidates were able to articulate ways to differentiate their literacy practices. Teacher candidates wrote about developing an inclusive classroom environment, offering choice and multiple means of text representation, providing a variety of literature, and directly modeling literacy strategies coupled with plenty of opportunities for student practice. Moreover, nearly half of the teacher candidates directly referred to the role-play activity (2.2.2) as a replicable strategy. For instance, one teacher candidate wrote:

> "One form of such appropriate differentiated instruction is exemplified in the various portrayals of the story that was provided to us before a class lecture. The story was told in traditional text, Manga, and a hybrid form of text and pictures with visually descriptive words. Each presentation told the same story and provided equitable access to content."

Each of the teacher candidates was able to articulate inclusive instructional methods they planned to implement such as "...provide students choice in the ways that they demonstrate and express literacy". Another candidate articulated a plan to differentiate literacy experiences in her elementary student teaching placement:

> "Students all come into the classroom in different parts of the playing field. By differentiating, I can tailor instruction to assist them with their development and access to the material. I can provide multiple means of representation, action, expression, and engagement. I can facilitate word consciousness through modeling and skillful use of language, provide access to different genres of books, exposure to different types of writing, reading to them [students] and letting them read."

4. Discussion

Similar to the body of literature on teacher dispositions (Hochstetler, 2014; Murrell, Diez, Feimen-Nemser, & Schussler, 2010; Sharma & Jacobs, 2016; Wilkerson & Lang, 2011), findings from this study suggest that a focus on cultivating dispositions for inclusive literacy expanded teacher candidates' beliefs, values and attitudes about literacy. In line with the authors' conception of dispositions for inclusive literacy, each of the teacher candidates demonstrated beliefs that all students have valid ways of being literate, value inclusive literacy experiences for all students, and embodied the attitude that academically diverse students should and can be participants in meaningful literacy experiences.

Consistent with the authors' conceptual framework (1.4), this cohort of teacher candidates appeared to value literacy as a human right that is necessary for survival (Scribner, 1984). They were able to articulate literacy as a means of communication and name specific methods to ensure that students with disabilities and struggling readers are included in meaningful literacy experiences alongside their peers. In line with Dudley-Marling and Burns (2014) "presumption of competence" (p. 23), this cohort of teacher candidates was able to envision literacy, and thus classroom literacy experiences, as much broader than reading and writing print. They were able to plan for classroom literacy experiences that were inclusive of all voices, suggesting their presumption that all students are capable—including students with disabilities and struggling readers.

While these findings are promising, the teacher candidates only marginally considered literacy as a form of social liberation and change (Freire, 1970; Scribner, 1984). This finding makes sense, given that the theory and practice of critical literacy (Giroux, 2011) were not explicitly addressed in the literacy teaching methods course. However, without exposing teacher candidates to critical literacy, including examples involving persons with disabilities, educators run the risk of perpetuating ableism, or deficit orientations towards individuals with disabilities. In this vein, while findings suggest that teacher candidates in this study ended the course with promising dispositions for

inclusive literacy, the authors plan to broaden their methods by including critical literacy in future iterations of this work. This important next step will better prepare teacher candidates to ensure students with disabilities and struggling readers are not only included in rich literacy experiences but are also empowered to contribute to social progress.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

The purpose of this study was to understand how one cohort of teacher candidates' dispositions for inclusive literacy evolved over a two-month literacy teaching methods course. The authors also inquired into the relationships between teacher candidate dispositions for inclusive literacy and their self-reported instructional practices. Findings suggest that it is possible to shift narrow, ability-orientated dispositions toward literacy to more expansive and inclusive conceptualizations. Findings imply that dispositional shifts correspond to self-reported instructional practices. Moreover, the role-play activity, self-reflection exercise, and case study project offer other teacher educators' tangible methods to facilitate their candidates' dispositions for inclusive literacy.

While the findings suggest that a focus on dispositions for inclusive literacy is valuable, this study's findings must be viewed judiciously. First, this was a case study of a small cohort in a single teacher preparation program. Future research should include replication of this study in varied models of teacher preparation to help identify which aspects of the authors' approach to developing dispositions for inclusive literacy are transferable across contexts. Second, teacher candidates' instructional practices were self-reported, and for the most part, focused on how they *planned* to approach literacy in their future classrooms. While this is appropriate at this stage in their teacher preparation, a more nuanced longitudinal study following teachers into their careers would better capture if participant dispositions for inclusive literacy influenced their instructional practices over time and across professional settings.

Despite limitations, this study's findings add to the teacher disposition scholarship as it relates to inclusive literacy. In order for students with disabilities and struggling readers to be included in meaningful literacy experiences, teachers must embody dispositions that demonstrate a belief in the universal capacity to learn (Sharma & Jacobs, 2016) and a commitment to learning the skills necessary to implement inclusive literacy practices. A focus on teacher dispositions for inclusive literacy in teacher preparation offers promise as educators seek to support academically diverse students for the sake of ensuring an equitable and empowering education to all learners.

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