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# Connective Capacity: The Importance and Influence of Dispositions in Special Education Teacher Education

Scot McGregor Rademaker  
*University of South Florida, [srademaker@mail.usf.edu](mailto:srademaker@mail.usf.edu)*

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Connective Capacity: The Importance and Influence of Dispositions in  
Special Education Teacher Education

by

Scot McGregor Rademaker

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in  
Special Education  
Department of Special Education  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Ann Cranston-Gingras, Ph.D.  
David Allsopp, Ph.D.  
Jeannie Kleinhammer-Tramill, Ph.D.  
Liliana Rodriguez-Campos, Ph.D.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Dispositions are a difficult construct to define and assess within teacher education. The problem lies in the relative ambiguity of the term and the subjective manner in which it is applied to the assessment of the performance of preprofessional teachers. Additionally, because certain accreditation institutes including the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) require that dispositions be measured as part of a teacher's professional development, the issues of how dispositions are constructed and gauged becomes an essential part of the foundation related to understanding the effectiveness of teacher education programs. The fact that much of the research examining teacher dispositions does not include special education, adds to the imperative to study this concept. In order to examine professionals' conceptualization of dispositions related to the preparation of preprofessional special education teachers, Stake's (1999) case study method was utilized in this study. This method allowed for the use of interviews and the analysis of archival documents to better understand the phenomenon of special education teacher dispositions. Preprofessional teachers in their second semester of their program and those in their final internship, as well as recent graduates (all associated with the same program) were interviewed in order to determine what constituted their definitions and perceived influences of their dispositions within a special education teacher preparation program. The intent of the study was to better inform future practices in teacher education programs in special education through a more contextualized understanding of dispositions.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Dispositions.* The professional virtues, qualities, and habits of mind and behavior held and developed by teachers on the basis of their knowledge, understanding, and commitments to students, families, their colleagues, and communities. Such dispositions-of character, intellect, and care-will be manifest in practice, will require sophisticated judgment in application, and will underpin teachers' fundamental commitments to education in a democratic society, such as the responsibility to set high standards for all children, harbor profound concern for each individual child, and strive for a classroom and school environment of high intellectual and moral quality (Sockett, 2006, p. 23).

The above definition proposed by Sockett (2006) attempted to outline how teachers' dispositions influence their practice. Other researchers support the definition. Tishman, Jay and Perkins (2004) noted that dispositions are "ongoing tendencies that guide intellectual behavior" (p. 4). The connection between a consistent pattern of actions and one's thoughts is an important aspect of becoming a thoughtful practitioner (Splitter, 2010). Ritchhart (2002) further delineated dispositions as "characteristics that animate, motivate, and direct our abilities towards good and productive thinking and are recognized in the patterns of our frequently established voluntary behavior" (p. 62). Similar to Sockett's (2006) promotion of a teacher's commitment to a democratic society,

what constitutes a teacher's disposition is more than simply a pattern of reactions, but instead an intricate and influential component of his or her personality.

Within the context of professional teacher practices, the view of dispositions includes the thought that they are "an attributed characteristic of a teacher, one that summarizes the trend of a teacher's actions in particular contexts" (Raths, 2001, p. 6). This conceptualization is related to Sockett's (2006) view that "the professional virtues, qualities, and habits of mind and behavior are held and developed by teachers" (p. 23). Common among these definitions is the idea that certain aspects of the individual's personality create a pattern of behaviors that are exhibited within a specific context. These behaviors ultimately impact the "others" in those individuals' environment with varying results. The importance in understanding how the interaction between the "self" and the environment takes place has to do with the future impact that a teacher will have on his or her students.

### **Dispositions and Teacher Education**

There are three essential components that are examined within a teacher education program in order to determine if individuals will graduate from an accredited program with a degree in education, including 1) knowledge, 2) skills (or competencies), and 3) dispositions (Splitter, 2010). Historically, much emphasis was placed on the first two standards, however, the examination of the third, dispositions, has been replete with ambiguity and uncertainty with respect to its assessment and utility in teacher education (Sockett, 2006). This is due to the complex structure and varying definitions of what constitutes an individual's disposition. Several essential questions regarding dispositions in teacher education programs include: What defines one's character? How do beliefs,

attitudes, desires, and values shape one's behavior? And finally, how are these factors integrated in the transformation of teachers by faculty in teacher education programs? (Villegas, 2007). These essential questions are ones that may not be answerable, but need clarification if informed decisions about a teacher's capacities are to be made by faculty educating teachers.

The confounding questions about dispositions are related to the debate as to what constitutes one's morals and how this sense of morality affects one's professional practice. A disposition can also be related to one's persona in terms of his or her character, intellect, and sense of care (Sockett, 2006). The connection between an individual's morals and his or her persona is vital to understanding how personal attributes influence one's practice. The analysis of dispositions is especially pertinent to teacher education because teachers will be interacting with children and young adults and influencing their lives in (hopefully) a profound manner. Because teachers are not interacting with their students in a vacuum, it is inevitable that their "inner lives" will influence their students' thoughts and behaviors (Splitter, 2010). Therefore, dispositions become a major factor in how a teacher teaches and builds his or her levels of open-mindedness, kindness, and intellectual persistence, all of which are vital to becoming a successful teacher (Sockett, 2006).

Teachers' dispositions will also affect the way they create connections between meaningful work and meaningful living (Norton, 1991). This moral transformation develops slowly, but a teacher who is able to understand how his or her morals develop will be able to generalize this knowledge and promote it through ethical practices. As Sockett (2006) noted, "The development of dispositions of character, intellect, and caring

are *the core of professional teaching*, each demanding knowledge and self-knowledge” (italics in original, p. 21). Therefore, a teacher’s introspection on their own dispositions becomes vital to their professional development. Deeper understandings of one’s disposition is, in addition to an integral understanding of how these dispositions affect the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to effectively and efficiently teach students, essential to creating a valid and reliable assessment of a teacher’s abilities within a teacher education program.

As previously stated, dispositions are a difficult construct to define and there are many other factors, including historical, emotional, and temperamental influences that could blur how an individual behaves in a particular situation. Additionally, because some of the concepts presented above, such as habits of mind, intellect, and care are complex, how dispositions influence these constructs is yet to be determined by researchers (Splitter, 2010). Examining dispositions from the perspective of teachers in their teacher education programs, as well as those recently graduated from the same program, could assist in furthering researchers’ knowledge of the topic in a more introspective fashion. In the following sections, a delineation of how dispositions fit into special education teacher education programs, the need to examine the topic, and the proposed analysis was outlined below.

### **Preprofessional Teachers’ Dispositions in Special Education**

Special education is a multifaceted and challenging profession and the preparation of teachers through university programs has become an influential aspect of how teachers ultimately impact their field (Renzaglia, Hutchins, & Lee, 1997). Although accreditation organizations such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education

(NCATE) have varying definitions about what dispositions consist of, a more general definition would include a person's tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed toward a broad goal (Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007). The result of this pattern of interactions between the self and the environment is the development of attitudes, values, and beliefs as well as a way to make meaning of the world (Eberly, Rand, & O'Connor, 2007).

This meaning-making process is a vital part of becoming a teacher of students with disabilities. This is because reflective pedagogical practices allow the teacher to develop his or her practice in accordance with a deeper understanding of how his or her personality interacts with their profession (Jay & Johnson, 2002). Therefore, the need to understand how preprofessional teachers in special education, entering a program of study with previously established dispositions, have certain aspects of their "self" altered by their involvement in the teacher education program becomes a major aspect of those teachers' professional development.

Understanding teacher dispositions is a difficult task and its relationship to how programs in special education are assessed for accreditation has become a topic of debate (Villegas, 2007; Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011). This is because multiple definitions of what constitutes dispositions are promoted through various agencies including researchers in higher education and the NCATE. Furthermore, because the terms found in these definitions are often abstract and difficult to delineate, there is a need to further investigate what comprises both positive and negative teacher dispositions as they relate to the successful completion of a teacher education program and ultimately the teachers'

professional outcomes. A closer examination of these definitions and their subsequent connotations related to a teacher's practice are demarcated in chapter two.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Schussler (2006) suggested, "...dispositions are undeniably a murky concept, yet murky concepts abound in the fields of education..." (p. 253). Colleges of education have historically overlooked the impact of dispositions in their conceptualization of what represents a confident and effective teacher candidate (Grant & Gillette, 2006). The focus has often been on the academic credentials of potential teacher candidates. Although grades are important, the profession of teaching requires a certain type of person that is able to work with other individuals to create positive learning outcomes. The quality of a teacher directly impacts how students receive their education and is a major determinant of the success of students (NCATE, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000). Therefore, shaping dispositions becomes an essential component of teacher education, one just as critical as disseminating pedagogical knowledge (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011).

The literature related to teacher dispositions in the field of education reveals how teacher educators define dispositions and use these definitions to assess teacher candidates' propensity to become effective teachers. These examinations have included the various influences of students' past beliefs and attitudes as they collide with a preparation process involving the participation in various courses, placement in multiple practicum settings, and interactions with the various professionals in their special education program (Conderman, Morin, & Stephens, 2005; Villegas, 2007; Murray, 2012). Additionally, professionals at the university involved in special education teacher



preparation have competing conceptualizations of what dispositions are, how they are assessed, and what they mean in terms of outcomes for students after they leave the university. This divergence can confound the operational definition of the dispositions to be assessed and lead to the term being misconstrued and thus ineffectively analyzed (Bauer, Johnson, & Sapona, 2004).

## **Rationale for the Study**

### **Moral and Historical Imperative**

Teaching is a profession directly related to the moral virtues of how we as a society educate our children. Moreover, teachers transfer certain moral values to their students and become individuals who should and must be trusted to establish a meaningful learning environment (Kohlberg, 1981). The crux of one's moral imperative as it interacts with intellectual virtues comes together when a teacher creates a relationship with his or her students. Teachers are more than just the disseminators of information to empty vessels. They are (or at least should be) the beacons of hope for a better life and a better way of understanding for so many students. An understanding of these moral and intellectual virtues is especially pertinent to special education because, as often is the case, students with disabilities are othered and not treated equitably (Jameson & Huefner, 2006).

A more contextualized framework for examining dispositions in teacher education (and ultimately teacher education in special education) can be derived from Dewey's (1944) definition of dispositions as "habits that render our action [conduct] intelligent" (p. 344). Dewey went on to delineate how certain traits such as empathy, trustworthiness, and honesty (amongst others) are directly connected to a teacher's dispositions and

should be the salient characteristics of his or her personality. Furthermore, as Tishman et al. (1992) noted, the importance of a dispositional approach is centered upon “the strong claim that being a good thinker means having the right thinking dispositions” (p.2). These conceptualizations connect to teacher education in a way that allows for the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills to be just as important as the fostering of certain aspects of one’s dispositions.

For this examination of teacher dispositions in special education, Dewey’s (1944) conceptualizations were taken into consideration related to how the interaction between one’s actions and one’s disposition interact to create an effective teacher. Dewey noted that:

The most important problem of moral education in the schools concerns the relationship of knowledge and conduct. For unless the learning which accrues in the regular course of study affects character, it is futile to conceive the moral end as the unifying and culminating end of education (p. 360).

Essentially, Dewey delineated the relationship between what someone knows and how that affects that individual’s behavior. The importance of this connection has to do with what we as a society consider valuable and worthy of our time and efforts. Education should be chief amongst those virtues, but as is often the case, the discussion about how we educate our children falls to the wayside and gets buried amongst political and social conflicts. In my opinion, this is because of the complexities and intricacies that surround the field of education. In order to more fully understand how these complex issues are displayed and understood, research that goes to the source of the understanding can add

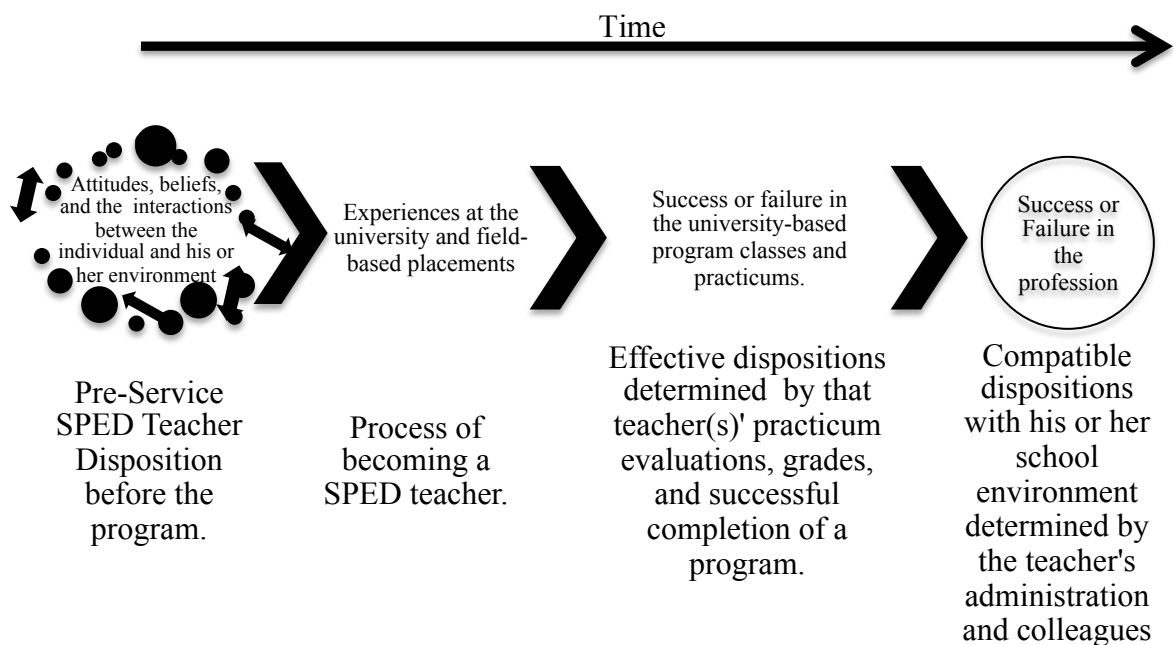
to the exchange between governing bodies and those that are affected by the mandates related to the assessment of teachers.

### **The Current Project**

In order to understand teacher dispositions and their subsequent effect on the future students in those teachers' classrooms, there was a need to examine the importance of the construct as it relates to teacher education programs in special education. The influences of the preprofessional teacher's past, his or her attitudes and beliefs, as well as the prior successes and failures based on the preprofessional teacher's pattern of behaviors all influence his or her disposition coming into a teacher education program (Johnson, 2008). The teacher then undergoes a period of professional development in which these previous constructs are tested and reflected upon in a way that creates a distinctive change. This results (theoretically) in a newly formed set of dispositions that in some way influences the preprofessional teacher's performance in the university-based program as well as how he or she is perceived by professionals in his or her final internship setting (LePage, Nielsen, & Fearn, 2008; Thornton, 2006). Figure 1 is a visual representation of these theories of interacting conceptualizations over the course of the teacher's time at his or her university-based teacher education program in special education and the possible outcomes.

The left side of the figure represents the pre-existing dispositions. Moving from left to right (with the arrow representing the movement across time), the teacher experiences various influences of the university-based program and encounters either success or failure, ultimately leading to that individual's success or failure in the field as determined by the professionals in those settings. Understanding this process can shed

light on what it means to assess and understand dispositions from the perspectives of preprofessional teachers (at various stages of their program) and teachers who have recently graduated from a teacher education program. This allowed for a more concrete derivation of what constitutes both preprofessional and practicing teachers' dispositions in the area of special education and how the construct is related to their successes or setbacks. The importance of this topic goes beyond simply preparing students to become teachers.



*Figure 1.* A visual representation of the process behind the examinations within this research project (adapted from LePage, Nielsen, & Fearn, 2008; Thornton, 2006).

The individuals who work and advocate for individuals with disabilities must have a particular set of skills, but must also be able to know how to handle adversity, be courageous in the face of ignorance, and be willing to sacrifice their time outside of operating hours for the betterment of their students (Sockett, 2006). These are just a few

of the attributes that are related to dispositions and if teacher education programs in special education want to address these topics in a meaningful and constructive fashion, a deeper investigation of what constitutes a dispositions to inform its subsequent assessment is needed. This is important to the field of special education in particular because of the historical wrongs exacted on individuals with disabilities, society's view of their meaningful contributions, and the moral imperative related to the inclusion movement for all students (Thornton, 2006). All of these factors are unique to special education and must be the focus of the teachers if their students are to receive fair treatment in the school system.

Much of the research on teacher dispositions was focused on other areas of education (e.g. elementary, secondary, etc.) (Goe & Coggshall, 2007; Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011). Although those areas of education are important, there is still the need to examine special education teacher preparation, as there are many unique aspects of teaching in special education that are derived from those in the general education setting (Villegas, 2007). This includes not just the special education teachers themselves or the population of students they are working with, but the curricular and assessment demands as well as the peripheral aspects of continued service delivery for students labeled with a disability. Ignoring an entire population of teachers within a specific discipline does not help to inform a collaborative model for practices in teacher education in higher education.

In particular, this neglect could be detrimental to programs that promote inclusive and co-teach practices. This is because if special and general educators are to work together effectively, they need to have a common understanding of the program that each

teacher came from and of the aims of education (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011). This study might have shifted the emphasis to a unique population and inform practices in teacher education preparation in special education. The following sections will outline a theoretical framework and delineate the research questions within this project.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The enculturation model for teaching consists of three components related to the transference of knowledge through a cultural context. These include, “cultural exemplars, cultural interactions, and direct instruction in cultural knowledge and activities” (Tishman, Jay, & Perkins, 1992, p.2). Within a teacher education program, the faculty disseminates information on the “teaching culture” through case studies, practicum settings, and interactive courses. The enculturation model also allows for an understanding of not just how people act and react within certain situations, but instead how they are disposed to think and then act and how transformations in dispositions occur. Therefore, this theoretical framework was applied to this project for a deeper understanding of faculty and preprofessional teacher interactions.

Since many teacher education programs in higher education seek to transform their students’ belief structure in a positive fashion, the enculturation model becomes an appropriate lens from which to examine teacher dispositions in special education teacher education. The model’s focus is related to how a teacher education program functions in terms of teaching students to become practitioners and enter a field that has its own unique culture (Tishman, Jay, & Perkins, 1992). This study addressed the following aspects of how preprofessional and recently graduated teachers defined and thought about

dispositions through the use of interviews (see the Method section for a more detailed description of the process surrounding these investigative practices).

In addition to the conceptualizations promoted by Tishman, Jay, and Perkins (1992), Nolan (2012), in an examination of teacher dispositions in mathematics education, utilized a socially constructed theory to further delineate the connections between the social world and the exhibition of dispositions. Bourdieu's (1977) social field theory provides a solid framework for this conceptualization, as it relates to confirming the complexities of teacher education and focuses on the dynamic interplay between structure and agency within a social practice. Through positioned critical reflexivity, Bourdieu (1977) postulated "a reflexivity which is not separated from the everyday, but is intrinsically linked to the (unconscious) categories of habit which shape action" (in Nolan, 2012, p. 195). This concept assisted in the understanding about how attitudes and beliefs are formed and change over time.

Bourdieu's (1977) theory is relevant to understanding dispositions in teacher education because it allows for teachers to be understood at the nexus of their own physical and mental state within the socially appropriated practice of teaching students with exceptionalities. The author refers to "the field" as the place where decisions interact with the networks and structures of a person's life, which ultimately translate into discrete behaviors. These decisions shape that individual and create a set of dispositions, which are comprised of attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and practices all in the context of one's past (Nolan, 2012). The questions in the interviews with the preprofessional and practicing teachers will be related to how the participants perceive the influence and importance of their dispositions as they apply to their future or current profession.

Dispositions manifest themselves in a person's thoughts, actions, use of language, and how one interprets experiences of their own fluctuating interactions with their environment (Sockett, 2006). The interactions between the individual and the "field" conflict with certain power relations, which are dependent upon that individual's cultural capital or their place within the hierarchy of the field (Nolan, 2012). Bourdieu's (1977) theory lends itself to the current examination of teacher dispositions in special education because it allows for a complex interplay between the teachers' status in a program and their continuing alterations of their disposition as a result of interacting within either a practicum or active teaching setting.

The rationale for combining the enculturation model (Tishman, Jay, & Perkins, 1992) and Bourdieu's (1977) social field theory is that they provide a more comprehensive examination of the preprofessional teachers' perspectives. In this study, the hope was that teachers' perspectives were understood from their perception of their involvement in the program and how that might transfer to their future practice in the field. Because these two theories incorporated aspects of gradually accepting or integrating the influences of the teacher education program as well as the effects of their interactions in the field, they are deemed appropriate for the scope of this study. In order to incorporate the framework within the study, the preprofessional and recently graduated teachers' interpretation of dispositions compared with definitions of accreditation institutions were examined. These various perspectives are important to understand when conducting a case study, as the information gathered through such an examination should take into account multiple perspectives related to the focus of the case (Stake, 1999).



## **Research Questions**

The overall purpose of this study was to determine how preprofessional teachers and recently graduated teachers associated with a special education teacher preparation program perceived the effects of their dispositions on their experiences in the program. This information could potentially inform the practices of the teacher education program in special education. Due to the fact that NCATE (2006) requires an accredited program to assess dispositions and because the research on the subject focuses on programs mainly outside of special education (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011; Villegas, 2007), there was a need to examine the topic from both a structural and contextual standpoint. The research questions for this study were used to focus on an examination of how preprofessional teachers in their second semester and those in their final internship perceived the emphasis and influence of dispositions within their program. Additionally, recently graduated teachers associated with the same program were interviewed in order to determine their perceptions on the meaning of dispositions and how they related to their practice. The intents and purposes of this study were not to define dispositions, but instead to examine them more closely in order to inform teacher educators in special education with respect to how they could potentially enhance their program.

1. How do preprofessional teachers in their final internship, enrolled in an NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program, perceive the ways their dispositions have changed, or not, throughout their participation in the program?
  - a. What perceived effects have their dispositions and subsequent transformations of their dispositions had on their successes and/or setbacks within the program?

2. How do preprofessional teachers in their first year (second semester) of their program (at the same NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program as above) perceive the ways in which their dispositions influence their involvement in the program through their program and their future practice?
3. How do first-year teachers (recently graduated from the same NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program as above) perceive the ways in which their dispositions have changed across their program and now into their first year of teaching?
  - a. How did their dispositions contribute to their successes and/or setbacks in their program?
  - b. How does their understanding of their dispositions influence their current practice?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Teacher preparation* – a university-based, traditional 4-year undergraduate teacher education program (Caruana, 2011).

*Dispositions* –Tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs (Villegas, 2007, p. 373).

*NCATE*- NCATE is the education profession’s mechanism to help establish high quality teacher preparation (<http://ncate.org/pulic/aboutNCATE.asp>).

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of the interviews and document analysis contained within this case study could hopefully allow practitioners to better understand how their conceptualizations of dispositions shape the way preprofessional teachers in special

education are influenced and assessed. This will add to the literature base and increase the understanding of a relatively ambiguous and multi-dimensional concept.

Additionally, the information gathered could be utilized to further develop a professional operationalization of what constitutes dispositions and inform ways to communicate these propagations to the school sites where teachers complete their final internship requirements. This understanding is important to the success of the pre-service teachers in the field upon graduation, as well as his or her students (Carr & Claxton, 2002).

Additionally, there has been much debate on not just what dispositions are, but how they are assessed and because there are many different systems and instruments from which information is derived, it is important to delineate the process within a specific context, such as special education (Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009).

### **Limitations**

There were a number of limitations in the study and these issues need to be addressed in a way that allows for future examinations of this particular topic to be improved. Again, dispositions are difficult to define within the field of education and this study does not seek an absolver of this issue with such a small sample size. Case study research is only an instance of a situation and, operationally, does not seek to make generalizable statements about a phenomenon (Stake, 1999). Additionally, because of the requirements for participation, the sample included the subjective opinion of certain instructors and professionals in the field that have an established professional relationship. Therefore, confirmation of their opinions will be difficult to obtain through this study. However, these limitations are inherent to any form of qualitative research and the hope is that the information gathered will help to further explain a social

phenomenon and assist university-based programs with their understanding and assessment of teacher dispositions in special education.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the competing definitions of dispositions as they relate to teacher education in special education. In order to better understand how the concepts of what comprises positive and negative dispositions, an analysis of the competing definitions will be examined, along with how accreditation institutions and researchers operationally describe teacher dispositions. Additionally, how these definitions and conceptualizations inform teacher education practices in both general education and special education settings will be examined in order to place the topic within a specific context. The last section of the literature review will examine the ways in which researchers in the field of teacher education in special education analyze these constructs and how the assessments of preprofessional teachers' dispositions inform college and departmental practices. The information as it is delineated will inform the rationale for the study and the methods employed for understanding the concept of dispositions.

### **Definition of Dispositions**

#### **Accreditation Institutions' Definition**

The agencies that govern and assess programs for teacher education have debated about what comprises dispositions for the purposes of assessing teachers (Villegas, 2007). In order to operationalize and integrate the concept of dispositions into the

construction of teacher education, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment Support Consortium (INTASC), a group of state and professional educational organizations, determined that the assessment of teachers should include knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Freeman, 2003). In the 1990s INTASC noted that a positive disposition in relation to a teacher's knowledge is determined by whether or not "The teacher has enthusiasm for the discipline(s) s/he teaches and sees connections to everyday life" (INTASC, 1992, p.14). Thereafter, teachers' dispositions were required to be examined as part of their evaluation in their respective teacher education programs.

NCATE took the definition of dispositions to mean something more than just enthusiasm for the profession in their publication of *Standards 2000*, which called for a formal assessment in teacher education programs of dispositions as part of a candidate's completion of a program in education. More recently, in 2006, NCATE proposed the definition of a disposition to be:

Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive behaviors support student learning and development.

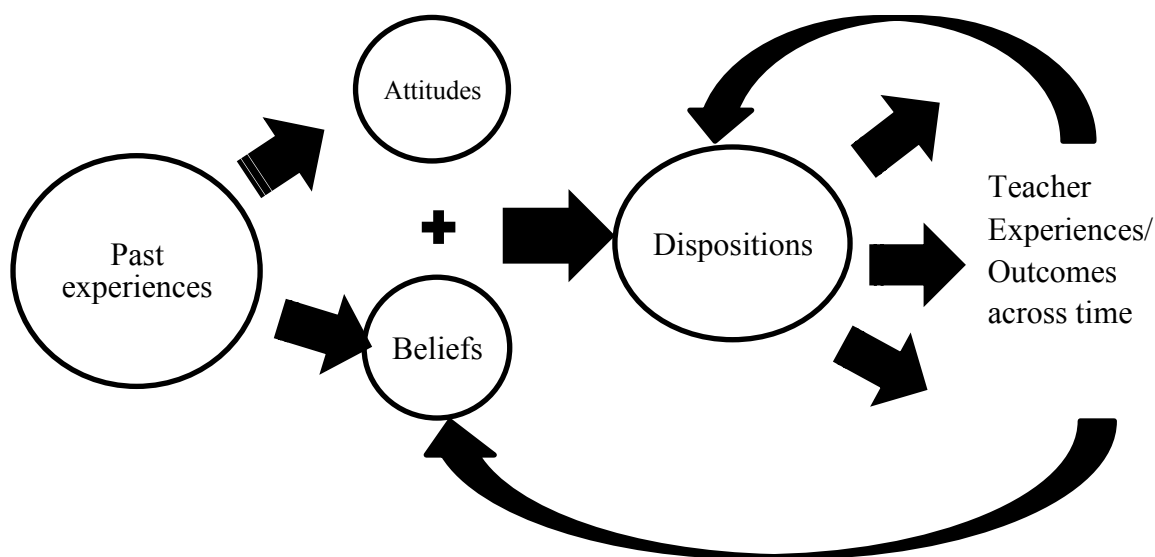
NCATE expects institutions to assess professional dispositions based on observable behaviors in educational settings. (NCATE, 2006, para. 13-14)

This relatively broad definition includes not just the values and beliefs of the teacher as demonstrated by the teacher's actions, but their interactions with entities he or she would encounter at his or her school. NCATE (2006) requested schools of education to complete an assessment of dispositions and base them on tangible outcomes, which are not discretely defined. Terms such as "positive behavior" are not clearly defined and this

adds to the ambiguity related to assessments (Villegas, 2007). Along with the INTASC (1992) proposition that the teachers make the connection of these dispositions with their everyday life, the constructs that inform the assessment of dispositions become even broader. Therefore, a more in-depth understanding of not just what dispositions is, but how they are exhibited in a teacher's practice becomes an important aspect in the understanding of facilitating a teacher education program.

### **Researchers' Definitions**

Researchers in the field of higher education have also attempted to determine what dispositions consist of in relation to teacher education. The complexity in defining the term stems from the competing definitions within the field, as well as the relatively ambiguous components of the term and its fluctuating outcomes (Jung & Rhodes, 2008). Renzaglia, Hutchins, and Lee (1997) noted that dispositions are the result of an individual's past experiential influences combined with his or her shifting attitudes and beliefs. These beliefs and attitudes are manifested in that individual's behavior and the pattern of these interactions forms that person's dispositions. The authors cited the fact that these constructs vary based on the continued interfacing with one's environment. Therefore, these concepts are not rigid, but fluid, which creates a sense of uncertainty because they are dependent on the outcomes of given situations (Renzaglia, Hutchins, & Lee, 1997). Figure 2 represents a working model of dispositions for the intents and purposes of this examination as they relate to beliefs, attitudes, and interactions with one's environment.



*Figure 2.* A visual representation of how dispositions are constructed through an interaction between previous experiences and their effect on one’s attitudes and beliefs, with disposition as an outcome, which shapes the formation of attitudes and beliefs in a reciprocal nature (adapted from Renzaglia, Hutchins, & Lee, 1997).

Conceptually, dispositions can be addressed through three different categories. These include teacher behaviors (e.g. punctuality, smiles, neatness, etc.), teacher characteristics (e.g. tolerance of differences, open-mindedness, patience, etc.), and teacher perceptions (e.g. self-concept, seeing students as able, etc.) (Wasicsko, Callahan, & Wirtz, 2004). Additionally, the interaction between these elements results in a particular outcome within the teacher’s setting, which either reinforces or inhibits how the dispositions will manifest themselves in the future. Therefore, the difficulty in determining the origin of certain dispositions lies in ascertaining if these aspects of the teachers’ personalities are consistent over time, and whether or not these traits can be objectified for assessment.



In a more contextualized examination of dispositions, Villegas (2007) defined the term within a social justice framework within teacher education and used the phrase to mean, “tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs” (p. 373). The author further defined a tendency as a measurable display of consistent behaviors, which could be an indicator of future actions. Missing from this definition is the incorporation of the teacher’s attitudes as they relate to one’s dispositions. Although Villegas (2007) does not directly address this issue, the absence of such a construct could indicate that some researchers define attitudes as temporary tendencies versus consistent patterns of behavior. Again, these competing conceptualizations add to the vagueness of the term.

Although Villegas’s (2007) definition is similar to that of the previous research and incorporates aspects of ITASC’s (1992) and NCATE’s (2006) definitions, there is still the quandary of being able to predict with any certainty whether or not these dispositions are stable. The task of shaping these dispositions and determining their relative predictability falls on the faculty of the institutes of higher education preparing teachers for their future professions. Therefore, the influence of the teacher education program on the preprofessional teacher becomes an essential component of creating dispositions in a teacher that is amenable and one that will hold stable over time.

Additionally, Villegas (2007) noted that teacher education programs should focus not just on an individual’s attributes, but also on teachers’ actions as an outcome of his or her disposition. This is due to the fact that actions can be measured, while attributes involve a complex measuring component that might not be feasible for every teacher education program to quantify. Therefore, because beliefs change, the difficulty lies in

determining their impact on a teacher's disposition, which also changes according to the given outcome of particular situations. The author noted that this becomes especially important to understand when examining how teachers interact with students from marginalized populations, as there is often a conflict between what the teacher believes is true of certain situations and populations and what is actually occurring in the field (Villegas, 2007).

The connection between the accreditation institutions' definition and that of the researchers allows for a more contextualized understanding of how certain aspects of a preprofessional teacher's disposition are being examined. However, there is still a lack of congruency in terms of how the perceptions of preprofessional teachers are incorporated into the standards of accreditation institutions (Baldwin, 2010). Researchers in the field cite the perceptions of preprofessional teachers on dispositions as one of the more important aspects of measuring and assessing the construct (Wasicsko, 2000; Yero 2002; Usher et al., 2003). Therefore, examining how the preprofessional teachers themselves define dispositions could assist faculty in teacher education programs with how to conceptualize their assessment and determine what should be measured.

### **Positive and Negative Descriptions of Dispositions from the Research**

#### **Positive Dispositions**

In order to more closely define dispositions within the context of teacher education in special education, the literature related to what comprises positive and negative dispositions must also be delineated. As stated above, dispositions are relatively ambiguous because of the complex constructs from which they are comprised (Villegas, 2007; Renzaglia, Hutchins, & Lee, 1997). However, a number of empirical examinations

have noted that there are distinct attributes that are considered to be either positive or negative in terms of how the preprofessional teachers' dispositions potentially affect their future profession.

From a historical perspective, Dewey (1933) contended that content knowledge and pedagogical expertise are not enough if a teacher does not have the attitudes and beliefs required to become an effective educator. Dewey (1933) cited three characteristics essential to making the connection between knowledge of teaching practices and didactic skills: open-mindedness (a lack of prejudice), wholeheartedness (willingness to examine oneself and admit faults), and responsibility (including intellectual responsibility, acquiring new knowledge, and accountability for engaging students). Therefore, a teacher should not simply know how to teach, but he or she must be personally invested in the profession and the success of his or her students. These constructs are manifested in the teacher's dispositions and assist with understanding the inner workings of what it means to care about a child's education within a profession.

Dispositions are also closely related to an individual's beliefs about his or her professional efficacy (Paneque & Barbetta, 2010). The concept of teacher efficacy is defined as the teacher's belief in his or her "capability to organize and execute course of action to successfully accomplish specific instructional tasks or, more simply his or her capacity to affect student performance" (Bandura, 1995, p. 45). A number of studies have examined the effect of self-advocacy as a possible influence on the shaping of positive teacher dispositions (Paneque & Barbetta, 2006; Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2011; Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

Efficacy becomes an important aspect related to understanding dispositions because of the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom. If teachers believe in their abilities to teach, then this confidence allows the teachers to be open to new ideas related to how their practice can be enhanced, which ultimately has a positive influence (increased learning gains, student satisfaction, etc.) on their students (Grant & Stronge, 2011). The interaction between the teacher's belief about his or her self and confidence becomes pertinent when working with students in the special education population. This is because teaching in this area requires an understanding of multiple modalities of learning and the ability to differentiate lesson plans to accommodate diverse students' needs (Goe & Coggshall, 2007).

Although the literature is not replete with examples of studies related to positive dispositions in teacher preparation programs in special education, several researchers have focused on populations at-risk for a disability and the effect of teachers' interactions with these students as it relates to their dispositional traits (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006; Bishop, Brownell, Klingner, Leko, & Galman, 2010; Paneque & Barbetta, 2010). For example, Paneque and Barbetta (2010) examined teachers' levels of efficacy in relation to their teaching practices with students labeled as English Language Learners (ELLs) at-risk for a learning disability. The researchers surveyed a group of special education teachers using measures of self-efficacy as well as other qualitative measures (e.g. interviews and self-reports). The results indicated that a high level of self-efficacy was related to the teachers being more organized in their practice, which led to a perceived increase in the academic outcomes of their students. Although this study examined in-service teachers, there are implications for understanding how

preprofessional teachers' self-efficacy could influence the outcomes in their future classrooms.

Other constructive components of positive dispositions have been discussed in the research as well. These include an ethical stance regarding knowledge and the embracing of all students based on their specific needs (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). Additionally, teachers who are passionate about their work exude positive dispositions, which can lead to a higher level of satisfaction in their work (Stronge, 2007). Therefore, positive dispositions become more than just a state of being, but instead extend into the teacher's motivation and other aspects of how he or she enjoys the teaching profession. The difficulty lies in pinpointing specific aspects of these positive traits and determining the magnitude of their influence with each individual.

Teachers' empathic understandings are another aspect of understanding how positive dispositions are shaped. Suarez (2003) examined how empathic understandings of certain experiences related to students with exceptionalities can enhance teachers' dispositions and ultimately their ability to teach in a diverse setting. The author noted that teachers needed to be exposed to a variety of culturally diverse placements in order to understand how students learn, which ultimately shapes their beliefs and attitudes about education. Therefore, the more exposure a teacher has with understanding the "other" through final internship placements and pedagogical knowledge, the more likely he or she is to develop a positive disposition related to teaching. The teachers might then be better able to cope with a diverse set of situations, while maintaining relatively stable dispositions (Suarez, 2003).

Overall, the researchers' definitions of positive dispositions are related to factors such as efficacy, empathy, confidence, and care. This is similar to the researchers' conceptualizations of dispositions in Chapter One (Sockett, 2006; Splitter, 2010), which were related to aspects of intellect, morality, and social justice. All of these factors are important attributes for a teacher to have if he or she is to be an effective practitioner and make a positive and meaningful impact in the lives of his or her students. The difficulty with understanding dispositions does not lie with the explication of these traits, but instead determining how to foster them within a teacher education program. The following sections will demarcate what a negative dispositions consists of and lead into a discussion of the literature relative to how faculty in teacher education programs incorporate these definitions and use them to assess teachers' progress.

### **Negative Dispositions**

Although positive aspects of dispositions are important to demarcate, there is also the contrasting elements of dispositions as they relate to teacher education in special education. These negative characteristics are often the opposite of the positive attributes and include a teacher being complicit about his or her job, a minimal belief that his or her teaching practices affects students' outcomes, closed-mindedness about enhancing his or her teaching practices, and a general lack of desire for the profession (Collier, 2005). There are other issues related to negative dispositions, which are inherently connected to the moral reasoning and behavior of the teacher that could negatively affect his or her practice.

Cummings, Dyas, Maddux, and Kochman (2003) examined the differences between preservice teacher education students and students in other majors in relation to

their level of principled moral reasoning. The authors noted that teaching, in its essence, is a moral profession and purposeful and thoughtful reflection becomes an essential piece to making sound moral judgments in the classroom, which are reflected in the teacher's ethical behavior. The participants in their study included 145 preservice education students (including elementary, secondary, and special education) all of whom were assessed using the Defining Issues Test (DIT, Rest, 1979) in order to determine their level of cognitive-moral reasoning.

In the study conducted by Cummings, Dyas, Maddux, and Kochman (2003), students from a variety of other majors were then administered the DIT and their scores were compared with the 145 preservice education teachers. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the preservice teachers' scores on the DIT and the comparison participants' scores, with the preservice teachers scoring higher on the DIT when compared to the participants from other majors. The authors noted that there is a need to understand why these differences exist and determine if the preservice teachers are coming in with a more advanced set of moral reasoning or if they are learning this through their program of study (Cummings, Dyas, Maddux, & Kochman, 2003).

Although this study utilized a small sample and combined all education majors into one group, there is still the need to understand how elements of moral turpitude affect a teacher's disposition, specifically in the area of special education. The issue becomes especially pertinent because of the interactions teachers have with their students and their parents. Therefore, understanding morality's influence on the development of

teacher dispositions could assist in understanding where these discrepancies come from and what they are influenced by.

Determining how to handle teachers who are at-risk for not completing their teacher education program is a difficult task and one that requires the examination of how dispositions are incorporated into the criteria to be met for graduation. Edwards and Edick (2006) synthesized information related to what caused teachers to be dropped from a teacher education program and found that dispositions were related to the rationale for expelling a teacher from a program for a majority of the cases. This study provided evidence for the need to understand how positive dispositions can be fostered through university teacher education programs in order to increase retention or understand why preprofessional teachers leave a program before completion.

The question becomes whether it is their “true” dispositions, ones that are stable over time, or temporary dispositions influenced by extenuating circumstances (Edwards & Edick, 2006). Faculty at the university should not be required to shape and alter dispositions, but instead should challenge the student to understand the nature of their dispositions and provide honest feedback on how those individuals will fare in the field if certain aspects are not altered or transformed. The level of influence exerted by the teacher education program is important to understand, as teachers need to be able to develop their professional dispositions in a way that is beneficial to their practice.

Additionally, teacher dispositions are related to both the students they are teaching and their teaching style (Heimlich & Norland, 2002) and their job satisfaction (Kokkinos, 2007; Teven, 2007). These important components are related to obtaining and maintaining a job in the field after graduation from a teacher education program. If



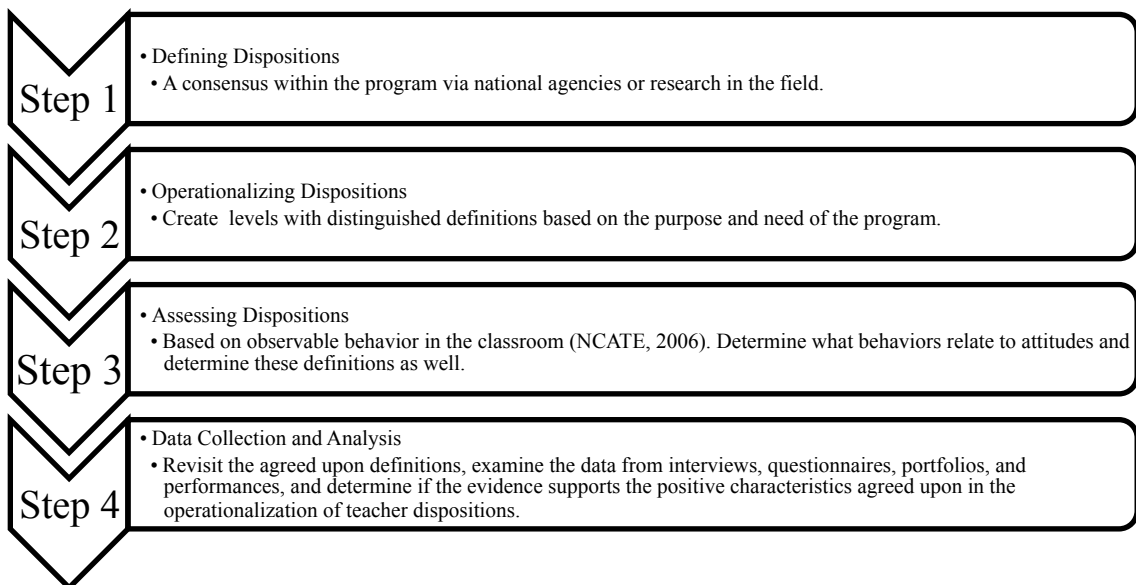
teachers are to be retained in the future, addressing their dispositions as it relates to their satisfaction with the profession becomes an essential piece for teacher education programs to address (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). Therefore, a deeper understanding of teacher dispositions in special education is needed in order to combat the rising attrition rate in the profession (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011). However, the way in which preprofessional teacher dispositions are assessed becomes a difficult task and one that will invariably influence how teacher education programs measure the success of their graduates. The next section will delineate how programs in higher education teacher education conceptualize, assess, and attempt to alter dispositions with preprofessional teachers in a variety of areas.

### **Definitions of Dispositions Applied to Teacher Education**

How a definition of dispositions will be incorporated into the conceptual framework for a department is a critical aspect of how the values of that university are communicated to their students. This could include having criteria related to dispositions before the students are admitted, how the candidates are affected by their involvement in the program, and what criteria should be examined upon the students' exit from the program. Operationally, dispositions might be difficult to define and assess (Villegas, 2007; Renzaglia, Hutchins, & Lee, 1997). However, instruments such as characteristic checklists, ratings from observations of candidates in variety of settings, inferences drawn from course involvement, personal mementos from students, and the opinion of other professionals could be compiled in order to incorporate multiple sources of data in order to make informed decisions (Wasicsko, Callahan, & Wirtz, 2004). Determining the definition of dispositions is important, however, without a solid structure and plan for

assessment, the meaningful information that could be gathered might be lost amongst the other requirements of the program.

Shiveley and Misco (2010) provided a framework for integrating and assessing dispositions in teacher education. Although their particular examination of teacher dispositions took place at a university with only an undergraduate program in elementary education, it is anticipated that this framework could be used for the examination of teacher dispositions within a larger program. This is because the fundamental aspects of what it means to assess dispositions within an accredited institution are delineated in a way that allows for the expansion or contraction within each discrete step listed below. Figure 3 delineates the process that was undertaken at the university in Shiveley and Misco's (2010) study. The authors outlined and highlighted the importance of sequential process of defining, operationalizing, assessing, and analyzing teacher dispositions within an undergraduate program.



*Figure 3.* The steps for assessing teacher dispositions adapted from Shiveley and Misco (2010).

The above format used by Shively and Misco (2010) for assessing teacher dispositions could allow instructors in higher education to delineate, within their particular department, what is to be measured, how it will be assessed, and in what ways the data can be used. The authors noted that one caveat with the process of defining dispositions is that the professors and the administration of the program must come to an agreement on what dispositions are in relation to the requirements set forth by NCATE (2006) for accreditation. The process is also conflicted by the faculty members' competing philosophies in terms of what it means to educate teachers. Additionally, how the data from the assessment of dispositions are used is of critical importance, as much of it will be qualitative in nature and be subjectively analyzed. An example of a rubric for the assessment of dispositions is listed below in Table 1. The information listed below, adapted from Wayda and Lund (2005), demonstrates how certain dispositions are examined through analysis of the target behavior, the course in which it is assessed, and the instrument used for its measurement.

Table 1

*Model for Assessing Teacher Dispositions*

Disposition	Target Behavior of the Candidate	Course(s) Assessed	Assessment Instrument
Commitment to Reflection and growth	Demonstrates thoughtfulness in the educational setting; provides examples of personal strengths and weakness; gives examples of how to improve in teaching of lessons; regularly practices critical thinking; seeks and responds favorably to constructive feedback.	Introduction to Education Methods Courses Student Teaching	Admission essay Case study response; Response to supervision cycle.

Table 1 (continued)

Personal Integrity	Is trustworthy and respects confidences of students and others; accepts responsibility for actions; is honest in one's dealings; is reliable and dependable.	Throughout program	Dispositions form (self-report).
Personal Professionalism	Respects school and program rules and policies; is consistently prepared; collaborates well with others; utilizes professional organizations and references.	Methods Courses Field work and student teaching	Collaborative projects; participation in local, state, and/or national organizations; Field evaluation forms.
Sense of Efficacy	Demonstrates a belief that the teacher is a powerful factor in learning process for all children in the classroom; is able to provide multiple strategies to impact diverse learners.	Introduction to Education Methods Course, Student Teaching	Admission essay Lesson plans and field work supervisor evaluations.

*Note:* This is a sample adapted from the Wayda and Lund (2005) model.

The sample from the Wayda and Lund (2005) model provides an integrated conceptualization of how certain dispositions can be defined, assessed, and connected to the various courses within a teacher education program. However, there are still several inherent problems related to determining if the preprofessional teachers are exhibiting these characteristics in their true definitional forms. Because terms such as “trustworthy”, “reliable”, and “dependable” are all relative to the person conducting the assessment, it is difficult to discern if these attributes are being displayed in their intended form. There is also the issue of the establishment of these dispositions and their

subsequent maintenance over time. What if the preprofessional teachers only exhibit these behaviors fifty percent of the time? What if the preprofessional teachers' definition of reliability is different than that of the program? What if the mentor teacher at the site and the university-based professional disagree on these definitions? All of these issues confound the validation process of assessing dispositions and a more comprehensive and succinct model for understanding these facets of their assessment is needed (Wayda & Lund, 2005).

A possible solution to these issues was addressed by Shiveley and Misco (2010), as they noted that communication and support of the process by the faculty is essential to accurately defining and successfully using the data collected. Informing the preprofessional teachers in the program about what is expected is also an imperative, as the goal is to disseminate and integrate the information in a way that allows for everyone involved in the program to have a common understanding of dispositions. Collaborating and communicating with the school sites and the mentor teachers and supervisors at those locations is also vital to the systematic dissemination of information in terms of what is expected with the teachers' dispositions. Ultimately, the teacher education program itself becomes of central importance and highly influential on the teachers as theories intertwine with practice.

With the basic process and possible areas of assessment in mind, the operationalized assessment of teacher dispositions needs to be discussed. In order to understand how faculty members in higher education complete this process and develop the instruments for the assessment of dispositions, several examples will be provided, along with the conundrums related to the explication of the assessment process. Again,

the difficulty lies in defining dispositions in a meaningful and contextualized fashion and being able to use the information gathered from assessments in an accurate way.

### **Assessment of Dispositions in Teacher Education Programs**

#### **Operational Definitions and Areas of Measurement**

Diez (2007) noted that there are several ways to conceive the operational definition of dispositions in terms of how a teacher education program measures the construct. These include decisions by the faculty regarding the following designations “entity v. incremental; separate v. holistic; screening individuals v. building professional community” (Diez, 2007, p. 389). Each of these decisions about how to look at dispositions is essential for a teacher education program to determine what the point is of assessing such a construct. Essentially, Diez (2007) is asking some critical questions about how dispositions are perceived: Is a disposition unto itself or does it grow over time? Can someone measuring dispositions parcel it out or should it be conceived as its own entity? What should be the purpose of the assessment in regards to the program of teacher education higher education? These questions are posed from interpretations of Diez’s (2007) research and are some of the fundamental queries that need to be examined by faculty in departments of education in order to conceptualize their own definitions of dispositions.

Although there are numerous constructs that could be measured within one’s dispositions, in order to tailor the assessment for teacher education programs, Hillman, Rothermel, and Scarano (2006) identified seven major areas which they used to construct a self-reported assessment of a disposition for teacher education elementary education. These areas include: (a) responsibility for learning; (B) interpersonal skills; (c)

professionalism; (d) effective use of time and resources; (e) communication skills; (f) higher level thinking skills; (g) collaborative skills (Hillman, Rothermel, & Scarano, 2006). A number of these constructs are not directly related to dispositions, but instead include aspects of the teacher's knowledge and skills. The difficulty that many faculty in teacher education have is separating these constructs and then determining how much one's disposition affects (either positively or negatively and to what extent) these other areas of assessment. In order to determine an effect, dispositions must be examined and delineated unto themselves while holding stable the effects of the other facets of teacher education.

The creation of a *professional* set of dispositions in relation to a teacher's practice is important to understand. The operational definition presented above moves away from the higher order constructs such as intellect, care, empathy, etc. and becomes more related to the teacher's actual practice. This allows the faculty in teacher education programs to assess more discrete variables, rather than ambiguous terms. However, there are still a number of issues related to these assessments, including how the process will be constructed and how the information will be used in the assessment process.

### **The Assessment Process in Higher Education**

There are several essential components that are involved in the assessment of dispositions which include the reflection of the preprofessional teacher on his or her practice, the development of portfolios of work, as well as the understanding of a critical cultural consciousness (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). However, determining how an individual's disposition fits the departmental definition and whether or not that individual will be able to follow the right track to become successful and have a positive influence

on students is a difficult task. Additionally, because NCATE (2006) requires that dispositions are assessed and reported only adds to the ambiguity of the construct, because the accreditation institutions provide no definitive manner in which dispositions should be assessed and provide no consequences if the results are determined to be negative in nature. Again, the subjectivity of measuring such a construct becomes a challenge for teacher education programs (Callahan, Wasickil, & Wirtz, 2004).

The faculty of Jacksonville State University has provided an example of how faculty within the department of elementary education struggled with determining how dispositions are to be assessed. They first included the establishment of the process of assessing a definition according to NCATE's (2006) proposed conceptualizations. This included the common understanding that "dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice" (Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009, p.7). The faculty also agreed that the purpose of assessing dispositions is to improve and assist preprofessional teachers in pursuit of their career as a teacher. Several questions in the discussions were raised and included, "Are [dispositions] directly observable? Are they directly linked to certain behaviors or patterns of behavior in a one-to-one fashion? Can they be readily assessable using the instruments of measurement that have become rather standards (e.g. checklists, inventories, and self report?" (Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009, p. 7).

Additional questions were related to where the preprofessional teachers would be observed, by whom, when, how often, and other issues related to fairness and fidelity in regards to how that information was considered within an overall evaluation (Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009). All of these issues needed to be directly



addressed and agreed upon before moving forward with the systematic assessment process with a set of defensible criteria. The faculty determined that a standardized assessment process would be next to impossible given the inherent issues of subjectivity in the assessment of the abstract concepts that comprise a disposition. Therefore, they decided that the assessment data would come from a number of different sources and be analyzed by a group of individuals within a blinding process.

Reflection upon their own practice and the philosophy of the department was an essential component in the understanding of what they wanted to accomplish if dispositions could be measured (Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009). Afterwards, a tentative definition of dispositions could be determined as well as how the shaping and teaching of dispositions was infused into the courses taken by the preprofessional teachers. Having taken the stock of the state of the program in relation to the construct of an individual's disposition, a survey was constructed in order to gather data from within the department. This information then informed how the assessments were constructed.

One major issue that the faculty grappled with was how to handle a preprofessional teacher with a "poor" disposition (Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009). The moral imperative to "fix" such an issue came into question and whether or not it was the responsibility of the faculty to handle some of the deeper trait flaws presented by their students. The group of professors concluded that there is a hope that positive dispositions will be instilled by the students' involvement in the program and that this influence might counteract previously held points of contention. However, there is not definitive way of determining if the assessments will be able to fairly and

accurately inform the decisions made by those in charge of the program's development. The process concluded with the faculty defining and designing a set of regulations around a "pedagogical disposition" which included aspects of one's temperament, character, and personality in the ethical practice of teaching students and interacting with their families as well as interacting in a collaborative fashion with their colleagues (Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009).

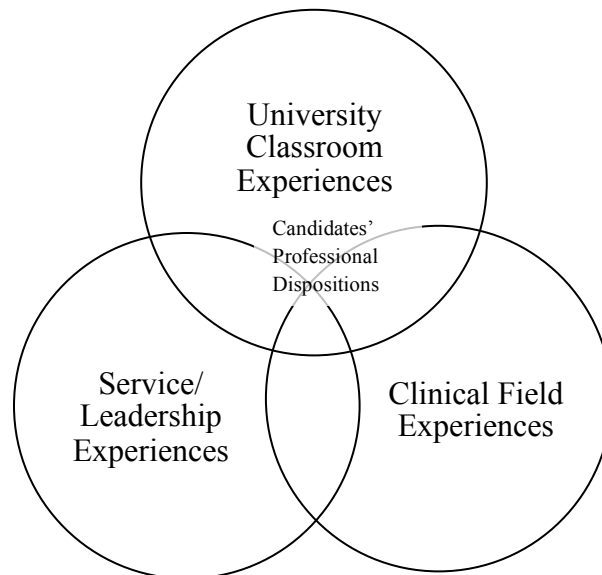
This example from the faculty's process at Jacksonville State brings up some interesting points about how departments in teacher education struggle with defining and assessing dispositions. The inherent difficulty is portrayed again through the faculty's questions about the nature of dispositions and what that means in terms of a preprofessional teacher's capabilities related to the accreditation institution's competencies. Additionally, because teacher education programs throughout the college of education are so diverse in their philosophies and intents, dispositions become a relative construct to the individual departments (Goe & Coggshall, 2007). In order to contextualize this discussion for a department of special education, examples from the research are provided below.

### **The Assessment Process in Special Education Programs**

**The organization for assessment.** The structure for assessing dispositions above is related to elementary education or the college of education as a whole (consisting of a mixture of majors). In order to contextualize the assessment of dispositions for special education preprofessional teachers, Beverly, Santos, and Kyger (2006) developed a professional disposition curriculum for the discipline. The authors noted that the preprofessional teachers in special education should have a set of knowledge and skills

(either well developed or underdeveloped) attained through their courses and field experiences. However, the dispositions are not necessarily explicitly taught and in order to determine if these students are ready for full-time employment, several aspects of their personal interactions in relation to their character need to be addressed by the faculty in the department.

The examination of how a teacher develops his or her “teacher identity” (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006, p. 27) becomes a crucial aspect of whether or not that teacher stays in the field and is able to cope with the reality of becoming an independent professional. The application of a teacher’s professional disposition was not always measured by the assignments, observations, and portfolios that were required for graduation. Therefore, the faculty at James Madison University set three goals in relation to incorporating professional dispositions into the curriculum. These goals included (1) linking the preservice teachers’ behaviors as students versus their behaviors as professional educators, (2) encouraging ownership of their professional behavior, and (3) the development of an overall program assessment plan that incorporated professional dispositions along with gateways for decision-making about the progress of the individual candidates (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006). Figure 4 is a visual representation of the various areas where the preprofessional teachers were to have their dispositions examine and assessed with the nexus becoming the candidates’ professional dispositions.



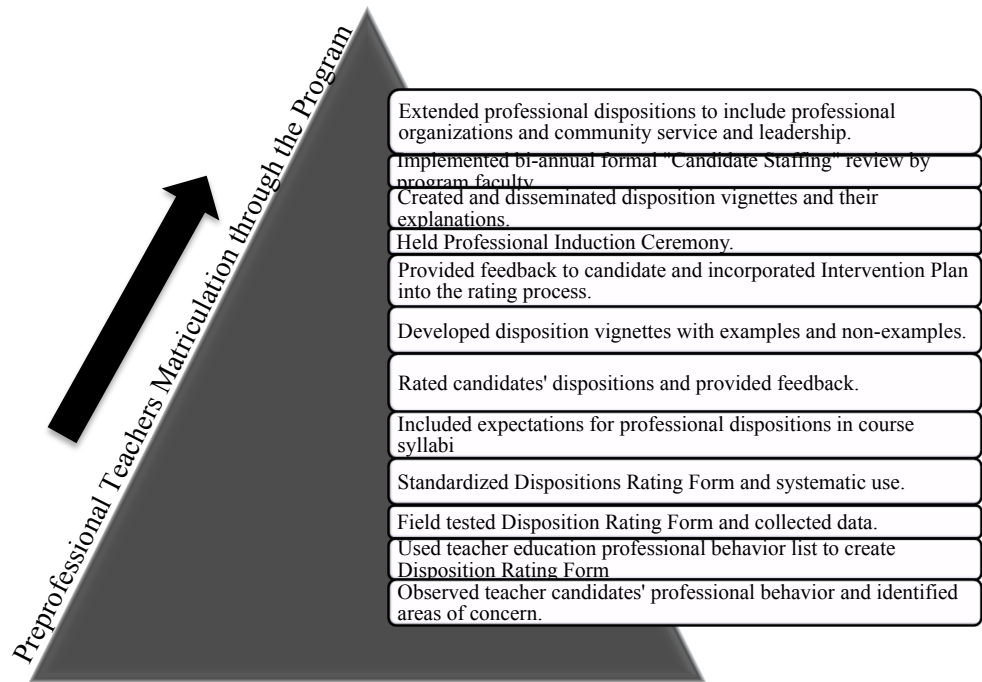
*Figure 4.* The above visual is a representation of the model for the identification and integration of professional dispositions with the candidate's professional disposition at the intersection between these other realms of the teacher education program, adapted from Beverly, Santos, and Kyger (2006).

The professional disposition curriculum established a set of behaviors that the teacher candidates were expected to demonstrate (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006). These were then explained to the students and incorporated into the courses and field experiences by the faculty. There were additional concerns related to whether the negative behaviors displayed by the candidates were consistent or in isolation. This, again, is an issue of reliability of character and is often difficult to ascertain in the brief time that the students associate with the faculty both at the university and the field placements. Additionally, it is challenging to determine if those students are in fact acting in congruence with their attitudes, beliefs, and values in those environments or if they are displaying behaviors that are expected given the condition.

In order to address how dispositions were to be measured as well as the concerns, Beverly, Santos, and Kyger (2006) developed a Professional Dispositions Rating Form (PDRF), which entailed a behavior checklist to be filled out by the students' supervisors. The standardization and communication about this assessment were key elements in integrating professional dispositions into the curriculum. The faculty also scaffolded how the teacher candidate would be consulted if a problem were to arise. This included meetings and consultations geared towards options for the candidate to consider in relation to the current state of their professional disposition at various stages throughout the program. Figure 5 is a visual representation of the process by which professional dispositions were assessed within the program (including the development of the form for the assessment). Overall, the authors noted that there has been a positive response to this process from both faculty and the teacher candidates themselves, with far fewer concerns regarding professional dispositions post implementation (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006).

The development of this curriculum by Beverly, Santos, and Kyger (2006) is an important piece in determining how to assess dispositions, as it locates the spaces where students would exhibit the behaviors related to their professional identity over time. However, the concerns related to whether or not these assessments and plans accurately describe and integrate the complex nature of dispositions persist. In order to more accurately describe the perspective of the students in this process, the following section will address how teacher candidates in the field of education perceive the disposition assessment process. Again, there is a need to understand how these competing concepts of what is a positive and negative disposition and how they interrelate and how these

aspects can be integrated in a way that provides constructive information for improvement for both the faculty and students of teacher education programs in special education. In the next section, the application of the above definitions and their positive and negative connotations will be examined as they apply to teacher education in special education and how dispositions are assessed within the discipline.



*Figure 5.* The figure displays the process by which the teacher candidates' dispositions were assessed in the program at James Madison University. Starting from the bottom and moving upward, there is a scaffolded process by which students are introduced and indoctrinated into the concept of a professional disposition, adapted from Beverly, Santos, and Kyger (2006).

**Content of the assessment.** Assessing the moral judgments of preprofessional teachers becomes a challenge in examining the heuristics behind what teacher dispositions are and how they impact students in the field (Johnson, 2008). This is due to

the fact that classrooms are becoming more diverse and more inclusive. In order to meet the needs of all students, professionals in higher education must adapt their criteria for assessing dispositions to include moral capacity as well as other elements of preservice teachers' personalities related to their dispositions (Murray, 2012). The theory behind measuring morality has to do with an understanding that a person's dispositions are not simply a set of characteristics, but instead a fluid and ever changing set of inherited and contextualized responses to that individual's environment. One's responses become more consistent over time, but as these schemas are created, conflicts arise with previously established ideologies and other deeper seeded values (Rest et al., 1999).

Although there are a number of measures of moral judgment currently being used to assess professionals in other areas, these instruments need to be examined as they apply to teacher candidates in education (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). This is because of the ethical issues that arise in the classroom and the implications of the teachers' decisions in relation to these matters. A better understanding of teachers' morality could allow for a more resourceful individual, capable of handling an array of difficult situations. Additionally, the debate as to the type of information that is being provided by quantitative or qualitative instruments will allow researchers in the field some direction in terms of both construct and application of these measurements (Johnson, 2008).

### **Instrument Development for Assessments**

Johnson (2008) explored how to assess dispositions and compared the use of two different types of assessments, one quantitative and the other qualitative, in relation to measuring preservice teachers' morality as it connects to their dispositions. The participants included 53 teacher candidates, the majority of whom were majoring in

elementary education. The quantitative measure was the Defining Issues Test 2 (DIT2, Rest & Narvaez, 1998), while the qualitative measure included an analysis of the teachers' reflective writings throughout the semester. The author used a case study design (Yin, 2003) to examine the moral judgment disposition of the participants and the congruence/incongruence between the two instruments.

Overall, the author found that the quantitative measure (DIT2) did have some inconsistencies when compared with the coded analysis of the reflective journals in regards to examining three main schemas: personal interest, maintaining norms, and post-conventional thought (Johnson, 2008). These inconsistencies were related to the overall ability of the instruments to concurrently display the attributes listed above. Essentially, there was more agreement amongst coders of the information with the qualitative instrument versus the quantitative instrument. This study provided some evidence that qualitative data, in terms of measuring dispositions, might provide a more contextualized source of information for analysis. The author suggested that future research should include even more diversified sources of qualitative data in order to capture the dichotomy between information being presented by the preservice teachers' program of study and the effect on their dispositions (Johnson, 2008). This data could then be used to determine a more relative definition of a teachers' disposition as it applies within a specific department.

Although assessments of preprofessional teacher dispositions created at the departmental or college level are important, there still needs to be a deeper and more intricate understanding of the students' experiences in the program and how that shapes their personal and professional dispositions (Goe & Cogshall, 2007; LePage, Nielsen, &



Fearn, 2008). The evaluation process allows faculty at the university to gain a perspective on how the preprofessional teachers' dispositions might effect the decisions about how a program is designed. The difficulty in assessing dispositions is that a preservice teacher might be able to describe their dispositions, but might not integrate those attitudes and beliefs in his or her practice (Thornton, 2006). Commonly referred to as the Hawthorne Effect, this problem is inherent in many types of qualitative research and instrument development and involves the participant responding in a socially acceptable manner to the individual providing the questions. The effect is especially profound when the individual administering the questions has a place of power in relation to the individual being asked the questions (e.g. a professor and a student).

An example of the instrument development process was delineated by Singh and Stoloff (2008) in their examination of the relationship between teacher dispositions and their students' achievement. The authors developed a dispositions tool, the Eastern Teacher Dispositions Index (ESTDI), which was aligned with the standards set forth by INTASC (1992) and NCATE (2006), as well as input from their own professional experiences with the assessment of preprofessional teacher dispositions. They found that in order to move away from a more subjective instrument, they needed to collect their data by using individuals not directly involved the overall assessment of teacher dispositions and the subsequent decisions that needed to be made in case of a conflict.

The basis for the instrument was derived from the concept that dispositions and perceptions could be used interchangeably (Singh & Stoloff, 2008). Essentially, if an individual has a positive outlook in regards to the perception of students and their ability to achieve, a more constructive and supportive disposition would also be present. The

ESTDI has 54 items and five scales, which include (1) Perceptions about self (2) Perceptions about others (3) Perceptions about the purpose of education and process of education (4) Perceptions about subject field, and (5) General frame of reference perceptions (Singh & Stoloff, 2008). The instrument's intended use is to measure how preprofessional teachers rate themselves in terms of these areas on a Likert-type scale.

The study involved 86 preprofessional teachers in undergraduate elementary, secondary, physical, and early/childhood/special education programs, all of whom were enrolled in the course, "Child and Adolescent Development, and Exceptionalities". The ESTDI was administered to the students and the results indicated that the majority of the teachers had many of the elements related to being an effective teacher (Singh & Stoloff, 2007). However, it was noted that this sample was one of convenience and the vetting of the ESTDI, as a reliable and valid instrument was not conducted.

Additionally, because this instrument was based on a self-report, there was no insight into the actual process of how the teachers rated themselves or if they understood the purpose of the question. One could be concerned that the teachers simply responded in a positive fashion to the questions in order to demonstrate the perception that they are in fact effective teachers. Despite these shortcomings, the study provides some insight into the types of questions that could be asked in an interview with preprofessional teachers in special education in order to determine if those aspects of positive dispositions are connected with effective teaching practices in the field. This example again provides a rationale for the need to understand dispositions from the teachers' perspectives because of the complex definition of dispositions (Singh & Stoloff, 2007).

## **Other Areas of Assessment**

### **Ethics in Special Education**

The connection between a teacher's morality and his or her dispositions is important to understand in special education because of the differences in the student population and the skill sets and knowledge needed for teaching (Johnson & Reiman, 2007). For example, Tillman and Richards (2010) conceptualized their examination of teacher dispositions in special education as a way to assist the faculty of a department in the assessment of their candidates. The authors used a single case design and their participants included 28 preprofessional special education teachers enrolled in their final internship. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Code of Ethics was used as a template to examine aspects of the teacher candidates' dispositions. The Code is listed below and provides some insight into how preprofessional teachers in special education are held to certain contextualized standards that do not appear in the criteria associated with other accreditation bodies and their definition of appropriate professional conduct.

The Code states that special education professionals: “(1) are committed to developing the highest educational and quality of life possible for individuals with exceptionalities; (2) promote and maintain a high level of competence and integrity; (3) engage in professional activities which benefit individuals with exceptionalities, their families, other colleagues, students, or research subjects; (4) exercise objective professional judgment; (5) strive to advance their knowledge and skills; (6) work within the standards and policies of their profession (7) seek to uphold and improve where necessary the laws, regulations, and policies governing their profession (8) do not condone or participate in unethical or illegal acts” (CEC, 1993). This code of ethics is

important to note because it provides an overarching construct for how Tillman and Richards (2010) examined dispositions in teacher candidates in special education. Centering their examination on CEC's Code of Ethics could be a pertinent way of investigating preprofessional teacher dispositions in special education in future studies.

Having the student teachers submit a weekly reflection to their university supervisor was the data collection method for the study. Additionally, some of the participants were involved in an eight-week discussion, which examined each of the above CEC ethical codes. An example of a prompt for such an activity included the question, "How do you [or How does your student teacher] demonstrate... followed by the specific standard" (Tillman & Richards, 2010, p. 5). This process allowed the researchers to demonstrate their purpose to the participants involved. The authors then coded the responses into discrete categories including behaviors, attitudes, and activities, all of which were then related to the eight standards. Results indicated that many of the students were adhering to the principles set forth by CEC 's code of ethics. However, because this was a single case study, the authors did not delve into the more interpretive aspects of the meaning behind certain statements made by the participants.

The above study does provide some insight into how the examination of dispositions can be aligned with standards in the field of special education. However, there needs to be a more in-depth examination of the phenomenon as it relates to multiple perspectives of individuals involved in the facilitation of the program as well as a more thorough dissemination of information from the students themselves. Therefore, a case study that involves multiple data collection points, as well as more open-ended and direct questions could provide the structure that is needed to facilitate a closer examination of

how the definition of dispositions affects the assessment of preprofessional teachers in relation to the practices of departments of special education.

### **Reflective Practice and Dispositions in Special Education**

Reflective practice is an important aspect of understanding and analyzing the work of students in higher education. This concept is applied in many teacher education programs in special education (LePage, Nielsen, & Fearn, 2008). This is because reflection allows one to understand the inner workings of the interaction between their personality and the environment. The process of reflection throughout a program can provide the preprofessional teacher with an invaluable tool for future practice, one that would hopefully allow them to practice their own personal form of professional development. Specifically, a teacher's philosophy and vision statement could be seen as two examples of reflective practice in action. The task of creating these documents allows for some metacognitive practice and hopefully provides the teacher with a clearer picture of who they are as a student on the brink of becoming a professional.

The preprofessional teachers' vision statements can be a useful source of information for researchers examining these teachers' dispositions. Davis (1983) examined the connection between reflection and disposition through the following questions. He asked: (1) who they were as individuals; (2) what their personal and professional strengths and weaknesses were; (3) what irritated them most about their roles and how could they resolve those irritations; (4) to what extent they had control over their professional lives; (5) why they entered the field of special education in the first place; (6) what their initial expectations were and how their expectations had

changed; and (7) what their primary responsibilities as teachers were and who or what was preventing them from meeting those responsibilities (Davis, 1983).

Although Davis (1983) was researching teachers already employed by a school district, the questions could be adapted for preprofessional teachers and first year teachers, as the content of the questions could provide a personal insight into how the teacher is transitioning from being a student to a professional. Additionally, the above concepts are related to a preprofessional teacher questioning certain aspects of their “self” as they matriculate through their teacher education program. Understanding the delineation of teachers across a program is important if a deeper understanding about dispositions is to be connected to the practices for assessment at the departmental level.

Overall, the attempts made by researchers in the field to create a set of criteria for the assessment of teacher dispositions in special education has been met with some controversy (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006). This is because what is being measured is not easily discernable and varies within each preprofessional teacher. In order to examine this phenomenon more closely and contextualize the understanding for special education, more research on the perceptions of dispositions by preprofessional teachers is needed. The above studies have suggested that qualitative methods might be able to capture richer data, but might still leave a sense of ambiguity with those attempting to understand how dispositions fit into the grand scheme of program design. Therefore, a more comprehensive and mixed method examination could contribute to the understanding of preprofessional teacher disposition in special educational and inform future practices.

## Summary

Missing from the above discussion is how teachers themselves perceive and associate meaning about the effect of dispositions on their program experiences. Additionally, the topic of preprofessional teacher dispositions and their subsequent assessment is a topic not often addressed within the research in special education (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011; Villegas, 2007; Goe & Coggshall, 2007). Assessing dispositions in teacher education programs in special education is a difficult task due to the ambiguity of the definitions presented by accreditation institutions and researchers in the field. The importance of examining such a subject has to do with the personal, psychological, professional, and future successes and failures of preprofessional teachers in the field, as well as their students' successes and failures (Jung & Rhodes, 2008).

Conceptually, a teacher's dispositions could be viewed as filter to the world around him or her, one that allows certain attitudes and beliefs to be exhibited in a manner that benefits their pursuit of a profession and provides a positive outcome to the day-to-day decisions that teachers make (Schussler, 2006). This study is not an attempt to define dispositions, but instead to examine them more closely in preprofessional teachers in special education in order to inform practices in higher education. The essential component throughout this study will be to elucidate the story behind how dispositions manifest themselves within a program, which will hopefully lead to a more comprehensive picture of how preprofessional teachers matriculate from being a student to a professional.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **METHOD**

#### **Research Questions**

The overall purpose of this study was to determine how preprofessional teachers and recently graduated teachers associated with a special education teacher preparation program perceived the effects of their dispositions on their experiences in the program. This information could potentially inform the practices of the teacher education program in special education. Due to the fact that NCATE (2006) requires an accredited program to assess dispositions and because the research on the subject focuses on programs mainly outside of special education (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011; Villegas, 2007), there was a need to examine the topic from both a structural and contextual standpoint. The research questions for this study were used to focus on an examination of how preprofessional teachers in their second semester and those in their final internship perceived the emphasis and influence of dispositions within their program. Additionally, recently graduated teachers associated with the same program were interviewed in order to determine their perceptions on the meaning of dispositions and how they related to their practice. The intents and purposes of this study were not to define dispositions, but instead to examine them more closely in order to inform teacher educators in special education with respect to how they could potentially enhance their program.



- 1) How do preprofessional teachers in their final internship, enrolled in an NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program, perceive the ways their dispositions have changed, or not, throughout their participation in the program?
  - a) What perceived effects have their dispositions and subsequent transformations of their dispositions had on their successes and/or setbacks within the program?
- 2) How do preprofessional teachers in their first year (second semester) of their program (at the same NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program as above) perceive the ways in which their dispositions influence their involvement in the program through their program and their future practice?
- 3) How do first-year teachers (recently graduated from the same NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program as above) perceive the ways in which their dispositions have changed across their program and now into their first year of teaching?
  - a) How did their dispositions contribute to their successes and/or setbacks in their program?
  - b) How does their understanding of their dispositions influence their current practice?

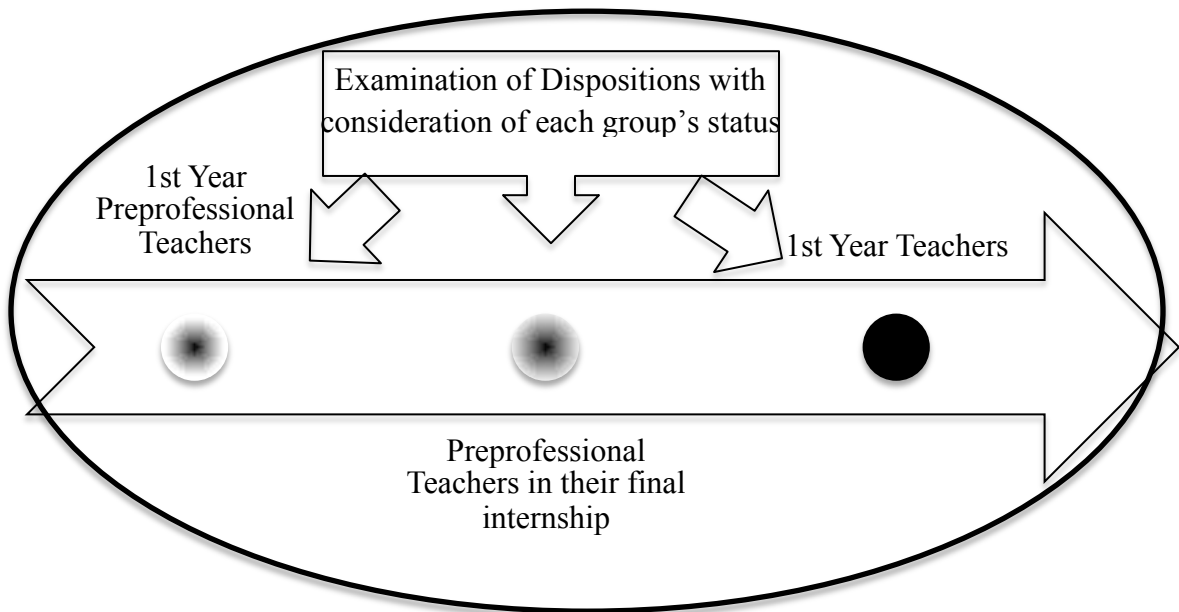
### **Theoretical Framework**

Stake (1999) conceptualized the case study method as a fluid process that examines a case(s) and its interaction with single or multiple issues. The main concept Stake (1999) purported is that case study researcher should seek an understanding and tell the stories related to the topic of interest. Smith (1979) noted that a case is “a bounded system” (p. 42), making what is to be examined an object within a specific process.

Stake (1999) agreed with this statement about a case and expanded the meaning to include the fact that a case could be a specific instance within a system. Stake (1999) used the Greek symbol theta ( $\Theta$ ) to represent the case. Theta has a “self” that needs to be delineated in order to understand the case more fully through multiple means of representation. The curiosity of the researcher is the driving force behind evaluating the case within a particular context. Qualitative inquiry, specifically as it applies to case study research, is associated more with learning about the particulars of a given situation and does not often result in the researcher being able to make generalizations.

For this examination, a case study method was utilized to understand the topics outlined in the research questions related to an understanding of teacher dispositions in a special education teacher education program. In order to gain an understanding about teachers’ perceptions of the influences of their dispositions, both preprofessional teachers (first year students and students in their final internship) and recently graduated teachers (from the same university program) were interviewed. Three groups were representative of teachers from the same special education teacher education program. The three participant groups represented preprofessional teachers in the second semester of their five-semester teacher preparation program, preprofessional teachers completing their final internship, and in-service teachers in their first year as teachers. All of the participants were associated with the same NCATE accredited teacher preparation program in that same department of special education. A case study method allowed for multiple means of representation from different perspectives as they relate to the influences and importance of dispositions in each group’s matriculation through the

special education program. Figure 6 represents each group as they relate to one another within this case study.

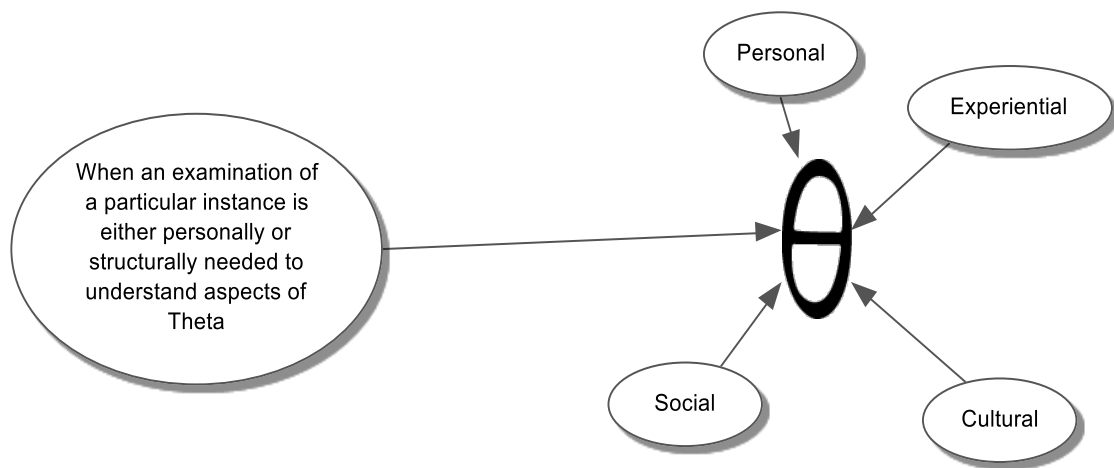


*Figure 6.* Above is a visual representation of the case being examined.

This examination included interviews with the preprofessional teachers (both first year and final internship groups) and recently graduated teachers related to how they perceive the definition of dispositions, their reaction and analysis of the definition as promoted by NCATE, and how the concept of dispositions influenced their experiences and outcomes in the program. The overall purpose of this study was to better understand how these entities understand, conceptualized, and operationalized dispositions. The results of this study could hopefully provide information for the consideration of faculty in their attempt to further the professional development of the future preprofessional teachers in special education teacher education programs.

## Case Study Method

The purpose of case study research according to Stake (1999) is not to make broad generalizations about the participants or the phenomenon being studied. Stake (1999) noted that, “Case study seems a poor basis for generalization... Only a single case or just a few cases will be studied at length” (p. 7). Interpretations that are drawn must be taken with relative consideration to the influences of social, cultural, political, and personal forces that interject certain levels of power and importance on the individual case. A visual representation of how inquiry influences a case is displayed below in Figure 7.



*Figure 7.* The when and why of conducting Stake’s (1999) case study research. The left side of the diagram indicates the purpose, while the bubbles on right are what are influencing  $\Theta$ .

## Rationale for Design

Stake’s (1999) case study approach is appropriate to address the research questions of this study because the method allows for the use of multiple sources of data and is intended to “tell the story” behind multifaceted issues. The complexities of

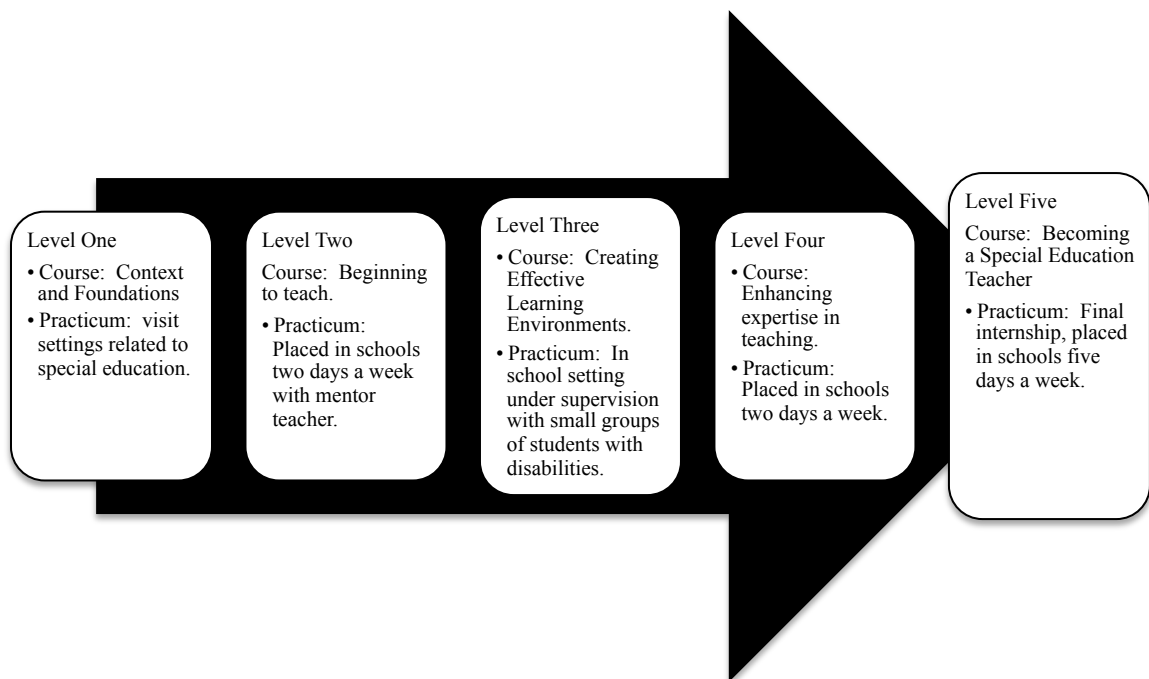
dispositions in teacher education are difficult to define and their assessment has been questioned by researchers in the field when studies of dispositions are examined in teacher education (Jung & Rhodes, 2008; Murray, 2012). Case study research is ideal for examining the complexities of the initial collection of data from multiple sources (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, observations, document analysis, etc.), which can provide a rich description of the instance, especially when dealing with complicated subject matters. Stake's (1999) case study method also employs the use of triangulation and member checking, which allows for some relative confirmation of the data collected. Therefore, within the context of this study, the method of case study as proposed by Stake (1999) is appropriate for examining the perceptions of professionals in teacher education in special education as it lends itself to a more insightful examination of the phenomenon.

## **Participant Selection**

### **Screening for the Case Study**

The participants from the three groups within this study were drawn from the population of students and alumni associated with a special education department in a large, southeastern, metropolitan university. This university assessed dispositions through the use of a questionnaire administered at the beginning and end of the program of study. This included the first year preprofessional teachers in their second semester of the teacher education program, preprofessional teachers in their final internship in that same program, and recently graduated teachers (received their degree in the previous year from the same teacher education program).

Figure 8 represents the various stages of the program and the major courses and fieldwork experiences required by the program. The preprofessional teachers in their second semester, were in the “Level Two” stage of the program, the preprofessional teachers in their final internship were in the “Level Five” stage of the program, and the recently graduated teachers were alumni who matriculated through the program one year previous. The groups and their association with each level is important to contextualize as the purpose of this collective case study was related to an understanding of the groups and their university experience (the commonality between the groups) (Stake, 1999).



*Figure 8.* The levels of the special education teacher education program associated with each of the participants with a description of the course and practicum experience at each level.

All participants from the preprofessional teacher group were in good standing with the university and within their program. The participants (n=6) from the first year teacher group were certified teachers in special education and held a position as a special

education teacher. The total number of participants for each group was six. This led to a total participant pool of 18. The plan if more participants were needed in order to create a richer description of the case, more will be recruited from any of the groups based on the above criteria, however, this was not implemented in this study (a more detailed process for the possible addition of participants is described below).

### **Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**

All participants participated on a voluntary basis. The interviews were conducted outside of the university and public school sector at a mutually agreed upon location. The preprofessional teacher participants were drawn from those in the second semester of their program and another group that were in their final internship. The recently graduated teachers had graduated from the same program as the preprofessional teachers one year previous.

### **Participant Selection Process**

The participants were selected from a pool of preprofessional teachers (n=58) and first year teachers (n=33), all of whom were associated with an NCATE accredited special education program at a large university in a metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. All the individuals associated with the undergraduate teacher education program (those in their second semester and those in their final internship) were asked to participate and from this pool a group of nine participants for each group was selected. The faculty members in charge of the recruitment, teaching, and assessing of these teachers were consulted in order to determine which individuals were selected. This process involved a meeting with the professors in which this researcher described the

purpose and intents of this study and answered any clarifying questions that might arise as a result of the discussion.

Three faculty members were consulted, each having knowledge of the three groups described above. All three faculty members had worked with each of the groups in some capacity (either as supervisors or instructors). The faculty members provided the researcher with the names of nine individuals and provided a brief rationale for their selection. This process was also documented and discussed in chapter five. The individuals from each group were then contacted and asked to participate. The first six participants contacted in the groups of the recently graduated teachers and preprofessional teachers in their second semester agreed to participate. However, two potential participants in the group in their final internship declined to participate. The list of nine potential participants provided by the faculty was then consulted and the next two individuals contacted chose to participate. Therefore, the process for the additional selection of participants was not undertaken.

All the participants involved in this study were at one point associated with a class taught or were supervised by this researcher. However, at the time of the interviews, none of the participants were directly associated in either capacity with this researcher, nor did their grades or standing with the university have any connection to their participation with this research project. It is believed that because this researcher had previously established rapport with the participants, a more involved and open interview process was undertaken. The prior knowledge of participants' backgrounds and the knowledge of the program they were involved in also added to the interview process and



led to some unexpected, yet beneficial results (this will be discussed further in chapter five).

The final 18 participants were all female. Their ages ranged from twenty to forty-six. All of the participants were in good standing with the university and were all progressing through their teacher education program in the planned sequence. Each of the three participant groups consisted of six participants. The reason for having that specific number of participants is related to the level at which saturation occurs. Essentially, saturation within the process of gathering information is the point at which no new information could be collected that would contribute to answering the proposed research questions (Berg, 2009). However, as previously stated, if more participants were needed in order to accurately address the research questions, the consultation process listed above will be repeated (it was not). Figure 9 represents the process for selection of each group along with the contingency plan to collect more data.

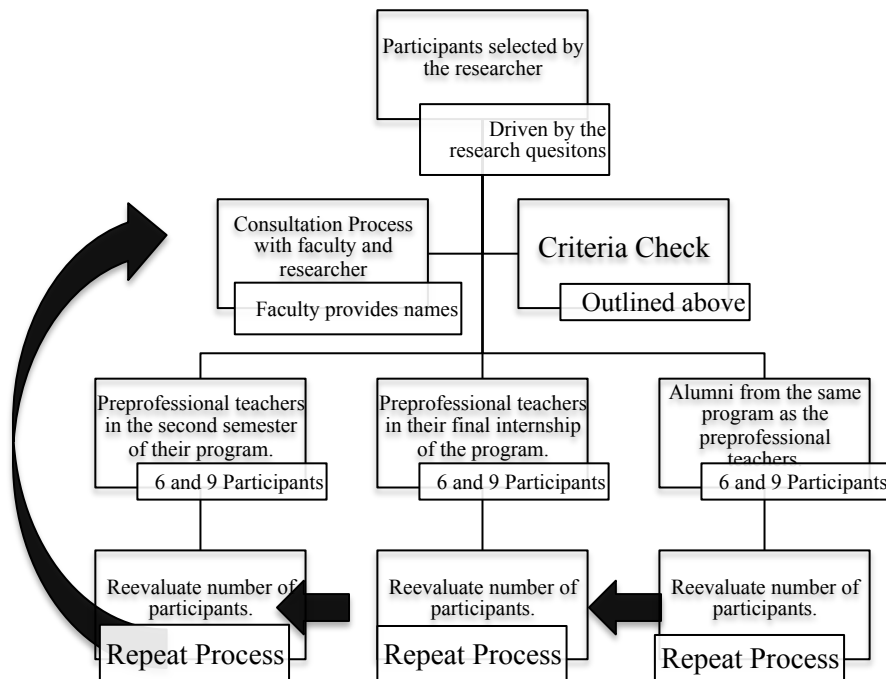


Figure 9. Above is the structure outline for participant selection for each group.

## **Data Collection**

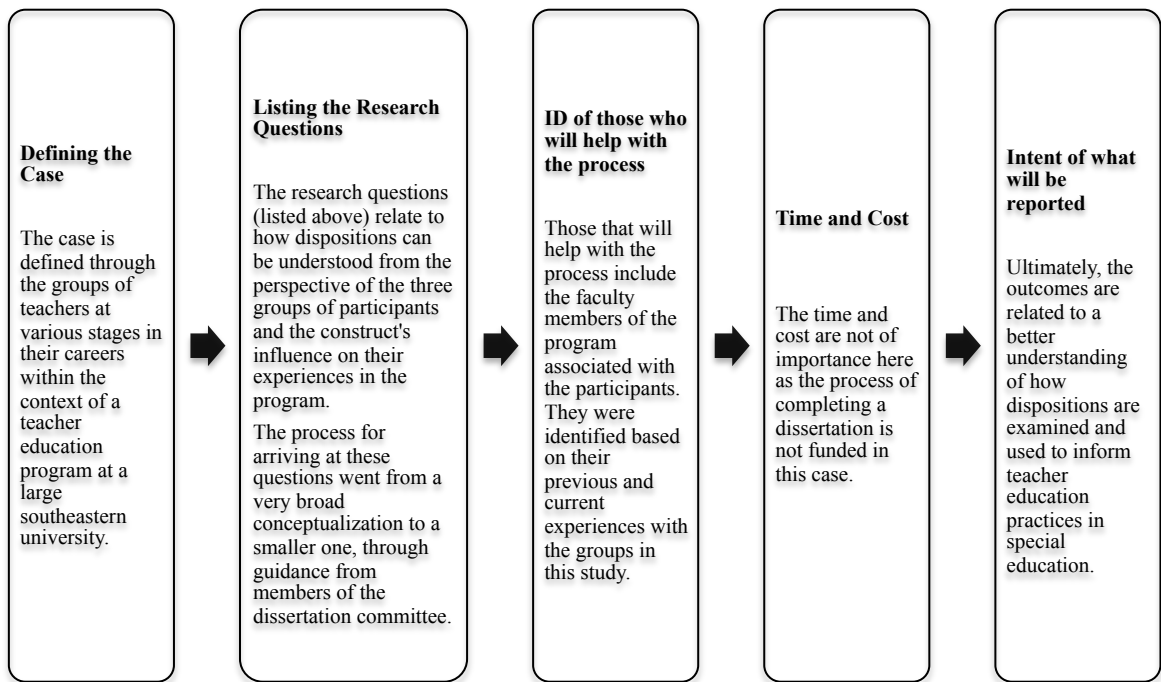
### **Pre Data Collection Considerations**

The collection of data, according to Stake (1999), involves a process that is adaptable and ever evolving. In order to capture a rich depiction of the case that will ultimately contribute to the knowledge that is sought Stake (1999) noted that, “There is no particular moment when data gathering begins. It begins before there is commitment to do the study” (p. 49). The first impression is crucial in developing an understanding, but the researcher should also keep an open-mind and consider multiple realities. This could begin with getting acquainted with the case and drawing from one’s previous experience.

This researcher has some experience with interviewing professionals in other settings related to the employability of youth from marginalized backgrounds. This project involved interviewing several employers of individuals from marginalized backgrounds, analyzing the information through an open-coding process, writing up the analysis based on this information, and disseminating the information at a national conference of education professionals. Although that particular project is unrelated to the current examination, as it was completed with a different population for a different purpose, this experience is noted in order to delineate the fact that this is not the first time this researcher is conducting interviews for the purpose of data collection.

Stake (1999) outlined several steps that are essential to the data gathering process which include: defining the case, listing one’s research questions (going from a large list to a small list), the identification of those who will assist the process, an examination of what time is allocated, how much it will cost, and the intention of what is to be reported.

This plan will help the researcher to conceptualize not just what is being examined, but why it is in the forefront of the agenda. For this particular project, these steps become an essential piece of efficiently and accurately capturing data on dispositions. Figure 10 is a list of the steps contextualized within this project.



*Figure 10.* From left to right, the process for data gathering suggested by Stake (1999) is delineated as it relates to this project.

Case studies can be evaluated in a number of ways and Stake (1999) proposed that researchers examine certain criteria for the assessment before gathering data. These include communication, content, method, and practicality. Other important aspects to consider are: clarity, integrity, attractiveness (to the readers), case definition, identification of issues, data resources, the reasonable selection of the case, outlining data gathering activities, considering triangulation for validation, how the participants accessed the study, if it is protecting identifies, and how much it will cost to conduct the

research. All of these elements relate to preparation and help to get the researcher's mindset in the right place for the actual gathering of data. This is essential as Stake (1999) also noted that researchers should tread lightly when conducting case study research as the disturbance of the instance we are examining could do more harm than good. Pre-planning can alleviate many of these concerns and integrate the researcher in the most unobtrusive and respectful manner possible. This process will be conducted throughout this study and is described in detail below.

### **Interview Process**

According to Stake (1999), the interview process is meant to gather descriptions and interpretations of the individuals involved in the case study. Again, the concept of capturing multiple realities becomes the focus of the procedure. This is the point where the researcher's advanced planning becomes vital to the accurate accumulation of data. There is an art to asking pertinent questions in order to capture experiences and tell the story of the interviewee(s). Interviews are coupled with observations and the culmination of this process should contribute to the perceptions of the respondent and the linkage to an explanation. Therefore, questions in the interview should not be simplistic. Instead, they should be derived from the overarching questions from within the study.

In order to conduct the interviews with the preprofessional teachers (both groups) and the first year teachers, with Stake's (1999) conceptualization of the interview process in mind, Berg's (2009) model of the semi-standardized interview was utilized. This was due to the fact that Berg (2009) allows for an open format for questioning, which is essential to understanding dispositions from the various perspectives in this study

because of the construct's relativity and ambiguity. Semi-standardized interviews were conducted with the six participants within each group.

According to Berg (2009), the semi-standardized interview process involves the researcher asking a number of predetermined questions in a systematic fashion allowing for some digression. Probing questions can be asked if the researcher wants to know more about a particular answer and delve into subject matter that might not have been planned for, but relates to the overarching research questions. This procedure is pertinent to the proposed project because interview questions within a semi-standardized format will allow the researcher to delve deeper into the perceptions and opinions of the participants. Therefore, the information obtained through the flexibility associated with the standardized questions can be enhanced in a way that allows for a more introspective and socially contextualized account of the phenomenon.

Standardized protocols for questions were developed (see Appendix B) in order to delineate the main ideas as they connected to the research questions (description and questions listed below). Again, this list of questions included deviations in the process through the use of probing questions and other inquires. In order to complete this task, an interview schedule was developed and acted as an outline for the categories to be examined (Berg, 2009). As suggested by Berg (2009), the conceptual questions were listed out in order to understand what needed to be asked in relation to the overarching research questions. This was completed through a chart with the essential questions listed on one side and the research questions on the other. Obviously, more than one essential question was necessary in order to address the overarching concepts within the smaller number of research questions.

Once these major theoretical concepts were listed, this researcher began to list specific questions under each category. Alterations to the specific questions will then be made in order to account for issues such as length, wording, and clarity of inquiry. The use of complex versus straightforward questions will be taken into consideration because, based on this researcher's previous experience interviewing professionals, complex questions can often be misinterpreted. However, if the questions are too dichotomous, the participants might not elaborate on their answers. For this project, the questions listed also had clarifying questions in order to determine what is meant by certain response. This allowed the questions to get at the "why" behind certain answers (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The questions were vetted with members of this researcher's dissertation committee, as well as one other confederate outside of this study. This process involved providing the research questions, a brief description of the project, and the interview questions to the colleagues listed above. Those individuals then read through the questions and provided any feedback necessary to clarify the questions. This researcher then altered the questions and returned them to the individuals involved for another round of reviewing. After the questions were received and reviewed again, several student participants (not associated with this project) were asked to provide feedback in a similar fashion to the process described above. Again, their feedback was taken into consideration and the necessary alterations were made and the final protocol was developed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Questions of a more sensitive nature were presented as well in order to validate questions within each conceptual area. The

essential questions were embedded within each of the categories and will be accompanied by probing questions.

### **Interview Protocol Development**

**Interview process.** Due to the murkiness surrounding the topic of dispositions in teacher education, interview techniques were utilized to allow the researcher an opportunity to delve into the concept in ways that quantitative research would not allow (Baldwin, 2010; Tillman & Richards, 2010). The interviews for each group of teachers were similar in terms of both the types of questions and the process by which the interviews were conducted. Because the research questions were related to how teachers define, construct, and determine the influence of their dispositions, the process began with open-ended questions related to how each participant defined his or her disposition.

Next, NCATE's (2006) definition of dispositions was given to the participants and they were asked to read it to themselves. They were then asked to compare and contrast their personal views with that of NCATE's (2006) definition. Finally, the participants were asked to analyze NCATE's (2006) definition and add any other comments related to their conceptualization of dispositions. The interview process was semi-structured (described above). This was a process that allowed for the interviewer to deviate from the protocol based on certain responses. The semi-structured interview method allowed the researcher to pursue interesting and relevant topics in-vivo with questions that were not listed on the interview protocol (Berg, 2009). The initial questions for this protocol were as follows:

1. How do you define your dispositions as they apply to becoming a special education teacher?

- a. Why do you think dispositions are important to define, assess, and understand within a teacher education program?
  - b. Do you think your dispositions have contributed to your successes and/or setbacks in your program?
    - i. If so (with successes or setbacks), why?
      - 1. In what ways did they affect your outcomes (either by a semester basis or overall)?
2. [Provide the participant with NCATE's (2006) definition and allow them to read through the document.] How do you think your definition of dispositions is similar and/or different from what you have just read?
- a. What changes, if any, would you make to that definition?
    - i. If changes were listed, why would you make those changes?
    - ii. If no changes are needed, why?
3. In your opinion, what do you think are some positive and negative aspects of how accreditation institutions (such as NCATE) and thus teacher education programs in special education define dispositions?
- a. Can teacher education programs teach dispositions?
    - i. If so, from your perspective, how do you think they do this?
    - ii. If no, how can they implement a plan to teach dispositions for future preprofessional teachers?
  - b. Why is important for teacher education programs and/or schools to consider dispositions when assessing teachers (as candidates and/or employees)?



4. Do you have any other comments or suggestions related to dispositions and how they affect your future practice or the practices of teacher education programs in special education?

These questions were connected to the research questions in that they attempted to draw out the participants' opinions about dispositions, as well as their opinion about how that related to the accreditation institution's definition. Additionally, because the questions were assigned to each participant group, the interview questions were contextualized, which led to a clearer delineation of the data that was examined. Again, because the interviews were semi-standardized (Berg, 2009), other questions were asked. These questions and their supposed intents were also examined in the analysis section of this project. The interview process and the questions listed above were to be a reflection of one aspect of Stake's (1999) case study method and provided a rich source of data from the three participant groups. The other processes within this case study including the document analysis and reflection process are described in the following sections. The questions for the interviews were vetted with both this researcher's colleagues and a sample of five participants in order to determine if the questions were a valid representation of the purpose and intents of this study.

The individual interviews lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. The interviews for the professional teachers in their second semester averaged 17 minutes, the interviews for the professional teachers in their second semester averaged 29 minutes, and the average time for the interviews with the recently graduated teachers averaged 32 minutes. Several interviews were conducted via Skype, while the others were conducted in person at a mutually agreed upon site outside of the public school system associated with the

university where the participants were enrolled. There were no issues with the recording of the interviews and all participants agreed to the terms of the consent form provided for them (no signed consent was obtained as a waiver of signed consent was obtained through the IRB process).

### **Document Review**

The process of examining documents is similar to guidelines of observing and interviewing. The documents should be relevant to what is being studied and contribute in a way that develops the overall understanding of the case (Stake, 1999). Documents were reviewed in relation to the current definition and assessment process of dispositions within the special education teacher education program in order to determine what is currently in place. Again, this was related to the current status of how the department assesses dispositions and allow for a broader understanding of the context of the program.

After obtaining the information related to how the university-based program collects data on dispositions, additional sources of document review included data from the preprofessional teachers involved in the program. This included examining the reflections from students, which were used to assess dispositions. A comparison was then made between the opinions and perceptions of the professionals from the interviews with the actual evidence collected by the researcher. This allowed for a more contextualized understanding of how certain evidences are created in order to assess and understand preprofessional teacher dispositions.

### **Reflections and Painting**

Reflection upon practice is also important and requires certain levels of “sensitivity and skepticism” (Stake, 1999, p. 50). Therefore, the researcher kept a journal

as part of his professional development and practice. This journal was kept from the inception of the writing process until the completion of the study. This allowed for some insight into the development of a dissertation and the topic of studying teacher dispositions in special education. There was no precise format for the reflections, but instead they will be open-ended and allow for a free flow of ideas, frustrations, and introspections (Cunliffe, 2004). A painting was also created in accordance with the reflective journal and will be used as a creative outlet. Painting can be used as a method for self-study and acts as a creative outlet that can enhance reflective journaling practices (Samaras, 2010). The creation process with the painting was also discussed within the reflexive journal. This process allowed for this researcher to understand the process of becoming an expert in a certain area through reflective practice (Stake, 1999). Although case study research does not promote the use of painting directly, there was the interpretation from the conceptualizations promoted by Stake (1999) that gathering data from a unique source could contribute meaningfully to the triangulation and analysis of the data related to the participants.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Analysis Considerations**

In terms of analyzing data, Stake (1999) provided no specific timeline and insisted that analysis should occur throughout the case study. Stake (1999) noted that, “Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations...Analysis essentially means taking something apart” (p. 71). The process of analysis is in perpetual motion. The interviews and document reviews were all meant to give meaning to the case and the researcher’s goal was interpret them in a way that

coincides with what knowledge is to be acquired. The reflection ties all of these pieces together and can be used as a way to examine the process of data collection and the information obtained.

The objective of the analysis was to take the all-encompassing information that has been gathered and make sense of it all. However, analysis in this sense is seemingly never-ending. The realization that the case exists amongst others and that our experience within that instance will induce certain conclusions that are only relative to the broader scope of the phenomenon could be discouraging. Yet it is the art of the research that is important to understand and the aesthetic principles generated from the researcher's examination could be considered just as valuable as a large quantitatively analyzed set of data (Stake, 1999).

### **Interview Analysis**

This research project utilized an open-coding process for the analysis of the interview data, which involved a procedure of the data informing the analysis in a logical and reciprocal manner. This multi-step open-coding procedure was used in order to examine the data from the interviews with the three groups of participants (Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005). The interviews were transcribed and inputted into the ATLAS.ti software program for analysis. The coding process involved the constant comparison of the information within each of the interviews.

The constant comparison process involved reading through all the transcripts from the interviews several times. The researcher then read through the material again, adding codes to selections of text. These codes were what the researcher perceived as the commonalities between the transcriptions as they relate to the overarching research

questions. Finally, the researcher further summarized those codes into categories (or families). The categories are broader than the codes and could contain multiple constructs, again with the purpose of synthesizing the large amount of information presented in the interviews (Berg, 2009). This information were then analyzed by another colleague through the member checking process (described in detail below).

The interviews were split into three separate groups, each with a set of interviews coinciding with their designation in and outside of the program (thirty-three percent of the interviews were with preprofessional teachers in their second semester; thirty-three percent with preprofessional teachers in their final internship; and thirty three percent with recently graduated teachers). In order to contextualize the information the groups were analyzed in a specific order. Because the recently graduated teachers had the most experience with teaching and had completed the program successfully, it was anticipated that they would provide the most contextualized information in the interviews, followed by the preprofessional teachers in their final internship, and the preprofessional teachers in their second semester.

Upon the initial inspection of the data, this presumption was confirmed, as the recently graduated teachers were able to contextualize their answers to the interview questions and provide examples through their experiences in a more sophisticated manner. Therefore, the recently graduated teacher transcripts were openly coded first, followed by the preprofessional teachers in their final internship, and then the preprofessional teachers in their second semester. This allowed the data to be coded with the richest set being analyzed first. Again, this process assisted with obtaining a

perspective on not just what the participants were experiencing, but how they matriculated through the process and the differences that experience inflicted.

As suggested by Berg (2009), six participants were selected from each of the three groups in order to increase the probability that data saturation would occur. The final groups included individuals who are preprofessional teachers in their second semester of the program (n=6), preprofessional teachers in their final internship (n=6), and alumni of the teacher education program (n=6). Through a semi-standardized interview format, all participants were asked a series of questions that were connected to the research questions for this study. The questions (found in Appendix B) were the same for the groups of preprofessional teachers, and altered slightly for the recently graduated teachers (due to the fact that the participants were not currently enrolled in the program).

### **Structure of Analysis**

Chapter four includes an analysis of the interview data collected for this collective case study examination of dispositions in special education teacher education. A two-step process was conducted for analyzing the interviews which involved first analyzing and coding the information related to each of the groups and then the researcher determined what information was shared between two groups and what information was unique to the individual groups (Charmaz, 2008). The first section described the process undertaken to analyze the data from the interviews in general. Next, the information condensed into codes and their subsequent families was delineated as they related to the overall purpose of the study. Afterward, because each of the research questions were related to a specific group (e.g. question one pertained to the preprofessional teachers in

their final internship), each question was addressed individually and connected with the findings related to the associated group.

Initial definitions for the codes were created through memoing and were then refined throughout the process until a common definition for the codes across the groups was determined. The memoing process involved the creation of an initial definition based on the excerpts from the interviews, with the allowance for change based on the further examination of the data. Final definitions were set after all 18 transcripts were examined and then reviewed. Finally, the researcher further summarized those codes by placing them into families (Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005). The families were broader than the codes and contained multiple constructs, again with the purpose of synthesizing the large amount of information presented in the interviews into a useable product (Berg, 2009). Finally, the information was triangulated with an expert reviewer and a sample of participants through a member-checking process (described in the member-checking section at the end of chapter four).

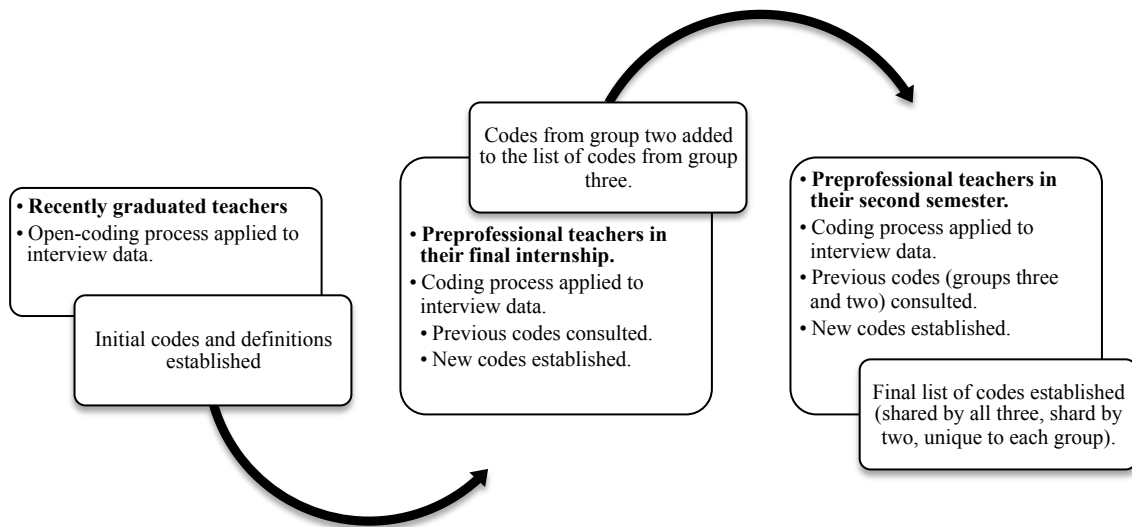
### **Group-by-Group Coding**

Due to the fact that each group was asked a similar set of questions (see Appendix B for question protocols), a thematic coding process was undertaken (Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005). The first step in the process was to read through all of the interviews from all of the groups. The order of the groups was determined by their experience with teaching. Therefore, data from the recently graduated teachers were analyzed first, the data from the preprofessional teachers in their final internship, and finally the data from the preprofessional teachers in their second semester. The idea behind this order was that the group with the most experience could potentially provide information that could be

related to the data from the interviews with the other groups. This was because the recently graduated teachers had previous experiences with the program and the courses and were involved in practicum placements similar to those undertaken by the preprofessional teacher groups. Additionally, at the time of the interviews, the recently graduated teachers were employed by a school district and would have taught in their own classroom for approximately five months.

The following active analysis process was modeled after the *intra*-interview (themes discussed by members of one group) and *inter*-interview (similar themes discussed by different participants across groups) data analysis procedures as suggested by Charmaz (2008). First an open-coding process was conducted with the interview data from the recently graduated teachers and a set of initial codes were established (Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005). Next a coding process was implemented with the interview data from preprofessional teachers in their final internship. The list of initial codes was kept from the recently graduated teachers and was applied, where appropriate, to the text excerpts from the interviews with the preprofessional teachers in their final internship. However, if an excerpt from the interview from the preprofessional teachers in their final internship did not match the codes previously established, a new code was created. Finally, the same coding process was implemented for the interview data from the preprofessional teachers in their second semester. Again, the established list of codes was consulted (from groups three and two), but, if a text excerpt necessitated an entirely new code, that code was created as a unique entity. Figure 11 below is a representation of this process.





*Figure 11.* The coding process by groups, as suggested by Charmaz (2008).

In order to code the groups in this sequential order the process of active coding was conducted. This involved an analysis of how each set of codes from each group built upon one another and created an inter-interview set of data (similar themes discussed by different participants) (Charmaz, 2008). This process, adapted from Charmaz (2008), related to the questions that codes should answer related to the research questions. Codes should be “active, immediate, and short” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 216) and should focus on how actions are manifested, assumptions conveyed, and processes delineated by the participants, thus setting the foundation for analysis.

### **Connection of Data Collection to Case Study Research**

In case study research, this process is related to the concept of an “aggregation of instances” (Stake, 1999, p. 74). Essentially, the process allows the researcher to get a sense of the case from multiple perspectives, while still maintaining the competences established by information from multiple representations of the collective case. The

information from the groups of participants built throughout the analysis, until a point of saturation occurred. The meanings of the codes are then drawn from the various instances and this allows for an expression of the complexities associated with a topic such as dispositions in teacher education. The process implemented also allowed for the “winnowing” (Stake, 1999, p. 84) of information into categories (or families), which will be discussed in detail below. This process of winnowing assisted in making sense of the large amount of data from the interviews and put the data into a more succinct format.

### **Process of Confirmation**

#### **Member Checking**

One process that was employed within this particular study is member checking. This was completed with a researcher outside of this project. The professionals involved in the case study examination also provided valuable information that helps shape the interpretation of the data. Stake (1999) noted that member checking involves a process where, “the actor is requested to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of the actors are featured, sometimes when first written up but usually when no further data will be collected from him or her” (p.115). The purpose was to assess the accuracy and palatability of the information that has been gathered by the researcher. Although not all of the feedback was included in the final report, it is important to understand the sensitivity of one’s interpretation. The actor could object to the actual information or the way it is presented and the researcher should make the appropriate alterations in order to ensure participant approval. Stake (1999) noted that participants do not always involve themselves in the process, but when they do the report can be enhanced.

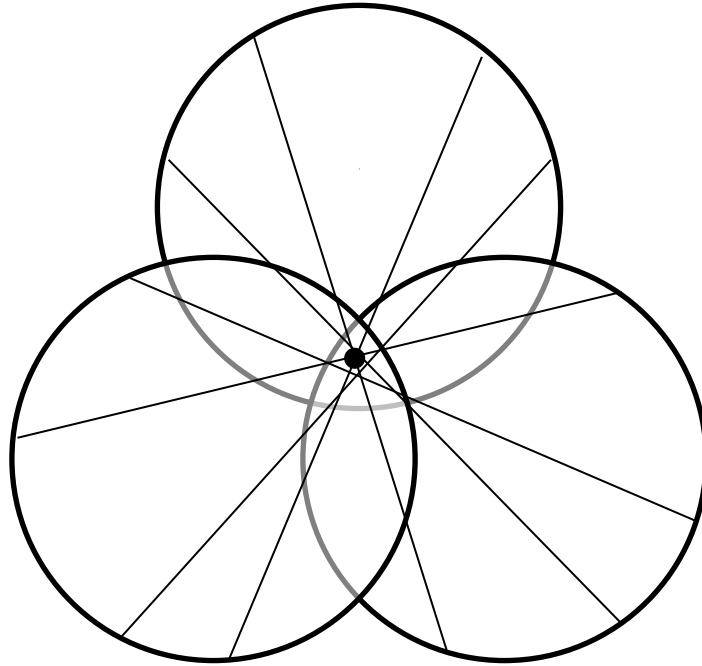
The member checking process for this project was conducted with a colleague involved in the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data in an attempt to legitimize the findings (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The colleague was given a sample of the interviews and their codes as well as the subsequent quotations and how they are organized within the themes (or categories). This allowed the researcher to confirm or reassess the analysis of the information gathered, because if the colleagues analyzing the information do not reach consensus on the codes, there might be an issue with the data collected. Additionally, a sample of nine participants was contacted and given a transcript of their interview as well as the codes, their definitions and the family names and their definitions. They were asked if the interview and the subsequent interpretations are a valid representation of their participation within the scope of the project.

### **Triangulation**

The data collected was vetted through a triangulation process. The triangulation process assists the researcher in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of  $\Theta$ . Stake (1999) noted that researchers must go beyond common sense in order to gain an understanding of the case and the protocols used should be affixed with the symbol  $\Delta$  (delta) in order to denote where triangulation occurred. The goal of the process is to move towards creating a reliable and valid representation of the phenomenon being examined. In order to explain how triangulation works, Stake (1999) compares what researchers do to a sailor attempting to navigate a ship by the alignment of stars (visually represented below in Figure 12).

The multiple interviews conducted and their examination by the researcher and his or her colleagues are similar to the lines created by the stars as calculated by the

sextant. The more instances within the case that is accumulated, the closer we as researchers can get to find a description of the case (the black dot in the center). Although location and meaning are two different concepts, the point is that the descriptions provided must be uncontested and come from interpretations based on our own logic with an in-depth understanding of the data gathered.



*Figure 12.* A visual representation of triangulation as compared to celestial navigation (adapted from Stake, 1999). The lines represent the data sources (e.g., observations, interviews, etc.) and their analysis. The dot in the center is the meaning that is derived from the process. The circles represent the various forms of data collection including interviews, observations, and archival document review.

Triangulation involves confirmation and Stake (1999) recommended that if certain meanings are not clear, an outside party could be consulted. Because this research project will use protocols for interviews and observations, this process becomes important to creating a professional confirmation with the data found. The various types

include: data source triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, or methodological triangulation. An explanation of these protocols and developed by Denzin (1984; 1989) can be found below in Table 2. Stake (1999) noted, “Triangulation regularly sends us back to the drawing board” (p. 114). This issue is compounded by the degree to which a researcher believes reality is constructed and triangulation often results in multiple interpretations rather than a distinct meaning. The positive and negative aspects of the triangulation process will be taken into consideration within this project.

Table 2

*Triangulation Protocols and Descriptions*

Triangulation Protocol	Description
Data Source	Look to see if the phenomenon remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as the person interacts differently.
Investigator	Have other researchers look at the same scene or phenomenon and interpret (with our without your input). This can be through direct or secondary observation.
Theory	Choosing co-observers, panelists, or reviewers from alternate theoretical viewpoints (e.g. a behaviorist and holist).
Methodological	Direct observation followed by a review of old records to garner confirmation of the phenomena.

For this study, each of the categories listed in Table 2 was taken into consideration when examining the collected data. The fact that multiple groups of participants at various stages in their careers were participating assists with the first stage

of sourcing the data. In terms of the second category, this investigator had a colleague examine samples of the data collected in order to confirm the researcher's analysis. The selection of that colleague took into account the third category, that of a varying theoretical background. Therefore, an individual was selected that did have a different research background. Finally, the last category in Table 2 was addressed through the collection of data via multiple sources and making a comparative analysis through the coding process listed above.

Additionally, the participants in the preprofessional teachers in their final internship were asked to write a bi-weekly reflective journal related to the ethical and moral principles on becoming a special education teacher (Tillman & Richards, 2010). This group was selected for triangulation purposes based on the fact that they were in their final internship. This meant that they had just come out of their first year in the program and were anticipating going into the field. Essentially, they were in the middle of their transition. Therefore, this group could provide insight into the process of becoming a teacher in special education and examine elements experienced by the other groups. This information was used as an additional source of evidence for the triangulation of the data. The process for the reflective journaling is described in chapter two and will be discussed in detail after the analysis of the interview data from all three groups in chapter four.

### **Presentation of Findings**

The presentation of the results of a case study should be delineated in a manner that allows the reader to understand the story being told in an efficient and meaningful way (Stake, 1999). It is important to understand who will be reading the report because

the intent is to not bog the reader down or provide too little information, but instead attempt to replicate what is happening in the field as closely as possible in relation to the research questions proposed. Stake (1999) suggested that the development of the report should include the chronological or biographical development of the case, an infusion of the researcher's view of the case, and the description one-by-one of several major components of the case. The presentation of a case is not necessarily linear in fashion and can draw on interpretations from the researcher in a meaningful way in order to create a sense that although this case is one of many in the field, the story still needs to be told.

The report can be organized in a number of different ways, however, as Stake (1999) suggested, the context of the case and why it is operating as it does should be in the forefront of the report. Additionally, factors such as the research questions, the context, and the history of the case all need to be developed and analyzed. In order to complete this task, the "Critique Checklist for a Case Study Report" (Stake, 199, p. 131) was completed by this researcher in order to more effectively review and analyze the content of what is being presented. The structure of the report is displayed below in Table 3. Although this is the format suggested by Stake (1999), there were several amendments due to the nature of this project as it relates to context of what and who is being examined.

Table 3

*Case Study Report Organization*

Section	Description
Entry Vignette	Used so readers can get a sense of how to develop their vicarious experience (explain place and time).
Issue, identification, purpose, and method of study	Background of the case, the personal importance of the issues.
Extensive narrative description to further define case and contexts	The presentation of the body of uncontested data, along with the researcher's interpretation.
Development of issues	In the middle of the report, key issues (not generalizations) are developed to help the reader understand the complexity of the case.
Descriptive detail, documents, quotations, triangulating data	The description of the issues that need further probing. This is the place for the most confirming experiential data. The presentation of triangulations occurs here, in terms of both confirmations and disconfirmations.
Assertions	Provide information, which allows readers to reconsider their knowledge of the case, or to modify generalizations. The researcher should describe how the case might have changed conceptually or in terms of a level of confidence.
Closing Vignette	The ending is on an experiential note, which reminds the reader that the report is just one person's encounter of a complex case.

The changes that need to be made to the above descriptions of the categories are related to the nature and purpose of this particular examination and will not necessarily be described in discrete categories. For example, the presentation of the data will have



less of a narrative element due to the intended delineation of the information obtained and its presentation to the readers. Additional amendments to the report for the purposes of this project included a more complex and demarcated development of the issues through a discussion section that provides certain conclusions and generalizations related to the examination of the case. Therefore, although Stake's (1999) suggestions were taken into consideration, there will be more of a traditional structure to the sections of this particular examination for the purpose of accurately depicted what was found and how it was interpreted by the researcher for this project.

The presentation of the data included a delineation of how the information gathered related to the research questions. The implication of the data was also discussed in a way that allows for the reader to draw conclusions about the size and scope of the project. Because this study is oriented with Stake's (1999) case study method, the relative nature of the information gathered must be taken into consideration. This is only one of many cases occurring at universities throughout the nation. Therefore, it will be important for the researcher to distinguish this point, but still be able to add to the body of research in the area of dispositions in special education teacher education in a meaningful way.

Finally, a reflective process was carried out by the researcher throughout the development of this project as suggested by Stake (1999) and was incorporated into the final write-up as a way to introspectively examine the findings and purpose the project. This allowed for the researcher to understand the case from his or her perspective and contextualize the role of the researcher within the process of gathering data and interpreting the results. Additionally, this permitted the researcher to understand how

subjective a case study is and how previous personal experiences have affected the assessment of what is happening within and outside of the situation outside presented. Qualitative research is extremely personal in nature and reflection on the process should add to the value of what is being presented and connect the story with the author.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **FINDINGS**

The overall purpose of this study was to determine how preprofessional teachers and recently graduated teachers associated with a special education teacher preparation program perceived the effects of their dispositions on their experiences in the program. This information will potentially inform the practices of the teacher education program in special education. Due to the fact that NCATE (2006) requires an accredited program to assess dispositions and because the research on the subject focuses on programs mainly outside of special education (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011; Villegas, 2007), there is a need to examine the topic from both an individual and contextual standpoint.

#### **Case Study Method**

The case study method (Stake, 1999) was implemented for this study. The collective case, as it is defined for the intents and purposes of this study, was the university experience shared by the participants within and across each of the three participant groups, as it was related to the participants' dispositions. The collective case study presented here is one that provided a description of how dispositions influenced preprofessional teachers' and recently graduated teachers' experiences in a university program and ultimately how their teaching practices could be affected. Interviews and document analysis were utilized to gain a deeper understanding of how disposition(s)

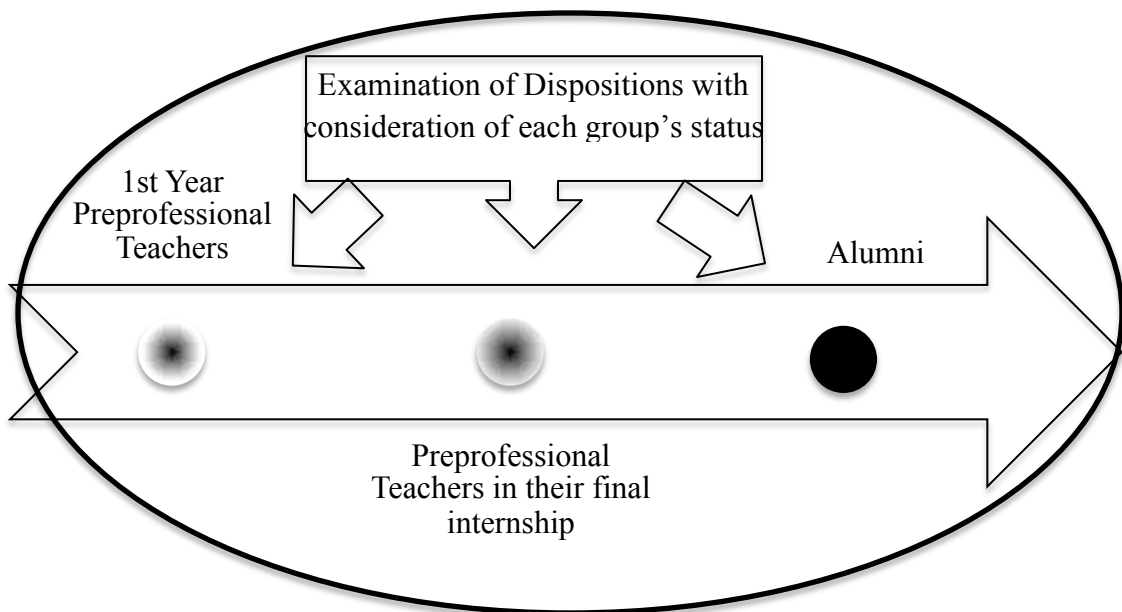
affected the conceptualizations of teaching practices for these preprofessional and recently graduated teachers.

The focus of the study was on the use of the *art* of case study (Stake, 1999), rather than a direct examination of the case through the direct use of the method. This perspective came as a result of the data and the unexpected, yet valuable, results that were found. Stake (1999) noted that, “Initial research questions may be modified or even replaced in mid-study by the case researcher. The aim is to thoroughly understand theta” (Stake, 1999, p. 9). Although the research questions in this project did not change, in retrospect, they could have, and a more flexible interpretation of case study was utilized in order to examine the data in a meaningful fashion.

Despite these unexpected changes to the conceptualization of the project based on the data, the project was still considered, in the opinion of this researcher, to be a case study. Stake (1999) noted, “Case study work is often said to be ‘progressively focused’ (i.e. the organizing concepts change somewhat as the study moves along)” (Stake, 1999, p. 133). This was certainly the case in this research project and in order to display the data from the case in the most accurate fashion, a more personal and anecdotal approach was undertaken. Stake (1999) promoted the concept of the case as not needing to fit into a framework, but instead to for the researcher to allow the information gathered through the various sources to dictate the manner in which it is presented. As Stake (1999) postulated, “Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art” (p. 136). The hope was that this research project promoted such a conceptualization and provided a level of interactive communication that allowed for a deeper understanding of a complex topic through the voices of the participants.

## The Case

The figure below (Figure 13) represents the case. Each of the participants within the group had different experiences within the program and had different views about how dispositions influenced their involvement in the program and ultimately their teaching practices. However, the commonality between the groups is that they have or are participating in similar courses and/or practicum settings within the same special education teacher education program.



*Figure 13.* Above is a visual representation of the case being examined. The three groups vary in regards to the stage of their teaching career across time, represented by the arrow and the gradated dots. All of the groups are associated with the same NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program (represented by the outside circle).

## Research Questions

The research questions for this study were focused on an examination of how preprofessional teachers in their second semester and those in their final internship perceived the emphasis and influence of dispositions within their program. Additionally, recently graduated teachers associated with the same program were interviewed in order to determine their perceptions on the meaning of dispositions and how they relate to their practice. The intents and purposes of this study were to examine how participants perceive dispositions and their impact on their teaching practices. The interview questions and how they are connected to the research questions can be found in Table A1 in Appendix A. The following is a list of the research questions for this project:

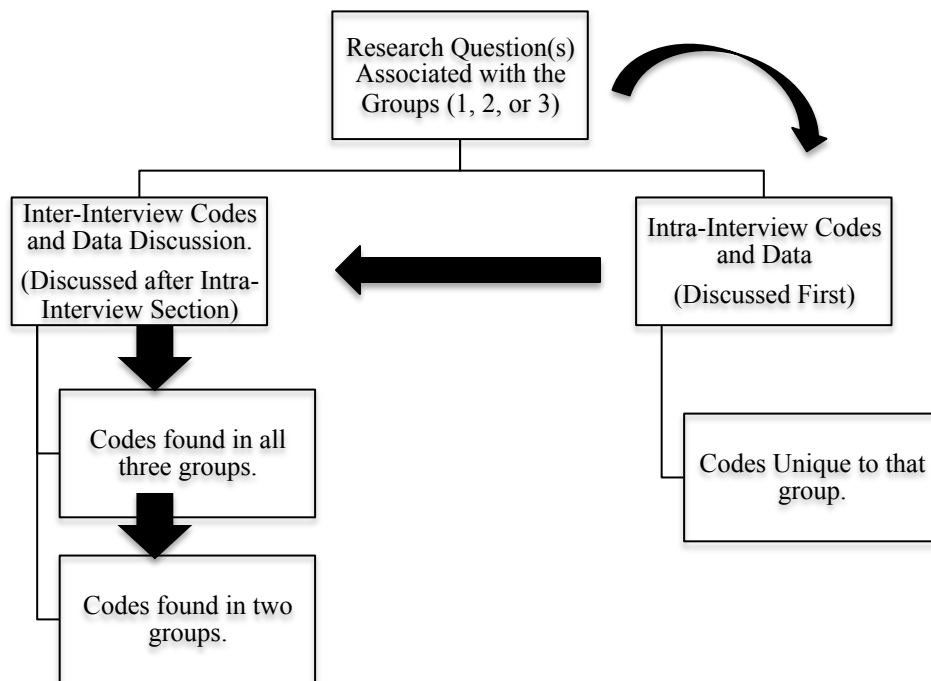
1. How do the preprofessional teachers in their final internship, enrolled in an NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program, perceive the ways their dispositions have changed, or not, throughout their participation in the program?
  - a. What perceived effects have dispositions and their subsequent transformations had on the participants' successes and/or setbacks within the program?
2. How do the preprofessional teachers in their first year, second semester of their program (at the same NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program as above) perceive the ways in which their dispositions influence their experiences in the university program and what will eventually be their future practice?

3. How do recently graduated from the same NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program as above) perceive the ways in which their dispositions changed across their program and now into their first year of teaching?
  - a. How did their dispositions contribute to their successes and/or setbacks in their program?
  - b. How does their understanding of their dispositions influence their current practice?

### **Presentation of Research Questions Analyses**

The following sections will address each research question posed in this study. Codes and the quotes from the interviews that supported them will be presented in order to connect the data with the research questions (see Figure A1 in Appendix A). The association of the codes and their quotes adheres to the method of presentation as suggested by Stake (1999). This format of presented synthesized information along with contextualized quotes allows the researcher to tell the story of the participants through their own words. The data from the reflections in the triangulation section will be presented in a similar fashion. Additionally, because many commonalities were found between the groups, the format for the discussion of the results was altered to reflect this outcome. Essentially, the findings will be examined and discussed first from an *intra* (themes discussed by that group which were unique to that group) perspective and then from an *inter* (themes discussed by that group also found in the other groups) (Charmaz, 2008).

First, each research question (specifically related to each group) is stated and the codes unique (intra-findings) to that particular group associated with that research question are examined and discussed (see Figure 14). Following that discussion, the results related to the commonalities between the three groups are discussed. Within this “inter-interview” examination of the group, codes that were found to appear in all three groups will be presented first, followed by the codes that were found to appear in the group being discussed and one of the other groups. All the codes discussed within each section were pertinent to addressing the research question listed (note that not all codes will be discussed in each section, as not all of the codes pertained to the research questions listed).



*Figure 14.* Above are the possible categories for analysis for the research questions. These include Intra-Findings (unique to one group), Inter-Findings (between all three groups), and Inter-Findings (between two groups).



Not all of the research questions were associated with all the possible categories for discussion (listed in Figure 14). This is because certain codes and their subsequent information within the categories were not always connected directly to the research question. Therefore, a research question (or sub-question) might only have one or two of the categories listed above. The subsequent sections will include a discussion of how the families (or categories) for the codes associated with the findings from all the groups were synthesized. The final section will contain the triangulation procedures and the findings associated with that process.

### **RQ1 (Preprofessional Teachers in their Final Internship)**

*How do preprofessional teachers in their final internship, enrolled in an NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program, perceive the ways their dispositions have changed, or not, throughout their participation in the program?*

Research question one was related to how preprofessional teachers in their final internship perceived the ways in which their disposition(s) have changed as a result of their continued involvement in their teacher education program.

**Intra-findings.** Several codes were associated only with data collected from interview with participants from the preprofessional teachers in their final internship (a full list of the codes unique to each group can be found in Appendix C, Table C3). One code specifically was related to the first research question: *Colleague or Cohort Member Influence on Disposition(s)*. It is interesting to note that this code only appeared in the interviews with the preprofessional teachers in their final internship, even though the other groups were obviously associated with cohort members in their program. One

participant, when she discussed how the university facilitated discussions about dispositions, stated:

It's not like, 'We're going to discuss this policy,' or 'We're going to discuss this disability.' It's everything that we do, the cooperative learning, the different groups that we have, sitting in groups and when you say, 'Talk to each other', I think that that shapes who we are, the discussions that we have, what happens outside, the bonds that we form, and how we take that outside of school shapes it.

The comment emphasized how important collaboration is within a university program and how cohort members can shape other members' dispositions in a positive fashion. In order to do so the faculty members must facilitate an open format for student discussion. The impact might not be seen directly, but could influence how teachers interact with other teachers in their future practice.

#### **RQ1(a) (Preprofessional Teachers in their Final Internship)**

*What perceived effects have their [preprofessional teachers in their final internship] dispositions and their subsequent transformations had on their successes and/or setbacks within the program?*

**Intra-findings.** One code that was uniquely associated with how participants' disposition(s) contributed to their successes and/or setbacks in the program was, *Differentiation of Disposition(s) for Type of Teaching Environment*. Although not all comments made were directly related to the research question and the topic of disposition(s) contributing to successes, there were several comments that provided an interesting conceptualization of this relationship.

The differentiation of behavior by a teacher around students of a certain age is something that seems obvious, but could ultimately impact a teacher's practice in a negative fashion if this distinction is not made. As one participant stated:

I feel like a lot of times with kindergarten you have to have more patience and you have to have a different way of interacting with students. The way you interact with a five, six, seven-year-old is going to be vastly different from the way you interact with a 12, 13, 14-year-old in your mannerisms.

The interviews in this project revealed that many of the preprofessional teachers in their final internship had a preconceived notion about certain settings and what their role would be within a particular grade level. In order to be successful within the program, many of the teachers needed to adapt and be open to new experiences within their practicum settings. One participant described this situation and her ability to adapt to become successful should be noted:

When I first found out that I got Pre-K as my final internship I wasn't over the moon...I was kind of feeling that...I'm going to be a babysitter. I think that it's changed by being with them and realizing how important that role is being in Pre-K...I've changed my mind about a lot of things. I think that [the faculty in her program] taught us a lot about different dispositions about how it's going to change, how we're not always going to have the same idea.

Overall, the sentiment throughout the comments related to this code was one of being able to rid oneself of the rigid mentality that often accompanies the introduction to a new setting. Because the participants' teacher education program was geared towards providing them with multiple experiences in multiple types of settings, the "sink or

swim” mentality was one that was purveyed across several comments. For example, one participant stated:

I think that I just have to remember that if I’m confident in the lesson plans that I’m putting forth. If I’m comfortable in my own demeanor with the kids and just remembering what their age is, I think that I’ll be fine. I think that patience is still a virtue even when it comes to older kids.

Patience was cited by another participant as being a valuable asset when working with an age group that was not anticipated before entering a practicum setting. In order to have success in their future practice, it is important for preprofessional teachers to understand how to interact and teach in multiple grade levels and have patience with both the children and the process of becoming a teacher.

### **RQ2 (Preprofessional Teachers in their Second Semester)**

*How do the preprofessional teachers in the first year (second semester) of their program (at the same NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program as above) perceive the ways in which their dispositions influenced their matriculation through their program and what will eventually be their future practice?*

Research question two was related to how preprofessional teachers in their second semester of the program perceived the ways their disposition(s) had influenced how they had progressed through their program. Because these preprofessional teachers had only completed one semester and were now in the fourth week of their second semester of the program (at the time of the interviews), there were fewer comments related to their experiences in the field in support of their comments about disposition(s). This is, in part, due to how the university had designed the practicum experiences of the students (a

full description is available in chapter three). In their first semester, the preprofessional teachers are introduced to various schools settings through planned visits. In their second semester, the preprofessional teachers are more involved in the teaching process and have more opportunities to interact with students. Therefore, this research question was designed with the group's experiences in mind. Despite these experiential limitations regarding this group, information pertinent to disposition(s) was still expressed.

**Intra-findings.** There were only two codes unique to the group of preprofessional teachers in their second semester: *SPED and ELM Differences* and *Conflict of Program with Disposition(s)*. One possible reason for these codes being unique to professional teachers in their second semester could be that the participants had just recently made the decision to enter the field of special education and could have been considering elementary education (or another area outside of education) as a possible major. In terms of the conflict code, again, the participants had just entered the program within the last year and could be experiencing the strife that often occurs when entering a new situation with new individuals, each with their own personality.

Additionally, the participants seemed to be starting to exhibit a sense of pride in the profession of special education versus elementary education. One participant stated:

I think being a special educator, there's more to it than just being a gen-ed teacher. You have to be able to understand the demographics of our students. They're the kids that are always down, always told they can't do it. You have to be able to educate them as well as lift them up and tell them, yes, they can do it. It's not just your typical second-grader who you can just teach and then give them

a sticker and they're fine. You have to have that little extra to make sure they are successful.

This divergence is obviously not based on the purest form of reality of teaching, as often teachers work in collaborative settings. However, the comment could also be related to how individuals in certain situations convince themselves that they are doing something for the "greater good" which allows for confirmation of having made the right career choice.

The conflicts that arise as a result of interactions in a program are inevitably part of being a part of a cohort. As the preprofessional teachers began to associate less with the whole group, they would have hopefully become more independent, but at the same time become aware that when working in a school, all teachers need to be able to work together in some capacity. One participant shared this sentiment and confirmed in many ways how the involvement in a program can lead to incongruities between individuals:

...I'm going to be with the cohort all the time, but the following semester when we are on our own, I feel like it's going to be easier for me to get along and get by because I'm not hearing everyone else's complaints as much.

There was the sense during the interview (associated with the comment above) that this participant wanted to become more independent and get into the field as soon as possible to begin honing her practice. However, taking the program in its sequence should allow her to focus on whom she works with and not necessarily what she is working on in order to complete the requirements to graduate.

Overall, the codes and their associated comments from the preprofessional teachers in their second semester related to answering research question two highlighted

some of the differences between the groups and how experience can lead to perspective on one's self as a teacher. Again, because the preprofessional teachers in their second semester were relatively new to the program, there were still a number of concepts that needed to be more deeply examined, including what some of the disposition(s) are related to becoming a quality special education teacher. There were glimpses of these thoughts and conceptualizations and hopefully the participants in the group will continue to become more reflective and learn from their upcoming experiences in the field. In the next section, the findings associated with the third research question in this study, which was related to the recently graduated teachers, will be discussed.

### **RQ3 (Recently Graduated Teachers)**

*How do first-year teachers (recently graduated from the same NCATE accredited special education teacher preparation program as above) perceive the ways in which their dispositions have changed across their program and now into their first year of teaching?*

Research question three was related to how the recently graduated teachers perceived the ways in which their dispositions have changed going from the university to becoming a teacher in special education. All of the participants interviewed were employed at a school where they taught individuals with disabilities. The research questions for this group were designed with consideration for the fact that these teachers have the most experience in teaching.

**Intra-findings.** One code was found to be uniquely associated with the recently graduated teachers as it relates to above research question three: *Resilience of Disposition(s)*. As one participant stated, "And it's not to say that I don't have a bad

day...because we all do, but it can always be ... I say, it can always be worse; it could always be better, so you stand where you stand.” The participants seemed to recognize that this resilient attitude could be an important asset to teaching, especially in special education where the situations can fluctuate.

One participant demonstrated how resilience of disposition could assist a teacher in the field:

I think it made me more successful because seeing that it was my predisposition towards them was false, to look in a whole different perspective on the professors that I had to re-evaluate what exactly I wanted to get out of class, and how I would get that out of it.

If the recently graduated teacher in the above scenario would have not attempted to create a change in her disposition, another more negative outcome could have come to fruition. She trusted in herself and was able overcome a situation that allowed her to continue with a new perspective.

The code listed above was also related to how the recently graduated teachers' dispositions changed over the course of their involvement in their program and now into the first year of their teaching. The participants noted an obvious change in not just how they handled situations, but in what they relied upon in order to handle those various scenarios. When compared to the preprofessional teacher groups, the recently graduated teachers seemed to access field experiences more often for support of their statements and were able to reflect on their university experiences in a meaningful fashion. The following section will include a discussion of research question three, parts *a* and *b*.



### **RQ3(a)**

*How did their [recently graduated teachers] dispositions contribute to their successes and/or setbacks in their program?* [This question did not have any intra-findings, but instead had data that was related to all three groups. Therefore, the data from the inter-findings will be presented in this section].

**Inter-findings (between all three groups).** Research question three (a) was related to how the recently graduated teachers perceived the ways in which their dispositions contributed to their success and/or setbacks while they were in their teacher education program. The code and its associated information related to addressing this research question was *Disposition(s) Contribution to Success*. Although some interview questions asked about the participants' setbacks, the information associated with this code was more related to how certain university experiences combined with the participants' disposition(s) created a more optimal situation for success.

The participants' university program included the requirement that all preprofessional teachers complete a final internship. However, the locations where students were placed were not always ideal and these situations need to be handled in a professional manner in order to facilitate their matriculation through the program. One participant, when asked about her successes and setbacks, provided an example where her positive disposition contributed to her ability to persevere through a difficult time:

An example of that would be that when I went into my first full internship, the teacher didn't want an intern. The principal put one there. She wasn't really happy about it. The principal made it very clear that if I messed up in any way, shape, or form that I would be removed. He took me aside and had that

conversation. I kind of went in knowing I better do every possible thing I can to be a wonderful person...I went in, thinking, I am going to do everything I can to wow them. I won't be insulted. I will just be everything that they hope that I am and so we won't have any issues. I ended up doing fine and not having any problems.

The participant also discussed how her disposition became a protective factor in that situation and she was able to work with her supervising teacher to complete her final internship. She discussed how she could have avoided the situation, been scared or been offended, but instead chose to keep a positive disposition and hope for the best outcome.

The recently graduated teacher participants also discussed how their dispositions affected their students' learning in their practicum and internship settings. One participant stated, "It doesn't matter what type of disability; it doesn't matter where they are, on level, below level, just that you are able to provide them with the best possible environment and learning experience that they need." Again, being open-minded to how students learn became an important part of how participants' attitudes were shaped. The same participant also hypothesized how disposition(s) would lead to her future successes:

I think your disposition is going to shape your whole career. If you are negative and you feel negatively towards something, then that is how your career is going to turn out, but if you're able to develop those beliefs and attitudes and make adjustments to your teaching, then I think...that's how you are successful as a teacher.

This compelling quote provides an example of just how important and influential dispositions are perceived to be when teaching in special education. The participant is

connecting her disposition and her career to her temperament and general sense of happiness, which are essential to understand if a teacher is to be content with his or her profession.

**RQ3(b)**

*How does their [recently graduated teachers] understanding of their dispositions influence their current practice?*

**Intra-findings.** One code unique to the recently graduated teachers was related to the participants' perception of how dispositions influence their teaching practice was *Teaching Students about Disposition(s)*. This code was only discussed by one participant, but is interesting to note, as it (in some ways) completes the process of teaching preprofessional teachers about dispositions so that they can influence their students and shape their dispositions in a positive fashion. The participant's story represents this sentiment:

...at the elementary school that I am at, we do something called character education. And we teach students...each month, we have a different character trait, and so we're at an early age, trying to instill on them that, you know, like last month was self-control. The month before was empathy. We try to teach them, even now, before college, that you know, these traits are so very important so if they get caught showing that trait, they can put their name in a basket, and then they get their name pulled out, and they get a bike.

It is interesting that disposition(s) are often considered both a higher order skill and an essential component of becoming a citizen. The story above allows for a deeper

understanding of what it means to teach to disposition(s) and their importance in learning. Again, this connection will be discussed further in chapter five.

### **Inter-Findings for Three Participant Groups**

Based on the data analysis, there were several commonalities between the groups of participants. These similarities are presented in the section below. The groups and the research questions will first be stated. Next, the data similar between each group will be discussed by first examining the data common between all three groups, then between two groups. The format used for the presentation of the intra-findings (where the codes and their associated data are presented together) will be implemented for this section as well.

### **Preprofessional Teachers in their Final Internship (RQ1)**

#### **Inter-Findings (Between All Three Groups)**

There were several codes associated with answering this research question: *Disposition(s) Adaptation or change, Stability of Disposition(s) Over Time, Maturity of Disposition(s), and Importance of Field experiences in Shaping Disposition(s)* (a full list of the codes, their definitions, and their frequency by group can be found in Appendix C, Table C1). Each of these codes was associated with information related to how the preprofessional teachers in their final internship perceived the changes in their disposition(s) as a result of their participation in the program. The codes were often supported by examples from the participants' field experiences and in order to analyze how often these experiences were cited. In general, the participants noted some type of change either in their personality, their practice, or their perception of what teaching

students with disabilities means. Below, each code will be discussed in detail, including its definition and associated quotes in support of research question one.

**Disposition(s) adaptation or change.** Participants were asked directly how this change occurred. One participant stated:

I think that my personal dispositions have changed a lot as I've become a special education teacher mostly because I think that when I first started, my dispositions were a little bit affected by like an ignorance...I had more of ideals rather than the reality of the teaching, so my dispositions have become a little bit more hard, and my experiences have grown.

Another participant echoed this notion of ignorance being affected through her experience in the program, "If I had to completely look at it, and think about everything...probably just becoming more open-minded about certain things, realizing how unaware I am about things." This notion of becoming aware of not just what teaching is, but how their practice affects student outcomes is important to note and was connected with other codes such as the *Influence of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practice(s)* (discussed below).

The participants' practica and internship experiences were related to the concept of adapting or changing disposition(s). One participant responded (in reference to one of her field experiences):

I feel like before I came into the program, I was narrow-minded in regards to where it should be taught, how it should be taught, and I've now learned that it doesn't need to be taught A, B, C. You could teach, A, C, then D, and then B first. Just as long as your ultimate goal for your students is successful.

Again, the participant cited her open-mindedness as an asset in changing with the focus being placed on her students' learning. Overall, the sense garnered from the participants was that their preconceived notions about teaching changed in some way as a result of their involvement in the program. This included adaptations to their core teaching philosophy (discussed in the section below).

**Stability of disposition(s) over time.** Contrary to the participants' adaptation or change in their teaching disposition(s) were data related to the code of *Stability of Disposition(s) Over Time*. Preprofessional teachers in their final internship also discussed that aspects of their disposition(s) were stable over time (especially those related to ingrained attitudes and beliefs). One participant stated, "I would say that my general disposition hasn't changed in that I've been positive and I've been conveying high expectations since my start with the program." However, when one participant considered how a school administrator considers a teacher's disposition in an evaluation of her performance in the school system, she stated:

I think, at the same point, the principal or whoever is evaluating you needs to recognize that "That might not necessarily be who they are or how they teach every day"...I feel like it's something you can't necessarily avoid...How do you take that out of an evaluation?

The contextualization of a teacher's disposition in relation to a future evaluation was something that came as a result of the non-scripted conversation in the interviews. Other participants were also concerned with how disposition(s) were considered with evaluations in the school system and what "value" they added in terms of becoming an effective teacher. These implications will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.

**Maturity and disposition(s).** Maturity was another theme discussed in relation to how the participants' disposition(s) have changed over time. One participant stated that, "Then there's situations where if you don't [have] the maturity to handle criticism...when you say can a teacher education program teach and shape their student's dispositions...I believe that because I think that it teaches us to handle criticism." Although this topic was not mentioned as frequently as it was by the recently graduated teacher participants, the topic is still important to relate to one's disposition(s) changing because it creates a connection between the personal and professional sides of an individual and their growth in both aspects.

**Importance of field experiences in shaping disposition(s).** Supporting these notions of change were examples from how their university program influenced their disposition(s), including their field experiences. There were often connections between the codes related to adaptation and change and specific experiential examples. This is represented through the code, *Importance of Field Experiences in Shaping Disposition(s)*. One participant stated, "...being in the field and the modeling that I've observed with other teachers and their dispositions has helped me in interacting, especially with the students."

The interaction in the field was influential in regards to the adaptation of the participants' disposition(s), but this took place over time. When asked about the change in her disposition(s), one participant stated, "I think that I am noticing it now more having everyday contact with my students, but I think that it was very gradual." Because this group of participants had some experience in the field, they were able to discuss their perceptions related to how their disposition(s) changed over time. This allowed for a

broader perspective on their teaching practices and the ways in which disposition(s) might influence their future practice.

### **Inter-Findings (Between Only Two Groups)**

Through the staged coding process (described above), several codes were found to be associated between two groups (a full list of the codes, their definitions, and their frequencies can be found in Appendix C, Table C2). In relation to the first research question, three codes were directly connected to how the participants' disposition(s) changed as a result of their involvement in the program. Specifically, two codes were shared between the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and the preprofessional teachers in their second semester. Those included the *Influence of Personality on Professional Disposition(s)* and *Reflective Practices and Disposition(s)*.

In relation to how the participants' personality influenced their professional (teaching) disposition(s), one participant stated:

It's been very beneficial for me to be a positive person, someone who can approach situations in a professional manner, and someone who approaches situations with a positive attitude. People want to, I think, work with me more and solve problems without conflict.

The response indicates an association between one's personality and their disposition(s) and its influence on the participant's practice. This could be important in the future, as one's personality is strengthened by attitudes and this might allow for the positive nature of an individual to become more constant over time. Another participant shared the same sentiment related to this connection in relation to a question about how her dispositions change over time:



Somehow I do it because I keep doing it, and it's funny because I look at it like from high school, and I have done the same things in college, which definitely, to me, defines it as the disposition because it's definitely who I am.

A sense of connection between one's personality and one's disposition can be manifested through a student's reflection (often required by university programs- including these teachers' program). However, explaining what one does as a teacher and how dispositions change as a result of interactions in the field was noted as being a difficult aspect of becoming a teacher. One participant stated:

Christmas was the first break, and stepping away and kind of reevaluating everything from the outside and trying to explain it to people who don't really know the process or the kids, but who are interested in me, my family and such, really opened my eyes to how I felt and how I feel about exiting the program and becoming my own teacher.

Reflective practice is something that can influence students in a profound way. The process of reflection allows the student to manifest an understanding of not just who they are, but what they are becoming. The importance of such practice was noted by one participant, "I wouldn't be where am I today without looking at who I am and evaluating myself." The reflection process is important to understanding dispositions and in order to better understand its influence within the context of this project, student reflections will be discussed after addressing the research questions in this chapter.

## **Preprofessional Teachers in their Final Internship (RQ1 a)**

### **Inter-Findings (Between Three Groups)**

There were several codes (common amongst the other groups) associated with answering the sub-question to research question one related to the perceived effects of dispositions on the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and their successes and/or setbacks in the program: *Disposition(s) Contribution to Success*, *Influences of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practice*, and *Future Influence(s) of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practices*. In general, the participants discussed how their dispositions contributed to their successes in the program, with few participants noting dispositions being related to any major setbacks. However, it is important to note the lack of negative remarks, as it could have indicated that participants were either unwilling to discuss the adverse effects of dispositions, did not have any setbacks in their program, or did not have any setbacks because of the composition of their disposition(s). Nevertheless, each code associated with this research question will be discussed below that were shared between all three groups, followed by the codes associated between two groups in relation to the teachers in their final internship.

**Disposition(s) contribution to success.** One participant, in relation to her future teaching career, discussed a disposition(s) conducive to learning from potential setbacks:

I don't feel right now that I've had any setbacks overall. I'm very confident. I know I said that I'm more of a realist than idealist...I don't really take anything negative as something to bring me down, only something to grow from.

This could also be interpreted as resilience in character, a component that could be an asset for an individual to become a successful teacher. Another participant shared this

sentiment:

I think that's it's [disposition(s)] contributed to my success because I have a mentality that all students can learn but I also have a mentality that my job as a teacher is to be an advocate for my students and I've already had incidents in my internship where I've had to advocate for a student, where I've had to speak up and say, 'Hey that's not the right thing to do.'

How the participants explained positive disposition(s) and how they contributed to the participants' successes in their university program was related to their perceptions about what constitutes an effective teacher in special education. One participant stated, "I think there's a lot more pressure put on teachers than most people come to realize, and I don't think that a lot of the people who choose to get into education have the strength to do it." This connection to personal strength related to becoming a teacher is an important aspect of how the participants' perceived the ways in which disposition(s) can be influential in a teacher's education.

**Influence of disposition(s) on current teaching practice.** Because the participants in this group were in their final internship, they were actively involved in the classroom setting and (in some cases) are the lead teacher throughout the day. Therefore, this code (also seen throughout the interviews from the other groups) related to an essential component of success within their teacher education program, as completing their final internship is necessary for graduation and often leads to a preprofessional teacher's employment. One participant in her final internship noted how important disposition(s) are to her success in her internship:

To me, as a teacher candidate, if you're assessing it [disposition(s)] and you're

looking at who I am and how I interact with kids and how I teach...clearly it makes sense there...I think your disposition affects the way you're teaching. They go hand-in-hand.

Another participant in her final internship shared this sentiment as she stated, "I think that the disposition results in what type of a teacher you are." The concept of disposition(s) and how they affect a preprofessional teacher's practice while in their internship becomes a key component in their development towards potentially becoming a successful teacher in the field.

**Future influence(s) of disposition(s) on teaching practice.** The participants' projections about how their disposition(s) will be related to their future teaching practice is also important when considering their successes and setbacks within their university program. Interacting with other professionals will be an important aspect of the participants' teaching practice and dispositions could be related to how certain situations are handled in the future. One participant stated, "I interact with people all day and I feel like my disposition affects me in that people want to problem solve with me, and I think that's going to be an asset when I'm in the field." Again, this perception relates to how certain features of one's disposition(s) could contribute to his or her future accomplishments in teaching.

### **Preprofessional Teachers in their Second Semester (RQ 2)**

#### **Inter-Findings (Between Three Groups)**

There were several codes associated with the participants in their second semester of the program (also found in the other two groups) that were related to the participants' perception about how their disposition(s) affected their continued successful involvement

in their program and how, hypothetically, their disposition(s) will influence their future practice. These included: *Disposition(s) Adaptation or Change*, *Stability of Disposition(s) Over Time*, *Future Influences of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practice*, *Influence of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practice*, *University Program Influence on Disposition(s)*, *“Teacher Disposition(s)”*, and *Disposition(s) Contribution to Success*. Each of these codes was associated with information related to participants’ disposition(s) and their perceived influence on their continued involvement in the program. Again, because these preprofessional teachers had recently begun their program, they relied less on direct examples from the field and more on hypothetical situations. Below is an analysis of each codes listed above, its definition, and the data’s implications towards answering the research question.

**Disposition(s) adaptation or change.** Similar to the comments made by some of the preprofessional teachers in their final internship, one preprofessional teacher in her second semester, when asked about the importance of disposition(s) in teaching stated, “I think...I am getting more patient with the kids. You have to be patient.” In the participants’ opinion, patience was to become more and more important as they would begin to interact with students on a more frequent basis. Another participant shared this same sentiment: “I have learned to be more open-minded when it comes to why we have to do certain things... I just have to wait for the reason even though I don’t really like to wait for the reason.” Both quotes relate to how the preprofessional teachers are connecting what they learn from the development of their teaching disposition(s) to the field, with the understanding of how certain associated dispositions (patience and open-mindedness) can become assets in their future practice.

Although some disposition(s) were seen as ingrained, the participants also discussed how certain disposition(s) could change as a result of interactions (either in the university classroom or the field). One participant stated, “What I'm learning is changing my disposition but I feel like that's part of my disposition. I'm open to that, my personality type.” Again, the concept of open-mindedness becomes an integral part of how the preprofessional teachers in their second semester perceive the impact of their disposition(s) on their professional development. Additionally, empathy was cited as a part of the change in the preprofessional teachers’ disposition(s). For example, one participant stated:

...Not that I didn't have empathy before...but the things that I have noticed that it's especially important when I'm observing my teachers that I'm paired with and I feel more empathy towards what their doing instead of just nitpicking what's wrong.

The shift from the teacher being an observer to becoming an active participant in his or her classroom setting is a crucial point in that individual’s professional development, because it allows them to “see” from a teacher’s perspective for the first time. As the participant stated above, it is easy to be critical when you are outside of a situation, but when you have to actually become the teacher, the task become a lot more difficult.

**Stability of disposition(s) over time.** The data gathered from the interviews with the participants in their second semester of the program were interesting in that many of the participants believed that disposition(s) were relatively stable and that you have to want to change before any adaptation is possible. One participant stated, “You have to want to change your disposition for it to change. Some people are just kind of stuck in

their ways.” Because the participants are relatively new to the program, the comments made in relation to this code were short, to the point, and without extensive explanation. For example, one participant mentioned, “My disposition...I don’t think my disposition’s really changed, but my lifestyle has changed.” This is in contrast to the comments made by the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and the recently graduated teachers, which were more related to the possibility of a dispositional change and/or the inevitability of such a change (discussed in detail in the sections related to research questions one and three).

**Future influences of disposition(s) on teaching practices, influence of disposition(s) on current teaching practices, and university program influence on disposition(s).** These three codes were combined for this section, as the participants’ comments were closely associated within each of these codes. Again, this could be due to the fact that the participants have been in the program a short time and are therefore combining concepts or are using a core set of understandings. These codes included, *Future Influences of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practices, Influence of Disposition(s) on Current Teaching Practices, and University Program Influence on Disposition(s)*.

Many of the comments from the participants in the second semester of their program were relatively vague or general in relation to how disposition(s) would affect their future practice. In response to how disposition(s) would influence her future practice, one participant stated, “I feel like they’ll help me cope, help me with all the situations that will come at me...I think dispositions will affect everything in your life.” When asked if it is the university’s responsibility to shape her disposition, the participant provided an example, “I’m not good at biology, so is it the biology department’s

responsibility to make me good at biology? No. It's not what I'm supposed to do.”

The ambiguity could also be related to this group's lack of experience in the field, which will obviously be something that they will experience more of as they move along in the program. One participant provided an example from another course that demonstrated this notion:

For example, in my ESL [English as a Second Language] class, we do a lot of interaction with students that are not from this country and were not native English language speakers, so it definitely opens your eyes and broadens your horizons. Being in the school has definitely helped.

The preprofessional teachers in their second semester perhaps realized, as their colleagues further along in the program did, that more experience in the field often leads to a change or adaptation in one's disposition(s) and/or preconceived notions about students with disabilities and their role as an agent of change in their lives.

**“Teacher disposition(s)” and disposition(s) contribution to success.** These two codes were combined, again, due to the need to aggregate the data in order to address the perception of how disposition(s) affect the preprofessional teachers' future practice. The codes included *“Teacher Disposition(s)”* and *Disposition(s) Contribution to Success*. Information from each of these codes was pertinent to how the preprofessional teachers' related their understanding of disposition(s) to their future practice.

The comments associated with these codes were similar to the comments in the above section and were again more general in nature. One participant stated, “I think you have to have a specific set of personality traits to be a special education teacher.” However, when the participant was asked a follow up question about what aspects of a



personality were directly related to successful definitions, she was unable to provide any concrete examples. Another participant shared a similar response, “I think it takes a certain type of disposition to become a teacher.” Again, when asked to be more specific, the participant did not provide a direct answer, she stated, “I do think it is important and I’ve never thought of it before until when I got this paper.” These comments do not necessarily related to a lack of knowledge, but a general lack of experience. The analysis associated with the data from the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and the recently graduated teachers demonstrated that as preprofessional teachers move through their program of study, they become more able to provide direct examples and were able to elaborate more on the topic of dispositions.

When asked about what it meant for the university to teach a quality teacher disposition, comments such as “I would just say that there are some people you can change and there are some people who are just very closed off.” and “I don’t think that people should act a certain way.” The participants in this group demonstrated that dispositions are a complicated topic and one that does require time to contemplate and needs to be populated by experiences in both the university classroom and the field. Several codes that were shared between two groups substantiated these claims and allow for the analysis of this group in comparison to both the group of preprofessional teachers in their final internship and the recently graduated teachers individually.

### **Inter-Findings (Between Two Groups)**

There were several codes associated with this research question that were shared between the preprofessional teachers in their second semester and the recently graduated teachers (*Connection of Personal Philosophy to Disposition(s)*) and with the

preprofessional teachers in their final internship (*Influence of Personality on Professional Disposition(s)* and *Reflective Practice and Disposition(s)*). The information associated with these codes is particularly interesting when taking into consideration how the participants' teacher education program is arranged. The preprofessional teachers in their second semester had been introduced (within the last year) to reflective practices and the creation of a teaching philosophy, while the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and the recently graduated teachers had substantial practice in both areas. However, the reason that all three groups did not share these codes could have something to do with how removed each group is from university influences. Many of the comments made by the preprofessional teachers in their second semester were related to recent events, while comments made by the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and the recently graduated teachers were related more to reminiscing or how their reflections (preprofessional teachers in their final internship) or philosophies (recently graduated teachers) have changed over the course of their involvement in the program.

When asked for an example of how her disposition(s) have changed in the short time she has been in the program, one participant stated, "I guess a lot of it would be field work, assessing how we react to things, but I think also classroom management, philosophy, stuff like that is a good example of our disposition." Conveying one's disposition(s) through a philosophy statement is an excellent way to connect who we are with what we do. This concept is especially important in teacher education, as the attrition rate for special education teachers is particularly high when compared to other professions in education (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). As another participant

stated, “I am looking at everything that we are being taught, but I’m putting my own values on top of it.” This melding of the self and the program could potentially be important for preprofessional teachers and their professional development.

The second semester preprofessional teachers’ comments about reflective practices (a code shared with the preprofessional teachers in their final internship) indicated their willingness to change and become more responsive practitioners. One participant stated:

I think a lot of it has to do with studying the reflective practices, because I always thought I was a pretty reflective person, but you realize that you’re not until you get critical about it. I think in the beginning I was not critical about my disposition and now I am and I see how that can affect me and my classmates.

This is an important realization as participants noted that their disposition(s) could influence their colleagues in a profound manner. Becoming critical of oneself and one’s practice was also found to be an important component of becoming a teacher that is willing to adapt to the ever-changing field of special education. One participant’s comment connected the concept of reflective practice with her own practice and considers how her students are impacted, “...for one you need to understand yourself in order to teach and if you can’t understand yourself you can’t understand the kids.” This connection between the self, one’s students, and one’s teaching practice becomes integral to the process of becoming a special education teacher that can understand how the reciprocal process of learning takes place.

### Recently Graduated Teachers (RQ 3)

#### Inter-Findings (Between All Three Groups)

There were several codes associated with the recently graduated teacher participants and their perceptions of the changes gone through moving from the world of academia to becoming an independent special education teacher. These included: *Disposition(s) Adaptation or Change, Stability of Disposition(s) Over Time, Maturity and Disposition(s), University Program Influence on Disposition(s), and Importance of Field Experiences in Shaping Disposition(s)*. Each of these codes was associated with information related to how their disposition(s) might have changed in order to adapt to their new role. Below is an analysis of each of the codes and the subsequent information that was related to answering the third research question.

#### **Disposition(s) adaptation or change and stability of disposition(s) over time.**

The discussion of these two codes was combined, as the information associated with each of these codes had some crossover (based on the coding procedures). These codes included: *Disposition(s) Adaptation or Change* and *Stability of Disposition(s) Over Time*.

Many of the recently graduated teachers discussed how their disposition(s) have remained relatively stable and that certain types of disposition(s) were assets while going through their program and now into teaching. One participant in this group stated, “I still have the same disposition. I have always had a positive disposition, but I’ve always had a very realistic side.” However, as one participant cited, some aspects of disposition(s) have to change when the switch from student to teacher is made:

I felt that I was so ready because I got A’s...passed all the tests, but then I don’t feel like you can fully be prepared for your first year, until you are totally

immersed in it, and you're on your own. So my disposition has changed, because I didn't think it would be as hard. And I've had to change my style and my attitude towards certain areas, and I've had to adapt to the way this school does it, and how to implement all these things that I actually learned fully, by myself.

This quote represented the importance of being able to adapt to certain situations and contexts in order to potentially become a successful teacher. The question became whether anyone could ever be completely prepared, as many university programs (such as the one the participants were enrolled in) scaffold placements so that the faculty provides continued support. Of course that support is important, but again, how students are weaned off the system might help to make the transition between university life and independent teaching a lot easier.

These dispositional adaptations and changes are also influenced by professional development sessions and an understanding of how each student learns in a different manner. One participant stated:

I think my beliefs and my attitudes are constantly changing, even from the beginning of the year to the winter, to now...the more trainings I do and the more practice I have, my beliefs are constantly changing, and I'm adapting my curriculum, and I'm adapting my style to best serve the students.

Another participant shared the same sentiment related to adapting one's disposition for different students, "Every student is different, therefore my disposition with every student is different."

The importance of changing one's dispositions is directly associated with striving to be the most effective teacher possible when it comes to influencing students' learning.

This is especially pertinent to teaching in special education. As one participant stated:

Over the course of the program, the more students and different classroom environments and school environments I was exposed to, obviously I had predispositions...but my current attitude and practices slowly evolved with what worked and what didn't work. Like I said, being proved wrong by students' abilities, how their disabilities were going to manifest in the classroom and just as kids. It was constantly changing.

This reciprocal learning process between the teacher, the student, and the environment is represented by the quotation above and demonstrated how information from field experiences can be vital in becoming a teacher that understands that students and the school environments are constantly changing. One participant specifically related this concept to being a teacher in special education, "Specifically, when it's education and, more so for special ed, I think it's something that's within you that no matter how much learning or instruction you get, either you're meant to be a special ed teacher or you're not...". The preprofessional teacher groups shared this outlook that special education has certain differences from other educational disciplines, and this attitude also is pervasive throughout the comments made by the recently graduated teachers.

**Maturity and disposition(s).** Maturity was a topic that was discussed often in the interviews with the recently graduated teachers. This could be due to the fact that they have the most experience out of all the participant groups and have now reached their goal of becoming a teacher. One participant provided an example of how maturity impacts one's disposition relative to teaching, "For me, I get it, and I would have gotten it at 20, but it would have been hard...sometimes you say a bad word or you do something.

Now, it's easier not to do that, because you become mature.”

In contrast, a lack of maturity was seen as something that could negatively influence a teacher's ability to work well with others. One participant provided an example from her experiences:

I do work with some people that are 40 or 50 years old that are still, every meeting is all about them...that's why I say that some people...they're always going to be that way...but I do believe some people just don't get it, and I think that you get better with age. I mean, not better with age, but some things you come to a realization with age.

The quote above is an example of how dispositions can become rigid in others who are not willing to change. This lack of maturity could negatively impact the teaching environment if a perspective is not gained on how egocentrism can create a divide within a group of teachers.

**University program influences on disposition(s) and importance of field experiences in shaping disposition(s).** The discussion of these two codes was combined, as they both related to the university experience contributed to the changes in the participants' dispositions. The information associated with these codes demonstrated how certain experiences impacted the recently graduated teachers dispositions and what they drew upon in their first year of teaching.

The field experiences were especially influential when it came to altering the perceptions of what the teachers initially thought teaching in special education was supposed to be in terms of the setting, the students, and what was to be taught. The preprofessional teacher groups discussed similar transformations, but because the

recently graduated teacher participants had now become teachers, their perspective was more replete. One participant stated:

I think in the undergraduate program...I went into it with one belief, and the way that I felt that special education was and what I wanted from it. I always wanted all kids with Autism in one classroom, my own classroom. Throughout the program, that totally changed, and I realized that's rare, and that's not really what I wanted or what I was good at. I think, in the beginning, it set me back, because I had a kind of a closed mind to it, and I wasn't willing to change. But through the program and going through all the internships, I was able to realize the true meaning of special education and what was important about it, which contributed, later, to success.

The concept of becoming open-minded (a major theme discussed in the analysis of the findings associated with the preprofessional teachers in their final internship) was also expressed in the quote above. The recently graduated teacher participants considered the ability to adapt and change one's beliefs was considered essential to the successful completion of the program. The same participant stated, "I think it's important to be exposed to all different settings and all different types of students, because I think that's the only way that you will be able to open your mind."

In order to cultivate this open-mindedness, one participant provided a suggestion for university faculty, "I think it's important to teach the [university name omitted] students, but also, to help them discover and to shape their own beliefs and attitudes and reflect on why they really feel the way they did." Similarly, as the preprofessional



teacher participant groups shared, the practice of being a reflective practitioner becomes important to understanding how a teacher's dispositions change.

Keeping a perspective on the orientation of one's disposition was also noted as something important to becoming a teacher. One participant stated, "Dispositions at that point helped me to prove me wrong. In some circumstances we're always looking to be proved wrong, just watch other people's behaviors and students as opposed to just my own, what I thought." The comment is related to how the participant began to realize that teaching is not simply about oneself, but about how the interactions between the self and one's students can create a shift in one's dispositions.

The recently graduated teacher participants demonstrated that the changes that occur through a preprofessional teacher's interactions with the courses, practica, and internships can profoundly impact their conceptualization of how dispositions are manifested in their teaching. One participant stated, "On some levels, we don't think that we have any preconceived notions about ourselves or about others. Until you are in a situation, you really don't know if you have those notions about someone." Another essential piece of the teacher's experience before entering the field was their interactions with other members of their cohort. Another participant stated, "I think by building that community within the cohorts, it gives us the strength of community outside of the cohort, into our first year." The transference of how interactions should take place in a positive fashion between the cohort at the university to a group of teachers in a school is an adaptation that could assist the teachers in their practice in the future.

## Recently Graduated Teachers (RQ 3 b)

### Inter-Findings (Between All Three Groups)

Research question three (*b*) was related to how the recently graduated teachers perceived the ways in which their dispositions were currently, or would in the future, affect their teaching practices. Because the recently graduated teachers were the only participants currently employed as teachers, the purpose of this question was grounded in asking about how disposition(s) influence their practice after their university experience. The interviews revealed that the participants considered disposition(s) to be influential in their practice, but that there was no universal disposition that relates to every teacher's success.

There were several codes associated with answering research question three *b*: *Future Influence(s) of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practice*, *Influences of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practices(s)*, and *Composition of Disposition(s)*. The first two codes related to the influence of disposition(s) will be presented together, followed by the presentation of the findings related to the participants' perceptions of what comprises a disposition(s) as they related to their teaching practices.

**Future influences of disposition(s) on teaching practice and influences of disposition(s) on current teaching practices(s).** The ability to work well with other teachers and take a leadership role was considered by participants to be an important aspect of becoming a teacher. One recently graduated teacher participant provided an example of how her disposition allowed her to rise above the potential pitfalls associated with conflict between teachers:

It was an argument between two teachers, and she walked out. And so everybody kind of looked at each other like, oh my gosh, what are we going to do, and the

administration that was present kind of sat back to see what we were going to do. And I said, okay, no problem, you know what, we just need to move forward...it is what it is. This is what I think we should do. What do you guys think, and we got everything resolved before the person got back.

This example demonstrated a certain confidence in the participant's actions and shows signs of leadership in difficult situations. In regards to how dispositions could influence her future practice the same participant stated, "I absolutely believe that it will help me move forward through my career." The fact that the participant made the connection between her disposition(s) her current and future practice is important to note, as often this perspective can be lost.

How disposition(s) influenced the participants' students and their learning is also an important aspect of how their teaching practice will develop. One participant stated, "I think if I have a certain belief towards a certain disability or a certain social economic status of one of my students, it could negatively or positively affect how I react to them or the approach I take." Understanding the dynamics between disability and socio-economic status and how students are ultimately affected by these beliefs became an important aspect of being a special education teacher to the recently graduated teacher participants. Divergence from the belief that all students can learn could negatively impact student learning. As one participant stated:

I think it's important because even within my own school, I've realized a lot of the teachers have a lot of different beliefs and attitudes towards different students or towards how we're supposed to teach...so I think defining that, assessing it and seeing the students' success based on the teacher dispositions could even benefit

and understand which beliefs affect how the students are learning or which attitudes are affected.

The understanding that all students learn in different ways was seen by one participant as a result of understanding how her dispositions will change, “Every student is individual. Every class that you're going to teach is going to be an individual and if you have these dispositions or a tendency to act a certain way...you might need to make choices and changes.”

**Composition of disposition(s).** The influences of disposition(s) on a teacher’s current and future practice were often grounded in their understanding of what comprises dispositions. One recently graduated teacher participant discussed what she felt was important when making a the transition from preprofessional to teacher:

Staying calm and levelheaded when people irritate me. Just, I don't always know everything. I learned a lot school and, maybe, what I learned is not relevant right now to the situation. I need to ask for help. I've had to be humbled a little bit.

Making the transition from preprofessional to teacher and the importance of understanding what a disposition consists of was also noted by another participant as important:

I’ve had to become a lot more compassionate...towards kids and coworkers...In class I could kind of just disagree and I didn't really need to get along with my peers. Now, it's kind of like I need to get along and I need to be a good coworker.

Another participant, when asked about the importance of considering disposition(s) in teaching, stated, “I think these underlying sentiments are very important for teachers to understand first and something that I think a lot of people missed, just in life in general.”

The influences of dispositions on a teacher's practice becomes an important connection to understand and will be discussed in further detail in chapter five.

### **Codes to Families Development**

The presentation of the results for this report was not organized by the families because it was felt by this researcher that the information would be too far removed from the data the participants were providing. It is believed that the above analysis presentation allowed for a better presentation of the case and adhered more to the principles set forth by Stake (1999) and allowed for the participants' voices to be displayed. However, synthesis of the data into families was important, as it allowed for a more succinct presentation of the data. The following section includes how the families were created and an example of how the data and the research questions are connected to this process.

#### **Procedure**

In order to synthesize the information associated with the codes, a set of families (or categories) were created per the analysis procedures suggested by Harry, Klinger, and Sturges (2005). The purpose of conducting such a procedure was to allow for the understanding that the information gathered exists in a hierarchy, which can then be used to make more general inferences about the meaning of the data. The process involved first creating the initial codes through the open-coding process described above. Through the coding and analysis procedures suggested by Charmaz (2008) (described above), the codes and their definitions were refined through the coding of information associated with multiple groups of participants (starting with the recently graduated teachers, then

the preprofessional teachers in their final internship, and finally the preprofessional teachers in their second semester).

Once the codes and their definitions were set, the data associated with the various codes were examined and the researcher noted commonalities between the codes. The codes that were similar in both definition and content were then placed into the families. The families' definitions were then created based on the information from the collective codes. The code names, their definitions, and their frequencies (found in Table C1) as well as the family names, definitions, and associated codes (found in Table C4), along with a sample of participants' interviews were then sent to a colleague outside of this project in order to confirm their construction and content (this process will be discussed further in the triangulation procedures section below). The codes and their associated families were confirmed to be grouped accordingly by the colleague.

### **Family Definitions**

After the coding and grouping procedures listed above, six families were formed, which were comprised of all the codes listed in Table C1. These included: *Evaluation of Disposition(s)*, *Definition of Disposition(s)*, *Special Education Disposition(s)*, *Manifestation of Disposition(s)*, *Evaluating Disposition(s)*, and *Extrinsic Affect of Disposition(s)*. Because some codes appeared only in certain groups (intra-codes), one family, *Extrinsic Affect of Disposition(s)* was associated with codes only found in the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and the recently graduated teachers. A complete diagram of the families and their associated codes can be found in Appendix C, Figure C1.

Although not all of the families and their definitions will be discussed here (see Table C4 in Appendix C), one family, the *Evolution of Disposition(s)*, will be delineated here to provide an example of how the formation of such families allows for a more replete synthesis of the data (the implications of which will be discussed in chapter five). The family, *Evolution of Disposition(s)*, was defined as “The codes and their associated data related to how a preprofessional teacher or recently graduated teacher’s disposition(s) changed and adapted over time and the importance and influence of these adaptations on their teaching practice (future or present).” This family was created in order to synthesize the codes related to disposition(s) changes, their influence, and how participants perceived the ways in which their disposition(s) would interact with their teaching practice. Again, the process of creating families’ from the data will allow for a more condensed discussion in chapter five.

### **Triangulation Procedures**

#### **Data Source**

**Background.** In order to determine whether the data collected from the interviews were valid and reliable relative to qualitative inquiry, Stake (1999) suggested that triangulation procedures should be employed within a study using multiple sources of data (see Table 2 in chapter three). To complete this process, the preprofessional teachers in their final internship were asked to write a series of reflections related to the ethical and moral practices of a special education teacher. The topic was seen by this researcher as directly correlating to disposition(s), as one’s attitudes and beliefs are connected with how they behave and their notions of moral and ethical obligations related to teaching students with disabilities. These bi-weekly reflections (for a total of

seven reflections) were based on a study by Tillman and Richards (2010), described in chapter three.

Samples from each of the six participants in their final internship in the program were gathered and three reflections were randomly selected and analyzed over the course of five weeks, for a total of 15 reflections. The number of reflections selected mirrors the number of interviews conducted and after review was seen as the point at which saturation occurred. The samples were selected at random via assigning each participant a number and selecting that number from a random pool each week. If an individual was selected two weeks in a row, his or her name was placed back in the pool and another name was drawn.

**Data analysis.** The 15 reflections were then openly coded using the procedures outlined by Harry, Sturges, and Klinger (2005) (see chapter three for a full description of their study). The coding process involved all of the reflections being uploaded to the ATLAS.ti text analysis software program. Initially, the analysis plan was to use the a priori codes from the interviews from the preprofessional teachers in their final internship. However, after an initial read through of all the reflections and upon further consideration of the nature of the reflections, one code, "*Teacher Disposition(s)*", defined as "Comments related to how a certain kind of person or disposition is associated with becoming and being a teacher in special education." This code was found to be the connecting (or super) code that allowed for the analysis to have some connection with the interview data. The rationale for this decision was related to how the code (and its definition) embodied a "Concept that is often intangible or difficult to explain but is something that is important to becoming a teacher and can be exhibited in the

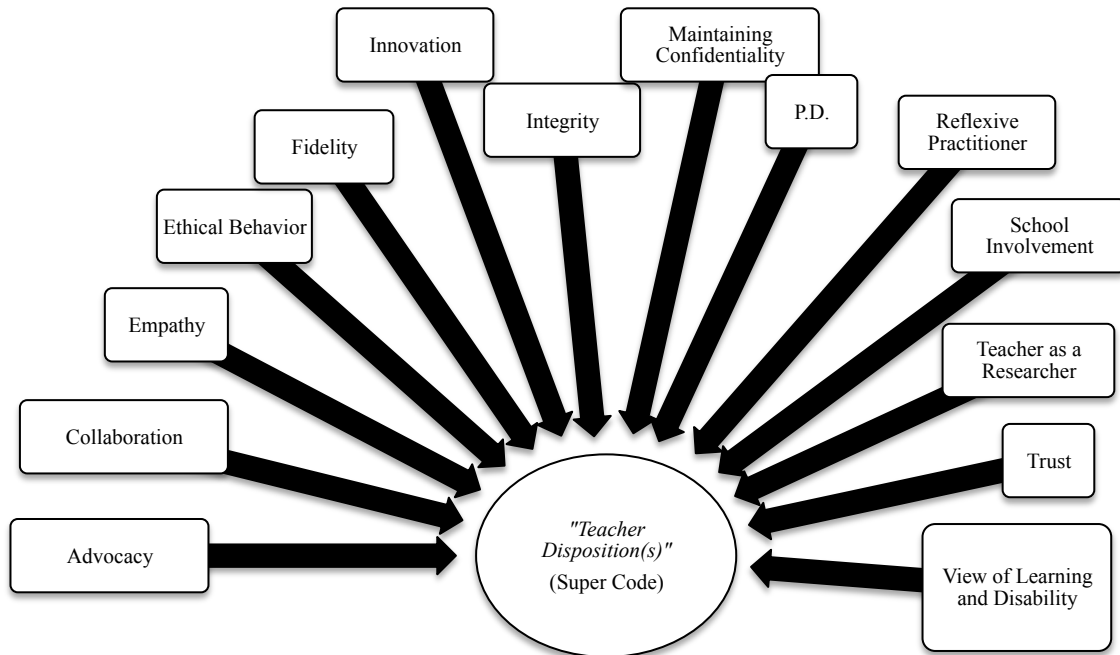


classroom.” This “super code” (Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005) or a code that could facilitate the open analysis for the information associated with the reflections, was also seen as a way to connect the concept of disposition(s) discussed in the interviews, to the concepts of ethical and moral behavior (topics of the reflection stems).

With the super code of “*Teacher Disposition(s)*” in mind, the reflections were openly coded. The results of the coding process revealed that much of what the preprofessional teachers in their final internship were discussing as to what constitutes a positive teacher disposition were being written about in the reflections. However, the reflections revealed a deeper level of discussion and the concept of “*Teacher Disposition(s)*” (as stated above) became more clearly defined. This definition included examples from the participants related to their philosophy of teaching, appropriate ways to teach, and the attitude that should be exhibited in order to potentially become a successful teacher. The conceptualization for this process is displayed in Figure 15 below. The complete list of codes, their definitions, and their frequency can be found in Appendix C, Table C5. In the next section the codes and their associated text will be discussed in order to directly connect them with the data from the interviews.

**Representative codes and connection to interview data.** Although all of the codes in the reflection data were related to the code “*Teacher Disposition(s)*” from the interview data, there were several other codes from the reflection analysis that were also connected the data from the interviews. These connections further demonstrated how the data was verified through the triangulation process. These included *Advocacy*, *Reflexive Practitioner*, *Teacher as a Researcher*, and *View of Learning and Disability*. Although the other codes did provide valuable information that could be correlated to the

interviews, these codes were determined to be the ones most directly connected when the information was compared. The following discussion will be similar in format to that of what was presented in the interview analysis section and will include examples of the connections between the two data sets.



*Figure 15.* A visual representation of the codes from the reflections and their connection to the super code from the interview data.

The concept of advocacy was a topic discussed in several reflections from the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and connects to several concepts from the interviews including how disposition(s) influence a teacher’s practice (both current and future) and how disposition(s) can have an effect on students’ learning. One participant noted, “I consider myself an advocate for those students who can not yet speak for themselves.” This is also something that is taught within their teacher education program.

Advocacy was seen as an asset for influencing others in the teaching environment and could be related to how disposition(s) adapt and change (a major theme from the interviews). Another participant provided an example of advocacy in action, “My commitment to being an advocate for my students enabled me to stand my ground against an individual with a misguided view of students with exceptionalities and to defend a student who has not yet found their voice.” Becoming an advocate was also cited as being influential on one participant’s students as well, “I will be helping my students develop the skills to create a support system around them and in doing so they will be increasing their self-worth and self-esteem thus becoming their own advocates.” Other participants cited the ways in which they could become advocates through professional development sessions and through their participation with their school.

Two other codes that were directly connected to sentiments and information from the interview data included, *Reflexive Practitioner* and *Teacher as a Researcher*. The information associated with these codes was related to a discussion of the importance of reflection in the interviews and how that contributed to participants’ successes in the teacher education program. Through her reflection, one participant eloquently connected these concepts:

I believe, that in order to develop the highest education and quality of life possible for an individual with exceptionalities I, as the teacher, need to stay devoted to doing research in order to expand my knowledge as well as maintaining the ability to reflect on my teaching practices.

Another participant shared this sentiment, “While everything from the workshops might not always apply or workout it is important that we try new things and reflect on them.”

The understanding that reflection is essential to maintaining the proper positive teacher dispositions became clear through both the reflections and the comments made in the interviews.

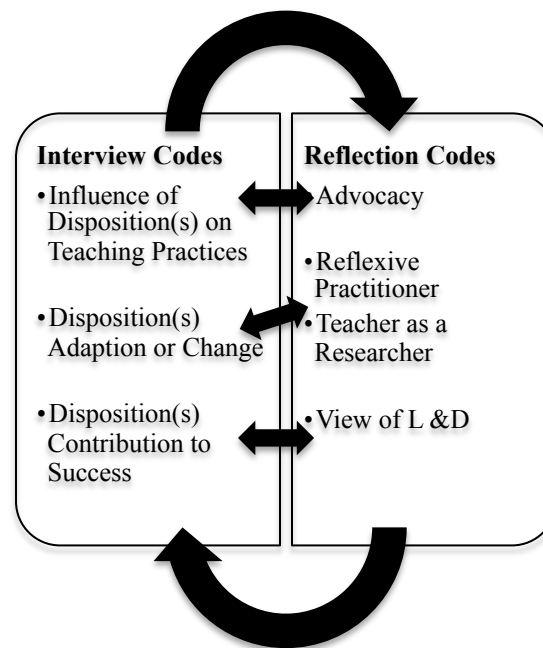
How the participants' viewed the ways in which individuals with disabilities learn and how the concept of disability affects his or her students was represented through the code of *View of Learning and Disability*. This code connects to comments made in the interviews relate to how one's views affect one's disposition(s) and the changes that need to be made in one's outlook to potentially become a successful teacher in special education. One participant wrote:

I do not view my students as having disabilities, but rather exceptional differences that challenge all teachers to step outside of their comfort zone of 'typical' instruction and, instead, differentiate a lesson so that *all* [emphasis included in original] of the students learn and understand the curriculum.

This powerful quote demonstrated a deeper understanding of how a teacher can influence both students with and without disabilities. Another participant who wrote, "Teachers would remain objective if they did not focus on what an individual student cannot do but rather what they can do", shared this sentiment.

Overall, the reflections provided by the preprofessional teachers in their final internship allowed for a deeper connection between the data from the interviews and the topic of disposition(s). It is interesting that the various modalities of knowledge representation examined here (both oral and written communication) allowed for the conceptual holes to be filled and leant a new perspective for interpretation within this project. This process adhered to the principles set forth by Stake's (1999) of case study

research and conveyed a more replete picture of the case and what a university program hopes to instill in their teacher candidates in terms of the traits associated with positive dispositions. Figure 16 is a representation of the connection between the codes and concepts from the interviews and the selected codes from the reflections.



*Figure 16.* The above figure is a visual representation of the relationship between the selected codes for the interviews and the reflections with each set of data informing the other in a reciprocal process.

### **Member Checking Procedures**

**Investigator.** Stake (1999) recommended that to further the triangulation process, the researcher should allow an external investigator to examine the data collected as well as the subsequent analysis and synthesis in order to determine if what is being purported is accurate (see Table 2 in chapter three). For this examination, an expert outside of the project with experience in examining both quantitative and qualitative data confirmation was contracted. The expert was given a sample of six

transcribed interviews (two interviews from each of the three groups selected at random by this researcher), a list of the codes and their definitions, as well as a list of the families and their definitions. The amount of information provided to the expert was based on the recommendations of Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller, and Neumann (2011) and their analysis of qualitative member-checking procedures. The expert was asked to review the interviews first, then examine the code and family list, and provide any feedback related to the analysis or presentation of data for this project.

After the reviews, the expert reviewer noted that, "In my evaluation, your codes are an appropriate fit for your research, given the purpose of the research and the sample of interviews." The reviewer also made several comments relative to the nature of the project, these included:

- First, it was interesting to see that students all seem to feel that "disposition talk" filled an important niche in the ecology of teacher preparation programs. Some pre-service teachers even felt that it made them feel proud of their program.
- Second, I was pleased to see the philosophical thinking. Interviewees focused on the "why" rather than the "what" questions. They also seem to have both a "pat response" answer to the definition of teacher dispositions and could put it in their own words. I did, however, notice that when they put it in their own words the answered varied a bit. It ranged from positive thinking to a hard-to-change characteristic.
- Third, I noticed that interviewees were able to share "stories" in their interview. For instance, one shared a story about visiting places in the community where students live in order to "adjust" her dispositions towards students. Another story

that was shared was about how they were able to handle disruptions caused by open conflicts between two teachers at schools during meetings.

These comments represent the validation of the interpretations and comments made in the analysis section in this chapter. There was the sense throughout the interviews that participants felt the topic of dispositions was an important topic in teacher education in special education. Additionally, the varied answers related to the participants' definitions of dispositions led to a diverse set of responses, which added to the richness of the data. Therefore, as Berg (2009) suggested, saturation was achieved in the opinion of both this researcher and the expert reviewer and no further interviews are seen as necessary for this project. Finally, as suggested by Stake (1999), the stories told by the participants assisted in telling their stories through the lens of this project, as this concept was sewn throughout the analysis of the data and demonstrated through the presentation of the findings.

**Participants.** Finally, as part of the triangulation procedures, the participants of the study were consulted in order to verify the information transcribed and interpreted through the interviews. A member-check is defined as, "...the process whereby researchers return to participants to ensure that their categories, constructions, explanation, and interpretations 'seem right' or ring true..." (Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller, & Neumann, 2011, p. 389). Three participants from each group were contacted for a total of nine participants (50 percent of the total sample). Each of the participants was sent their interview transcription, a description of the proposed analysis, and a description of the codes and families (the type of information was selected for member checking purposes as suggested by Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller, and Neumann (2011) for qualitative

research). The participants were emailed and asked to respond as to whether or not they felt the information they received was a valid representation and interpretation of their interview (the email included a brief description of what was meant by valid). All nine participants responded that the information they were sent was a valid representation of their interview.

### **Summary of Triangulation Procedures**

Overall, the triangulation procedures described above are believed to be substantial enough to verify the information collected and its interpretation for the purposes of this research project. Although the reflections were only collected for one group of participants, there was still the sense that this sample led to the confirmation of the information gathered from that group and that this would be the same case with the other groups. Additionally, the confirmation of the expert reviewer and the comments made were all associated with the interpretations of this researcher. Finally, the fact that the participants also felt the information was valid allows for the replete vetting of the information and its synthesis within the scope of this project.



## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **DISCUSSION**

Through the use of the case study method (Stake, 1999), this project examined participants' perceptions of the effects of disposition(s) from three groups (preprofessional teachers in their second semester, preprofessional teachers in their final internship, and recently graduated teachers), all of whom were associated with an NCATE accredited university teacher education program in special education. There was a need to examine this topic, as often the study of dispositions in teacher education has been related to disciplines outside of special education (Goe & Coggshall, 2007; Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011). Additionally, because teachers in special education have the extracurricular task of becoming advocates for students with disabilities and should promote the moral imperative that all children can learn, the delineation of their dispositions becomes an important aspect for teacher education programs to assess and examine (LePage, Nielsen, & Fearn, 2008; Thornton, 2006). Finally, the need to examine dispositions in special education teacher education is heightened by the fact that certain accreditation institutions such as NCATE (2006) require that all universities receiving accreditation measure disposition(s) as part of the overall evaluation of their programs. Because NCATE's (2006) definition conflicts somewhat with that of the research in higher education, the topic of dispositions again becomes something that

should be examined more closely (Renzaglia, Hutchins, & Lee, 1997; Jung & Rhodes, 2008).

In addition to the research questions posed, the driving question (originally a research question in the proposal) behind the discussion in this chapter is, *What effect, if any, can the perceptions about dispositions taken from both the preprofessional (final internship and first year) and the first-year teachers have on how a teacher education program prepares, assesses, and teaches dispositions with future preprofessional teachers in special education?* This question will be specifically addressed in the recommendations section, but the general idea of how this study informs practices in teacher education in special education will be sewn throughout the chapter. In order to address this concept, this chapter is organized to discuss a summary of the findings from the research questions, the overall significance of the data as it relates to the previously selected literature and theoretical propositions, and the resulting recommendations and implications for teacher education in special education. Additionally, this researcher's reflexive processes will be examined in the final section in order to portray the process of creating a dissertation and his future in the profession of teaching teachers in special education (described in chapter three).

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **RQ 1 and RQ 1(a)**

Research questions one and one (a) were related to how the preprofessional teachers in their final internship perceived the ways in which their dispositions changed (or not) over the course of their program and what perceived effects their dispositions had on their successes and/or setbacks in their program. The interviews with the participants

revealed that many of the preprofessional teachers shared similar sentiments about what dispositions are, how they related to their experiences in a teacher education program, and how these would in turn affect their future practice, when compared with the interviews from the preprofessional teachers in their second semester and the recently graduated teachers. This included the sense that dispositions are a driving force in creating who one is as both a person and a professional. Many of the participants cited examples of negative dispositions and the pessimism they witnessed was attributed to the lack of introspection by the professionals on their dispositions.

Another sentiment sewn throughout the interviews with the preprofessional teachers in their final internship (found in the other groups' interviews as well) was the understanding of the profound influence of dispositions was not relegated simply to the participants' current and future practice, but was rooted in their happiness with their profession. Satisfaction with one's profession is often connected directly to whether or not an individual stays in the profession of teaching in special education (Kokkinos, 2007; Teven, 2007). One possible reason for this is highlighted by the fact that all of the preprofessional teachers in their final internship connected their dispositions to their teaching "self" and, in doing so, melded who they are with their profession. This connection could be important to understanding why teachers get into teaching and stay in teaching. The findings from the current study emphasized the fact that if teacher education programs in special education are able to assist their students in making a deeper connection between their professional and personal self, the likelihood of the students staying in the field once they obtain a job might increase.

Participants in their final internship also discussed some unique characteristics related to the first research question and these nuances were believed to be connected with their position in the program and the evolution of their professional development. Participants in their final internship were on the verge of becoming full-time teachers in charge of their own classroom (pending their employment). The transference between university student and teacher is one that is often associated with high levels of stress due to all the program requirements and the questioning of whether or not this profession is *for them* (Whitaker, 2003). This researcher had several conversations the participants on this topic and the main idea born from this discussion was that knowing what was right was related to a feeling.

This intuitive feeling is hard to describe, but you know it when you feel it. It is the intangible aspect of connecting with one's self with one's profession and the concept of evolving, rather than becoming stagnant. Dispositions are an essential component of becoming a practitioner that maintains an ability to understand who they are and why they are in teaching. Exploring this feeling through personal reflections and the revisiting of one's philosophy statement were cited by participants being an important aspect of becoming a teacher and being able to maintain one's focus in the field. Therefore, both reflecting and creating a philosophy could be valuable tools for teacher educators to require throughout their courses.

Although many of the participants in their final internship stated that this feeling of what makes a good "teacher disposition" was hard to define, they inadvertently discussed many aspects of what they considered to be important components of a teacher's disposition in special education. They discussed the importance of patience,

empathy, understanding, open-mindedness, tenacity, advocacy, compassion, positive collaboration, love, and happiness (to name a few). These qualities in combination would certainly make for a well-rounded person, let alone a potentially effective teacher.

Through their responses to the interview questions, the participants were able to describe the intangible and sought after quintessential “*Teacher Disposition(s)*”, which they felt eluded many in the field of special education. However, being able to hold these dispositions and manifest them everyday was also something that the participants felt would be difficult in the face of adversity (this topic will be discussed further in the section of the connection between the established theory and the study, specifically with Dewey’s (1944) conceptualizations of dispositions).

Specifically, the preprofessional teachers in their final internship focused on patience and an understanding the professional and personal self as key components of how their dispositions changed over the course of their involvement in the program and were related to their overall successes. They also cited these concepts as two important aspects for faculty in teacher education programs to consider. Without patience, one cannot take the time to understand one’s self and therefore cannot understand one’s students. Ultimately, the importance of the first research question lies in how we as faculty at the university can initiate and prepare students for the first voyage into the world of teaching in special education. Faculty should allow some freedom, while at the same time make an attempt to keep the students grounded through reflexive practices in order to assist them in maintaining their perspective on the field and, most importantly, consider the students they will influence through their dispositions.

## **RQ 2**

Research question two was related to the preprofessional teachers in their second semester and how they perceived the ways in which their dispositions influenced their continued involvement in the program and how their dispositions would, hypothetically, influence their teaching practice. Because this group was the least experienced of all the groups, they obviously lacked some familiarity with working with students with disabilities in the field. Drawing on previous experiences was found to be an important attaché to answering questions within the interviews amongst all three groups. Therefore, the responses of the participants' in their second semester of the program were more vague in nature and were often associated with hypothetical situations. Despite these shortcomings, the data gathered from the interviews with the professional teachers in their second semester, brought to the surface several important connections to university practices and helps with the understanding of how dispositions can influence students' involvement in their teacher education program.

One finding from the interviews with this group was related to the connection between experience and expression of how dispositions affect one's teaching practice underlines several important factors related to the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and their conceptualization of their future practice. Additionally, the importance of understanding how students' perceptions evolve is again highlighted for the consideration of university teacher education programs. When compared to groups the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and the recently graduated teachers, the preprofessional teachers in their second semester and their responses to interview questions related to reflective practices demonstrated the participants' burgeoning

understanding of the importance of examining their own practice. There was the sense that the preprofessional teachers in their second semester still had some trepidation about the choices they made related to going into special education and the changes in perception they were experiencing.

The preprofessional teachers in their second semester were now moving away from being strictly in the university classroom and were beginning to become more involved in the field. Similar to how the preprofessional teachers in their final internship reminisced on their personal and professional evolutions in the program, the changes cited by the preprofessional teachers in their final semester in terms of both their dispositions and preconceived notions about what special education was supposed to be, were changing at a rapid rate. This transformation is an important point in the development of a preprofessional teacher, as often this semester is the point in the program where requirements are escalated and students begin to realize that they need to become more independent thinkers and be able to act on decisions on their own. Again, the scaffolded process employed by the university becomes an important component of how students react to this newfound responsibility.

Overall, the preprofessional teachers in their second semester supported the understanding of the initiation stage of teacher education programs and the importance of fostering their consideration of why they entered the program and how their perceptions of “self” matter when it comes to becoming a teacher in special education. Similar to the preprofessional teachers in their final internship and the recently graduated teachers, the preprofessional teachers in their final internship emphasized the many ways in which one’s dispositions can impact their current standing in the program and their future

practice. As they begin to move away from the cohort mentality (thinking in similar ways when compared to members of their cohort) and start to become more independent, it is essential that university faculty understand how important arming students with a deeper perspective of how their actions affect students and how they can begin to understand this process (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006). Teaching university students to contemplate the “why” behind their practice is seen as the theme and directly connected to the importance of teaching dispositions to students new to the experience of teacher education programs.

### **RQ 3, RQ 3(a), and RQ 3(b)**

Research questions three, three (a), and three (b) were related to the recently graduated teachers and their perceptions of how their dispositions changed across their involvement in their program, how dispositions related to their successes and/or setbacks in their program, and how their understandings influence their current practice. The data gathered from this group completed the theoretical circle related to the examination of dispositions within the university experience (the case in this study). Through the interviews it became clear that the recently graduated teachers displayed elements and characteristics of both groups of preprofessional teachers, but were now exuding a certain sense of wisdom regarding the process of university learning and how the manifestation of dispositions is an important concept to understand in their current practice.

This group obviously has more knowledge of the field. They drew upon this experience extensively within the interviews, which again highlights the importance of field experiences in teacher education programs. The recently graduated teachers were able to express their thoughts about how they changed in a more advanced way and



provided examples of how they are currently employing their understanding in an effective fashion. The notion that significant changes occurred as preprofessional teachers become teachers in the field adds to the importance in understanding this process, as the window for the university influencing dispositions is only open for so long.

Recently graduated teacher participants cited how they *now* understand the purpose in many of the practices of the university faculty in regards to both the design of the curriculum and the reflective assignments required within their courses. Of specific importance were the reflections, case studies, field experiences, and continued support of faculty in all facets of their learning experiences. Admittedly, many of the participants saw their dispositions change even more upon entering the field as a paid and certified professional in special education. Many stated that they relied on a lot of their previous teachings and were able to navigate the many imminent stressful situations that came about as part of their experience as a teacher.

Interestingly, the recently graduated teachers portrayed a more concrete image of the type of person they wished to be as a teacher. They deduced these characteristics from both positive and negative examples of teaching dispositions, what practices were found to be effective, and what practices allowed for a more positive teaching environment, conducive to their students' learning. Versatility and adaptability were the focal points of these conversations and these aspects were seen as crucial to being able to becoming happy in the profession and how they foresaw themselves staying in the profession in the near future. In their definitions of dispositions, and through the subsequent conversations about how components of dispositions can be influenced by

university programs, all of the participants expressed how grateful they were to have had some direct instruction on the topic and why that became an essential component of whom they are currently as a teacher. The advice they gave university faculty was to keep driving at the understanding that all teachers are different, but not all teachers are dispositionally equal and that strengths should be fostered and negative dispositions quelled through exploration both in class and in the field.

### **Connections to Previous Theoretical Propositions and Research**

#### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

One of the original intents (as stated in the proposal) of this project was to examine how the definitions of dispositions compare and contrast between accreditation institutions (e.g. NCATE) and researchers (Sockett, 2006; Villegas, 2007; Ritchhart, 2002). However, the conceptualizations of dispositions discussed by the participants took on a whole new meaning upon investigation and the definitions of dispositions became more of a starting point or portion of a conversation rather than the main topic or focus. Although this deviation did shift the focus of the study slightly, it was interpreted as a positive change and one that allowed for the collection of data on a level much deeper than anticipated.

In exploring the results, there was a distinct connection to several postulations made in chapter one of this study. This included, first, the philosophical underpinnings cited by Sockett (2006), as the researcher noted, “The development of dispositions of character, intellect, and caring are *the core of professional teaching*, each demanding knowledge and self-knowledge” (p. 21). As discussed above, all three groups of participants exhibited an understanding and further examined how their personal and

professional dispositions interacted and the importance of upholding the integrity that a teaching position in special education demands. The participants' understanding of how dispositions can influence a child's learning in a profound manner furthers the evidence related to how in-depth this examination of dispositions was when it came to understanding the role of a teacher in special education in society.

The concept of how a teacher can represent certain influential characteristics, important for a child to become a citizen of the world, was presented through Dewey's (1944) conceptualization of the role of a teacher (discussed in chapter one). He noted that traits such as empathy, trustworthiness, and honesty are all essential to becoming an influential teacher and can be exuded through one's personality in the classroom. Many of the participants in the current study discussed these themes as being critical components of their dispositions in relation to their teaching practices. The constructs discussed furthered the notion that the development of dispositions is something that is considered of great importance to the teachers as they move from being a student to a professional.

The association between one's disposition and one's actions as they relate to teaching was also discussed by Dewey (1944), "The most important problem of moral education in the school concerns the relationship of knowledge and conduct" (p.360). He goes on to call for the evaluation of a teacher's character, not just the results found through of students' test scores. The results of this project can be directly related to this topic, as many of the participants stated that simply having the highest grades or getting the highest marks on an evaluation matters little if you are not of a certain moral composition, which consists of the notion that all children can learn and all children

should be allowed to learn together. Furthermore, participants cited the fact that just knowing and believing these sentiments is not enough. One must put these beliefs and attitudes into practice and manifest positive dispositions in order to create positive change in their classroom.

Dewey's (1944) theory builds directly into the conceptualizations put forth in the enculturation model for teaching (Tishman, Jay, & Perkins, 1992) and how a certain teaching culture can influence teachers' belief structure in a positive fashion, which could ultimately lead to students' learning being positively influenced. Throughout the interviews, there was a sense that each group of participants was connected through a common bond, one that underlies the reason why individuals choose to become teachers. Initially, it was thought by this researcher that these reasons would be surface level explanations (e.g. love of kids, being in school is great, summers off, etc.) of what teaching means. However, what was presented in the findings and what has been discussed here is the idea of a collective conscious of teaching. One that promotes an examination of one's self as necessary to becoming a special education teacher that will ultimately influence children in a positive fashion. The culture of a special education teacher might be different than that of other teachers and this distinction is important to understand if disciplines are to cross barriers to create an effective learning community.

Finally, the participants' discussion of how dispositions allowed them to create meaning in their life connected with Norton's (1991) conceptualization of building a relationship between meaningful living and meaningful work. In the opinion of this researcher, it is happiness and the passion that comes from doing something one loves that keeps special education teachers in the field and helps build the capacity of their

disposition to include new beliefs and attitudes that will help shape their practice in a positive fashion. The connection between one's interactions in the field, their reflexive practice, and how their dispositions change, was a major topic discussed by many of the participants and connects with Bourdieu's (1977) social field theory. Bourdieu (1977) noted, "a reflexivity which is not separated from the everyday, but intrinsically linked to the (unconscious) categories of habit which shape action" (in Nolan, 2012, p. 195). Reflexive practice was vital to the participants understanding of their role in education and this notion of the intangible qualities discussed throughout the interviews in terms of what comprises the essence of a "teacher's disposition(s)".

### **Research on Teacher Education in Special Education**

As discussed in chapter two, conflicting definitions of dispositions in teacher education, especially in the area of special education exist (Villegas, 2007). Compounding these discrepancies are the definitions of accreditation institutions and researchers (Jung & Rhodes, 2008; Renzaglia, Hutchins, & Lee, 1997). However, as noted above, this topic provided a pertinent jumping off point to discuss the composition of dispositions, as told by the participants' in this study. More importantly, the connection to the literature related to the discussion of how teacher education programs in special education can move forward with their assessment processes. The creation of these assessments should be discussed as it relates to the scope of this project (a more detailed discussion of this topic will be discussed in the recommendations section of this chapter).

Wasicsko, Callahan, and Wirtz (2004) discussed how dispositions are evaluated through three different categories: a teacher's behaviors, teacher characteristics, and

teacher perceptions. Each of these categories was discussed throughout several interviews and how they connected with a teacher's dispositions. The trend in this project seemed to be that the participants' thought of these topics not necessarily as categories, but instead as falling along a continuum or consisting of repetitive processes. These processes would start with one's perceptions and their subsequent alterations as a result of new knowledge, which would then turn into characteristics, and would be manifested by behaviors. This conceptual rearrangement allows for a deeper understanding of how these categories interact and could influence how a teacher moves through a program and ultimately into his or her profession as a full time teacher (this shift will be discussed further in the recommendations section of this chapter).

What constitutes positive and negative dispositions was also a major theme discussed throughout chapter two and was a topic that was sewn throughout the discussion by the participants in the interviews. Examples from participants of what comprised negative or positive dispositions were often backed up with the citation of a particular field experience. The research connected a teacher's positive dispositions to their sense of efficacy (Paneque & Barbetta, 2006; Popp Grant, & Stronge, 2011), the belief that all children can learn (Talbert-Johnson, 2006), and empathic understandings (Suarez, 2003). All of these topics were discussed by the participants and were related to their conceptualization of their own strengths as a teacher or what they hoped to exhibit upon becoming a teacher (or continue to exhibit in the recently graduated teachers' case). Therefore, the data in this study may have important connections to the literature, as it provides some examples related to the composition of positive dispositions in teacher education.

Researchers noted that negative dispositions are often comprised of moral indecency (Cummings, Dyas, Maddux, & Kochman, 2003) and the instability of one's beliefs and attitudes (Edwards & Edick, 2006). Again, the participants in this study discussed these topics and related many of their comments to their experiences in the field with teachers or other professionals displaying negative dispositions. Understanding the reciprocal nature of dispositions could be important for teacher education programs in special education as the result of the manifestation of a negative disposition is often release from the program (Edwards & Edick, 2006). This examination of what dispositions mean from both a positive and negative standpoint could assist teacher education programs in making important decisions about teacher candidates.

One final connection between this study and the literature is how teacher education programs in special education assess their candidates' dispositions in order to evaluate their progress in the program. Several important connections were made between this study and this area of research. The first was the importance of reflective practice (Notar, Riley, Taylor, Thornburg, & Cargill, 2009). Participants discussed how they now understand the importance of reflection, as it allows for introspection and critical analysis of one's practice. Another connection included the integration of teaching to dispositions within the curriculum (Beverly, Santos, & Kyger, 2006). Participants often related their understanding of their own dispositions to how their teacher education program integrated this topic into their courses (often in a non-direct fashion). Lastly, the instruments used in the assessment of preprofessional teacher dispositions (Johnson, 2008; Goe & Coggshall, 2007). Participants shared the sentiment about how to evaluate dispositions in a teacher education program or the school system

was pervaded by sentiments of complexity and difficulty, as participants often discussed how it is difficult to measure such intangible constructs.

Overall, the findings of this collective case study connected with many challenges posed in both the theory and the literature related to the subject of dispositions in teacher education. Throughout many of the interviews, there was the notion that the participants wanted to understand and discuss dispositions in a more complex fashion, but that this would require guidance and support of faculty and more time with the topic. This is a positive sign and will hopefully be considered in future examinations of dispositions by researchers or teacher education programs. The following sections will include the recommendations and implications of this study as they relate to the examination and assessment of dispositions in special education teacher education.

## **Recommendations**

### **Teacher Preparation Programs**

The results of this study led to several pertinent recommendations for examining and assessing dispositions in teacher preparation programs in special education. These recommendations come as a result of the responses provided by the participants. Therefore, one section will include selected direct quotes from members of the three groups. This presentation strategy is in line with Stake's (1999) case study methodology, as it is the researcher's duty to tell the story of the participants through their words. As previously stated, the driving question for this chapter, and specifically for the recommendations section was: *How can the participants' perceptions about dispositions contribute to the process undertaken by teacher education programs to prepare, assess, and teach dispositions to future preprofessional teachers in special education?* This



question connects some of the ideas presented in the research to the research questions and the intents and purpose of the current study.

### **Researcher's Recommendations**

The following is a list of suggestions for teacher preparation programs, specifically as they relate to the field of special education. Although some comments may be relevant to other fields of education, the intent of this section, again, is based on the topic of dispositions within special education.

**Reflexive practice in teacher education.** The inclusion of teaching reflexive practices, specifically as they relate to the issues and concerns of special educators, should be an essential component of a special education teacher education programs. Such practices should not be done in isolation, but instead should be integrated throughout the program and should be built upon each successive semester. The students in the program should maintain and keep the analyses of the reflective materials (with feedback from the faculty members associated with the program), with one final culminating experience (e.g. a presentation) related to what they have learned throughout their program. This demonstration would allow for their reflection on their completed process and display their achievements for the faculty. This information could be valuable to preprofessional teachers' understanding of the changes they experienced throughout the program. Additionally, the reading and analyzing of the students' reflections and other materials could be beneficial for the faculty themselves and allow for a deeper understanding of their own practices as teacher educators in special education. Connections between students and faculty members are, in this researcher's experience, best made through an open sharing of ideas, triumphs, and struggles.

This process could first include an introduction on how to reflect presented by the faculty. One valuable article used in the presentation to the preprofessional teachers in their final internship in this study was an article entitled, *On Becoming a Critically Reflexive Practitioner* by Cunliffe (2004). This article promoted the concept of becoming someone who critically examines their own pedagogical understandings as they relate to the context of a subject area such as becoming a special education teacher.

Additionally, “reflection stems” such as those promoted by Tillman and Richards (2010), could also help to provide some guidance and contextualize the reflections for the area of special education (see a full description of the study and how it was used in chapter four). It was apparent, based on comments made throughout the interviews (and the reflections from the preprofessional teachers in their final internship) that participants found such practices valuable from their second semester in the program, all the way through their first year of teaching. New and creative ways to reflect should be encouraged and should not be limited to the above suggestions. Alternate forms of reflection (e.g. art, technological presentations, etc.) will be discussed through this researcher’s reflection on the process in the reflexive process section below.

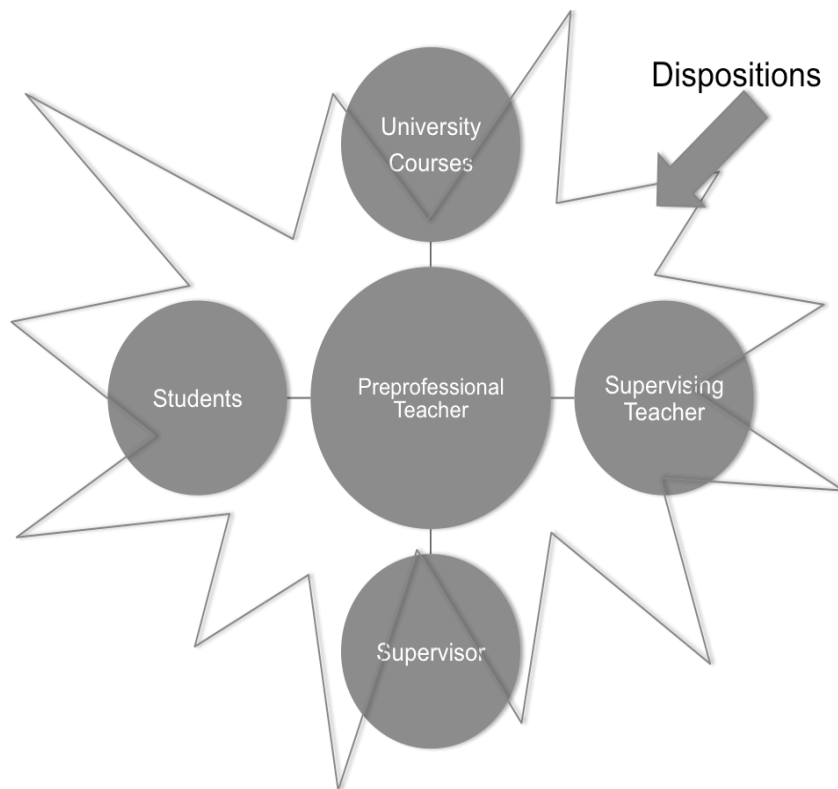
**Continuum of assessment.** When it comes to assessing dispositions in teacher education in special education, universities should consider examining the use of a continuum versus categories of dispositions. Instead of using discrete categories with a rating scale, evaluations could consist of individual scales that are adapted for each student. These scales would be related to each individual student’s progress and their needs in certain areas along a continuum of progress. This process could be time consuming, however, if each student were to create an individual set of “dispositional

goals” and discuss them with a faculty member once a semester (in a face-to-face meeting), both parties would be able to discuss dispositions in a meaningful fashion. It is believed that this process could benefit both the student and faculty member and create a forum for the open discussion of dispositions. This could take place several times throughout the semester and would allow for time to discuss how the individual student’s disposition is developing. The faculty member could develop a series of probing questions related to this topic. This would allow for a more contextualized and less uniform system for assessing dispositions.

An attempt to create such a process is of course not without its pitfalls as the ambiguity and individualized nature of such a plan could make it difficult to create. As the researchers in the field have noted, the process of coming to universal decisions about dispositions is a difficult task (Beverley, Santos, & Kyger, 2006). However, it is the belief of this researcher, after the lengthy examination of such a subjective topic, that such a process would benefit both the student and the university faculty once terms for the creative process are agreed upon. The collection of these individuals’ dispositional goals over the years could then be aggregated and deeper understanding of the themes could emerge. Again, the hope is that faculty would be less inclined to argue about what dispositions are, and allow individual themselves to decide the meaning of the construct as they have been able to do in this study.

**Assessment of dispositions in multiple contexts.** Faculty in teacher education programs in special education should look to assess not just individual dispositions of their preprofessional teachers, but of the relationships between the preprofessional teachers, themselves, and the supervising teachers in the field, and how each of these

individuals' dispositions match (or conflict) with each other in order to create a (hopefully) more harmonious situation. This would allow for multiple perspectives on the process of understanding the influence of dispositions on various settings, represented in Figure 17 below. Each group of individuals included could examine their own dispositions and attempt to understand why certain situations work out positively, while others do not end well. Based on the findings of this research project, it would be interesting to see a new perspective on how we perceive dispositions as a community of educators and include multiple perspectives on the topic as it applies to individuals becoming special educators.



*Figure 17.* The various relationships experienced by a preprofessional teacher through his or her university program, with dispositions being the underlying concept connecting them together.

## **Recommendations from Participants**

Several participants commented on how teacher education programs in special education should examine, evaluate, teach, and assess dispositions. One participant noted:

I think it's important [assessing dispositions] because even within my own school, I've realized a lot of the teachers have a lot of different beliefs and attitudes towards different students or towards how the way we're supposed to teach or what not, so I think defining that, assessing it, and seeing the students' success based on the teacher dispositions could even benefit and understand which beliefs affect how the students are learning or which attitudes affect them.

This same idea was expressed by another participant who noted, "I think that it's important for professors to understand that not everyone who signs up and enrolls in their program is going to be strong enough to be successful, to be that effective educator."

This sentiment is one that should be taken into consideration when asking students about why they want to become a teacher.

Other participants mentioned that dispositions should to be addressed in order to ensure that students are receiving the best education possible. One participant stated, "I think that if dispositions aren't addressed within a teacher education program you may be putting out teachers who aren't prepared to be teachers." Another participant shared this sentiment, "I think dispositions are largely important to teaching. To define and assess them would be a good measure of how successful a teacher would be in the field."

Overall, the participants hoped that the research on dispositions would go on and include a differentiated definition of the construct throughout the various field of education.

## **Future Research**

Research examining dispositions in teacher education in special education is lacking (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2011; Villegas, 2007). This could be due to the fact that dispositions are an ambiguous concept and one that is difficult to define. However, as demonstrated by the study above, methods outside of quantitative analysis can yield meaningful results that have the potential to be useful for future examinations of this topic. Below are several suggestions for possible future research examinations in the area of dispositions.

As discussed above, examining the various relationships that exist between the professionals involved in a preprofessional teacher's education could be helpful when comparing and contrasting the conceptualizations and/or perceptions of what dispositions are and how they impact not just those in higher education, but the students in the schools (see Figure 15 above). Such a study might be best designed through a qualitative method and involve the use of multiple sources of data (but not necessarily a case study). This examination would allow for multiple perspectives on the phenomenon of dispositional relationship and could add to the literature in a meaningful fashion.

Further research could also examine the ways in which universities and accreditation institutions develop their definitions of dispositions and assess them as part of accreditation and evaluative purposes. Part of the current study involved asking the participants about their thoughts on NCATE's (2006) definition of dispositions and how they would change the definition (if at all). For a list of the questions related to this topic please see Appendix B. However, the results of this examination did not yield any outstanding or useful results and were therefore not included in the findings sections.

Future studies should consider going more in-depth into the questioning behind the construction of the definition and could possibly have masters or doctoral level students conduct the analysis, as the time allotted for the questions and the participants' (in this study) knowledge of such accreditation institutions was limited. The future project could include elements of text analysis utilized above in order to provide a basis for examination.

Finally, replication of this study could benefit the field, as variations of the examination could include changes to the level of the participants (preprofessional teachers in their first semester, teachers who graduated more than one year previous), additions to the method (include observations in the case study), a different method (use of action research or another form of qualitative inquiry), or differentiation or addition to the line of questioning (e.g. more questions related to a particular topic). Hopefully, the research in the area dispositions would not be limited to special education, although this group is the least often represented per the review of the literature. Obviously there are more variations to be discussed, however, adding to the literature on the topic is considered an important aspect of continuing the learning process for individuals teaching teachers in higher education.

Overall, these suggestions provide a conceptual platform from which to continue the research in the area of dispositions in special education teacher education. There are certainly more aspects of the topic to explore and more ways to conduct such studies. However, the hope is that researchers seeking a deeper understanding of the topic might use this project and its suggestions in some beneficial manner.

## **Implications**

This research provides one example of a case study of the perceptions of three groups of participants associated with special education teacher education program on dispositions and their possible implications for informing faculty practices in higher education. It is evident that members of all three groups were able to discuss the topic of dispositions in a meaningful fashion, provided information to be discussed, and offered suggestions for future research in this area. The participants (each in their own way) emphasized the importance and influence of dispositions in teacher education in special education and encouraged faculty to continue the improvement of evaluation systems of dispositions for teaching purposes. Three major implications for this research are presented below: teacher education, qualitative interview analysis, and the case study method.

### **Teacher Education in Special Education**

The assessment of dispositions by teacher educators in higher education, specifically special education, is a difficult task. There are numerous factors to consider and knowing all of the information related to an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors is next to impossible. However, exploring new ways to elicit conversations and examinations of dispositions by the preprofessional teachers themselves is one promising possibility that can be drawn from this study. As demonstrated by the participants in this study, preprofessional teachers and recently graduated teachers are fully capable of discussing the topic of dispositions in a meaningful way and the results of the discussion can inform practices in higher education. However, the examination and reflection upon dispositions should not end here and should certainly not be limited



to just the preprofessional teachers. Continued examinations should focus on dispositions, as research on the topic is lacking and the subject is complicated.

### **Qualitative Interview Analysis**

The method used to examine the interview data in this project could be seen as relatively unique, as the process included aspects of open coding from multiple research sources (Harry, Klinger, & Sturges, 2005; Charmaz, 2008) within the case study method (Stake, 1999). The scaffolded analysis using both open coding and the *intra* and *inter* presentation of the findings assisted with the in-depth analysis of the data and ultimately led to the structure of the findings and a meaningful discussion. Without conducting such a procedure in combination with the case study method, it is felt by this researcher that connections between the information and the participants would have been lost. The combination and borrowing from other methods in analyzing interviews should be a practice that qualitative researchers should consider, as such a technique is rooted in the essence of qualitative inquiry as it is open to interpretability and yields the presentation of data that tells the story of the participants. The hope is that their collective voice shone through in combination with this researcher's words and postulations.

### **Case Study Method**

The question as to what the case was in this project was often a topic of discussion in the meetings with this researcher's committee. The cogitation of this topic was important in conceptualizing the case. The understanding that case study is related more to a bounded system than an individual case is what drove the project to its final conclusion related to the case being contained within the university experience. Stake's (1999) work related to case studies and his supposition that such research is a form of art

and can be interpreted in multiple fashions, truly assisted in the creative process related to this project. Case study is art, and like art should be interpreted in the way best seen fit for the researcher to tell the story of the participants. This is especially true of research related to topics such as dispositions. Because the topic is ambiguous and difficult to define, a little improvisation in combination with some thoughtful conceptualizations was necessary. The hope is that other researchers might consider the method for research on this and similar topics and continue the tradition promoted by one of the great thinkers in qualitative inquiry.

### **Researcher's Reflexive Process**

In order to complete my reflexive process, I kept a journal throughout the last year (starting in October and continuing until April) in the spirit of existential and critical self-examination as suggested by Cunliffe (2004). Additionally, I continually worked on a painting (Samaras, 2011), which I discussed in my reflections as well. I used these two methods in order to examine what I learned from the process of creating a dissertation, the implications of the results of my study, and the constant flux of researching in teacher education. In the following sections, I will first discuss my reflexive journal, followed by a discussion of the painting I created. Throughout the discussion, I will include my own thoughts as they appear now and what I feel was both beneficial and difficult about conducting research, writing a dissertation, and what's next on my journey.

I completed this project in the spirit of what Stake (1999) promoted as the art of case study research. I took this aspect of his explication quite literally and felt that it added an element of data collection on myself that really embodied a sense of growth and learning from the perspective of a researcher. The journal and painting were a way to

triangulate my own thoughts and conceptualizations while creating the final dissertation product. The difficulty was found in how to promote the purpose of these tasks, while still maintaining the level of rigor expected for such an endeavor. However, I believe that my creative outlet allowed for deep insights into what it means to become a scholar and helped me focus my thoughts on the task at hand. Therefore, I found this process to be invaluable and I would hope that other researchers examining such a complicated topic would find a way to release their creative energy through another medium as well.

### **Reflexive Journal**

I can't help but feel as Tom Petty once put, 'The waiting is the hardest part.' The opening line of my first journal entry describes the first part of my journey very well. I was struggling with how to tackle the subject of dispositions and wondering if I could combine my background in psychology and my love for teacher education in special education and (of course) make it meaningful and feasible. I knew what I loved: case study research, working with participants, in-depth explorations, and interpreting rich data. However, the *how* behind how to get all this became the difficult part and through some haggling with my committee, we were able to come up with a plan that satisfied all of my wants and needs for this project. I had to love this monstrosity, and in order to love something it has to have your influence, your own unique mark. My thoughts after these discussions were, "Fortunate as I am, I need to go out and earn it now." I am lucky to be able to do this and I found I was even luckier to have some amazing and willing individuals on my committee to help see me through the process.

"Light up the darkness" is one of my favorite quotes from Bob Marley and the title of a journal entry several weeks later. At this time I was writing my proposal while

my wife was on vacation. I had the house and my thoughts all to myself. I struggled a bit with the *how* again and the conceptualization of the case. I wanted to include as much of the participants' voices in what I was doing, but I was worried that this would make the process more difficult. I soon realized that a topic such as dispositions is inherently complicated and I needed to worry more about who I was as a researcher rather than the technicalities and inevitable setbacks that would occur. My moment of clarity came when I was sitting back from the computer screen and looked up at the thank you cards my first cohort had sent me after their graduation. I realized then that they were the reason I was doing this, to find that relationship again, to understand why they succeeded and how I could help others in the same way in the future. The project took off after that and ultimately my proposal was accepted.

Then came the dark times. I didn't reflect for some time while I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and then collected data. When I am in the thick of "it" I cannot think to do much else. Perhaps it's a good attribute because I was able to complete the process relatively quickly and begin the analysis. An excerpt from my next journal entry reflects this feeling: "I have emerged from the data collection process victorious! Well, at least I hope so." I realized then the mountain of data I had to sift through and the flood of happenings that I was to encounter. Just sitting back and thinking about the process helped tremendously and being around the students in class helped with my perspective as well. As I read through the interviews and began to come up with themes and codes, I started to realize that I really did have some genuine gold in terms of data. I actually enjoyed reading and coding and couldn't wait to start putting

this all together. The light in the tunnel became clearer. The road's end was on the map. I just needed a little more time to get there.

Now in the final throes of this process, I must admit that it was not as painful as originally anticipated. Sure I had my share of sleepless nights and fits of frustration, but I was allowed (by everyone involved in this process) to do what I had to do when I needed to do it. That was invaluable. It meant everything. I felt I was allowed to have my voice, that my freedom was respected, and that I was able to immerse myself in the process and emerge even more motivated to continue in higher education than ever before. The final chapter of this dissertation literally flowed out. It was like I had hit a pay streak of gold and couldn't gobble up enough of it, my greedy fingers hacking away at the keyboard. I wrote for hours on end and felt that this was the result of having done my job correctly in the previous sections. I was so immersed and so into what I was doing through the topic that I was able to actualize my dream with only a few setbacks (fingers crossed as I type this).

The final lesson I would like to impart before moving on to my lovely painting would be that the love I have for the profession and what it entails, as well as the melding of my past to my present helped me persevere through the difficult times. I want to remember that for future stormy seas, so that I might weather them better. I learned that empathy must be a central factor in my life, both personally and professionally (thanks to my mother for making me look that word up in the dictionary so many years ago). I cannot turn it off now and at times it seems like considering everything at once is too much, but that is exactly what the dissertation process taught me: take these things in stride and with time, pressure, and hope, anything is possible.

## **Reflexive Painting**

I am not an artist. I never thought that my dissertation would include such a project, but I found creating my painting helpful throughout the writing process. It allowed for a different perspective, one that would change multiple times before the completion of this task. As art is always an individual's interpretation, I will briefly describe my process with a couple highlights in terms of the creative process and then leave the rest up to the viewer for their own thoughts.

Initially, I wanted to start in the bottom left corner and move to the top right corner of the canvas with varying rows of colors and textures to represent my thoughts and feelings at that moment. This started off fine...until my proposal. My major professor noted that it seemed a bit claustrophobic. I hadn't thought I felt that way, but the more I considered it, the more that I felt like she was right. I was boxing myself in with this structure and rigor in a painting. This creative process was supposed to be free and open, it was supposed to be art!

After the suggestion at my proposal presentation, I realized that what I was doing to the painting, I was doing to my dissertation: trying to structure it and make it mentally comfortable. Structure is control, but I needed to break the mold and do something different. So I went for it, creating more random lines and dots within the painting. However, I again was not liking what I was creating. It didn't seem to have any meaning. Then one day my wife walked into my study where I kept the painting. She looked at it up side down and said, "Is that supposed to be a fish or something?" I hadn't realized what I had done, but yes, it did look like a fish (or a dragon or something mean looking).

It was at that point that I started to like what it was again. My wife asked if I could just change the perspective completely. I thought, “Why not?” If art is interpretation and perspective, why can’t she lend me hers? With that we now have the final product with some other elements added. Entitled, “My Dissertation Dragon” (Figure 18 below), you can see the previous months are now flipped and drawn over, with the new dragon (or fish) diving deep down after the goal (perhaps spitting some fireballs out as well), moving quickly through the anxious waters to the right. Regardless of what it is or isn’t, it was fun, and I hope it provides some insight into who I am and what I hope to do in the future with my teaching: be creative, break the mold, evolve, and be willing to accept change.



*Figure 18. My reflexive painting: My Dissertation Dragon.*

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

### Table and Figure with Research Question Associations

Table A1

*Interview Questions Connected to Research Questions*

Research Questions	Group 1 (PPT-2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester)	Group 2 (PPT-Final Internship)	Group 3 (Recently Graduated Teachers)
RQ 1		<p>(1) In your own words, what are dispositions?</p> <p>(4) How has your dispositions changed (if at all) over the course of your involvement in your program?</p>	
RQ 1(a)		<p>(2) How does your definition of dispositions affect the process of becoming a special education teacher?</p> <p>(3) Do you think your dispositions have contributed to your successes and/or setbacks in your program?</p>	

Table A1 (continued)

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RQ 2	1) In your own words, what are dispositions?
	(2) How does your definition of dispositions affect the process of becoming a special education teacher?
	(3)-Do you think your dispositions have contributed to your successes and/or setbacks in your program?
	(4)-How has your dispositions changed (if at all) over the course of your involvement in your program?

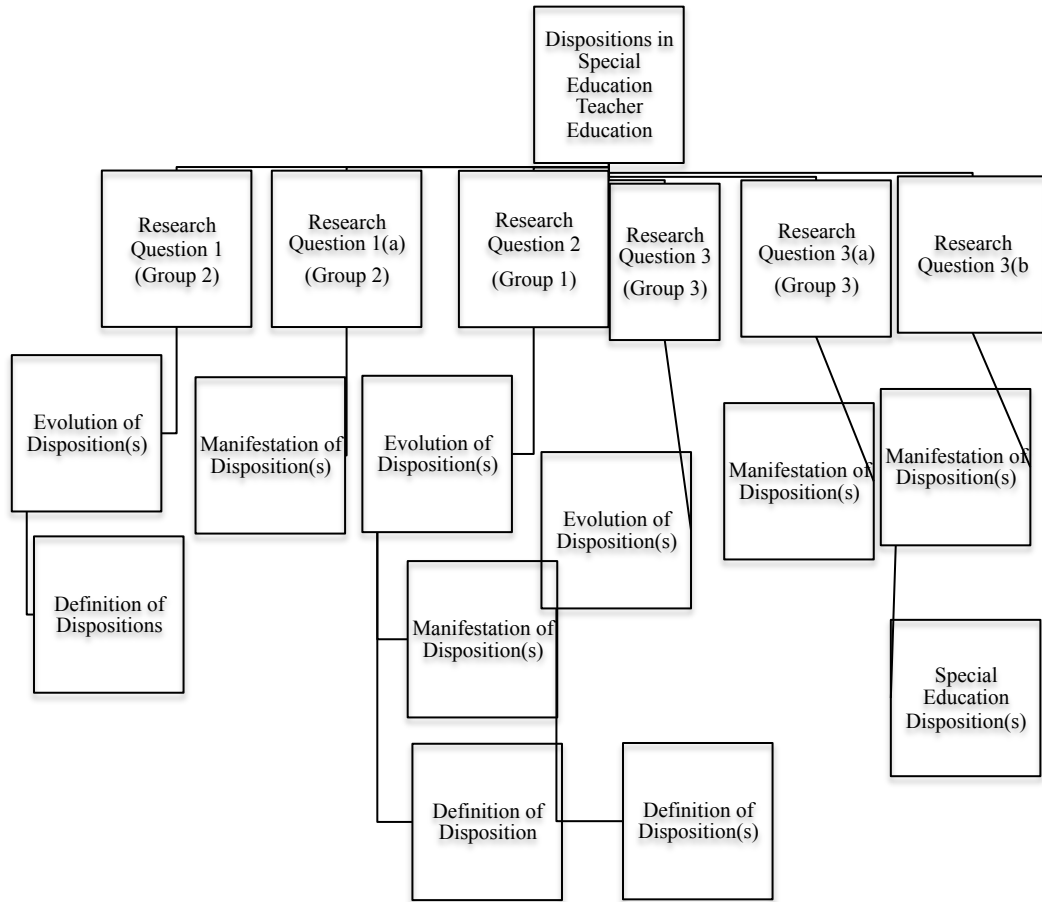
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Table A1 (continued)

RQ 3	(1) In your own words, what are dispositions?  (4) How have your dispositions changed (if at all) over the course of your involvement in your program and now into your first year as a teacher?
RQ 3(a)	(2) How does your definition of dispositions affect your practice as a special education teacher?  (3) Do you think your dispositions contributed to your successes and/or setbacks in your undergraduate program?
RQ 3(b)	(4c)- How do you think your dispositions influence your current practice?

*Note.* The table above is arranged so that the research questions in this study are listed in the left column (moving downwards), a full description of the research questions can be found in the Methods section. The groups of participants run across the top of the table and include preprofessional teachers (PPT) in their second semester (group one), preprofessional teachers in their final internship (group two), and recently graduated teachers from the same special education teacher education undergraduate program

(group three). The interview questions (with the number of the question in parenthesis) are inside the table and coincide with the appropriate research question and the group that research question is associated with.



*Figure A1.* This figure is a visual representation of the families and the codes of which they consist of for the codes associated with all three groups.

**Appendix B**  
**Informed Consent and Question Protocols for Participants**

**Informed Consent Document**

**THE NUMBERS AND NAMES OF CONTACTS HAVE BEEN REMOVED FOR PRIVACY PURPOSES. THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT HAD ALL PERTINENT INFORMATION PER IRB GUIDELINES.**

**Informed Consent to Participate in Research  
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study**

**IRB Study # Pro00010217**

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called:  
**Connective Capacity: The Importance and Influence of Dispositions in Special Education Teacher Education**

The person who is in charge of this research study is Scot Rademaker. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to more closely examine preprofessional and first year teachers' perceptions of how dispositions affect their teaching practices and to what extent they believe that these factors are important when studying to become a teacher in special education.

**Study Procedures**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview, which will last between 45 and 60 minutes.

**Alternatives**

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

**Benefits**

We don't know if you will get any benefits by taking part in this study.

### **Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

### **Compensation**

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are. However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, and all other research staff.
- The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.
- The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

### **Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the investigator or the research staff. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty if you stop taking part in this study. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from the study will have no impact on grades, course performance evaluation, access to future classes, or recommendations.

### **Questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call PI's name Scot Rademaker at 555-555-5555 or Faculty Advisor at 555-555-5555. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (555) 555-5555.

### **Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. You may take a copy of this form with you and keep it for your records.



## Interview Questions (Preprofessional Teachers)

1. In your own words, what are dispositions?
  - a. For reference the research state that dispositions are: *Tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs and attitudes.*
2. How does your personal definition of dispositions affect the process of becoming a special education teacher?
  - a. Why do you think dispositions are important to define, assess, and understand within a teacher education program?
3. Do you think your dispositions have contributed to your successes and/or setbacks in your program?
  - i. If so (with successes or setbacks), why?
    1. In what ways did they affect your outcomes (either by a semester basis or overall)?
4. How have your dispositions changed (if at all) over the course of your involvement in your program?
  - a. In what ways?
  - b. How do you think these changes have shaped your experience in the program?
  - c. How do you think your dispositions will influence your future (or current) practice?
5. \_“The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is an accreditation institution for universities such as the one you are at. Essentially

NCATE acts as the quality control for universities and only accredits a university if they meet certain standards. For example, in the syllabi you have been given in your classes, you will find how the university adheres to certain standards. One area they want universities to assess is dispositions. NCATE defines dispositions as:

- a. *Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive behaviors support student learning and development. NCATE expects institutions to assess professional dispositions based on observable behaviors in educational settings (NCATE, 2006, para. 13-14).*
  - b. How do you think your definition of dispositions is similar and/or different from what you have just read?
  - c. What changes, if any, would you make to that definition?
    - i. If changes were listed, why would you make those changes?
    - ii. If no changes are needed, why?
6. In your opinion, what do you think are some positive and negative aspects of how accreditation institutions (such as NCATE) and thus teacher education programs in special education define dispositions?
- a. Can teacher education programs teach and shape their students' dispositions?
    - i. If so, from your perspective, how do you think they do this?

- ii. If no, how can they implement a plan to teach dispositions for future preprofessional teachers?
7. Why is important for teacher education programs and/or schools to consider dispositions when assessing teachers (as candidates and/or employees)?
8. Do you have any other comments or suggestions related to dispositions and how they affect your future practice or the practices of teacher education programs in special education?

### **Interview Questions (Recently Graduated Teachers)**

1. In your own words, what are dispositions?
  - a. For reference the research state that dispositions are: *Tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs and attitudes.*
2. How does your definition of dispositions affect your practice as a special education teacher?
  - a. Why do you think dispositions are important to define, assess, and understand within a teacher education program?
3. Do you think your dispositions contributed to your previous successes and/or setbacks in your undergraduate program?
  - i. If so (with successes or setbacks), why?
    1. In what ways did they affect your outcomes (either within a single semester or overall)?
4. How have your dispositions changed (if at all) over the course of your involvement in your program and now into your first year as a teacher?
  - a. In what ways?
  - b. In reflection, how do you think these changes shaped your experience in your undergraduate program?
  - c. How do you think your dispositions will continue to influence your practice?
5. “The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is an accreditation institution for universities such as the one you are at. Essentially

NCATE acts as the quality control for universities and only accredits a university if they meet certain standards. For example, in the syllabi you have been given in your classes, you will find how the university adheres to certain standards. One area they want universities to assess is dispositions. NCATE defines dispositions as:

*Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive behaviors support student learning and development. NCATE expects institutions to assess professional dispositions based on observable behaviors in educational settings (NCATE, 2006, para. 13-14).*

How do you think your definition of dispositions is similar and/or different from what you have just read?

- a. What changes, if any, would you make to that definition?
  - i. If changes were listed, why would you make those changes?
  - ii. If no changes are needed, why?
6. In your opinion, what do you think are some positive and negative aspects of how accreditation institutions (such as NCATE) and thus teacher education programs in special education define dispositions?
  - a. Can teacher education programs teach and shape their students' dispositions?
    - i. If so, from your perspective, how do you think they do this?

- ii. If no, how can they implement a plan to teach dispositions for future preprofessional teachers?
- 7. Why is important for teacher education programs and/or schools to consider dispositions when assessing teachers (as candidates and/or employees)?
- 8. Do you have any other comments or suggestions related to dispositions and how they affect your future practice or the practices of teacher education programs in special education?

**Appendix C**  
**Tables and Figure for Code Lists**

Table C1

*Codes Similar Across the Three Groups and their Definitions Arranged by Family*

Code ( <i>Family</i> )	Definition	Frequency by Group
Disposition(s) Adaptation or Change ( <i>Evolution of Disposition(s)</i> )	The comments associated with this code were related to how an individual's disposition(s) changed over time in relation to a transition made (e.g. from being a student to becoming a teacher) or because of new information or experiences that were influential.	Group 1: 9 Group 2: 12 Group 3: 16
Stability of Disposition(s) Over Time ( <i>Evolution of Disposition(s)</i> )	The comments made were related to how the participants' dispositions have changed (or not) over the course of their involvement in the program.	Group 1: 6 Group 2: 4 Group 3: 8

Table C1 (continued)

<p>Future Influence(s) of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practice <i>(Evolution of Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>The comments associated with this code were related to how the participants perceived the ways dispositions would influence their future practice in teaching.</p>	<p>Group 1: 4 Group 2: 2 Group 3: 4</p>
<p>Influence of Disposition(s) on Current Teaching Practice(s) <i>(Evolution of Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>Comments related to how disposition(s) affected participants' teaching practices in a positive or negative fashion.</p>	<p>Group 1: 10 Group 2: 13 Group 3: 26</p>
<p>Maturity and Disposition(s) <i>(Evolution of Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>Comments related to how participants' personal development as an individual is related to their disposition(s) and how that impacted their experience(s) in the teacher education program or in the field.</p>	<p>Group 1: 2 Group 2: 2 Group 3: 6</p>



Table C1 (continued)

<p>University Program Influence on Disposition(s) (<i>Evolution of Dispositions</i>)</p>	<p>Comments related to how the university, through a teacher education program, influences disposition(s) in either a positive or negative way as students matriculate through the program.</p>	<p>Group 1: 9 Group 2: 15 Group 3: 16</p>
<p>Personal Definition of Disposition(s) (<i>Definition of Disposition(s)</i>)</p>	<p>When asked, participants provided their own personal definition of disposition(s) and might have infused their definition into an answer to another question.</p>	<p>Group 1: 9 Group 2: 9 Group 3: 8</p>
<p>Empathic Understanding Connected with Disposition(s) (<i>Definition of Disposition(s)</i>)</p>	<p>The participants made comments that associated dispositions and the importance of exhibiting empathy in their practice as a teacher.</p>	<p>Group 1: 3 Group 2: 1 Group 3: 4</p>

Table C1 (continued)

<p>“Teacher Disposition(s)” <i>(Special Education Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>The comments associated with this code were related to how a certain kind of person or disposition is associated with becoming and being a teacher in special education. The participants often noted that this concept is intangible or difficult to explain, but that it is something that can be witnessed in the classroom.</p>	<p>Group 1: 6 Group 2: 5 Group 3: 2</p>
<p>Composition of Disposition(s) <i>(Special Education Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>The comments associated with this code were related to more than just the definition of disposition(s), but how they manifest themselves in the classroom setting through interactions of the environment and the individual’s values, beliefs, or attitudes.</p>	<p>Group 1: 10 Group 2: 11 Group 3: 12</p>
<p>Importance of Field Experiences in Shaping Disposition(s) <i>(Manifestation of Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>The participants’ cited the importance of how their involvement in their practica and field experiences impacted</p>	<p>Group 1: 7 Group 2: 3 Group 3: 11</p>

Table C1 (continued)

<p>Separation of Professional and Personal Disposition(s) <i>(Manifestation of Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>Participants' comments related to the importance or need for a teacher to have separate sets of disposition(s) for their professional and personal lives.</p>	<p>Group 1: 1 Group 2: 6 Group 3: 2</p>
<p>Disposition(s) Contribution to Success <i>(Manifestation of Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>How the participants' perceived the ways in which their dispositions contributed to their successes in their university program or in their current practice.</p>	<p>Group 1: 4 Group 2: 6 Group 3: 10</p>
<p>Measuring and/or Assessing Disposition(s) by Universities <i>(Evaluating Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>Comments related to the importance of universities assessing the disposition(s) of their teacher candidates.</p>	<p>Group 1: 6 Group 2: 18 Group 3: 4</p>
<p>NCATE Definition Incongruence <i>(Evaluating Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>When asked, participants cited the inconsistencies between their personal definition of dispositions and that of NCATE's.</p>	<p>Group 1: 1 Group 2: 3 Group 3: 1</p>
<p>NCATE Definition Similarity <i>(Evaluating Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>When asked, participated cited the similarities between their personal definition of disposition and that of NCATE's.</p>	<p>Group 1: 6 Group 2: 10 Group 3: 5</p>

Table C1 (continued)

<p>NCATE's Inclusion of Verbal and Non-Verbal Behavior Criteria (<i>Evaluating Disposition(s)</i>)</p>	<p>Comments by participants that specifically noted the positive aspect of NCATE including both verbal and non-verbal behaviors in their definition of disposition(s).</p>	<p>Group 1: 1 Group 2: 4 Group 3: 4</p>
<p>School System Consideration of Disposition(s) (<i>Evaluating Disposition(s)</i>)</p>	<p>This code to do with comments related to how school systems examine and assess dispositions and the participants' suggestions for how this process is undertaken and utilized for teacher evaluations in special education.</p>	<p>Group 1: 9 Group 2: 7 Group 3: 7</p>
<p>Suggestions for how Universities should Integrate Disposition(s) in their Teacher Education Program (<i>Evaluating Disposition(s)</i>)</p>	<p>The comments associated with this code were related to the importance of including or teaching to disposition(s) within a teacher education program and possible ways to do so.</p>	<p>Group 1: 22 Group 2: 25 Group 3: 17</p>
<p>Consideration of How a Teachers' Students are Affected by his/her Disposition(s)</p>	<p>Comments related to how a teacher's disposition(s) affects that teacher's students (e.g. learning environment).</p>	<p>Group 1: 15 Group 2: 20 Group 3: 18</p>

Table C1 (continued)

Example(s) from the Field (Attached to the Codes throughout the analysis)	The code for when participants cited examples from their own experiences in the field to clarify or support an answer related to dispositions.	Group 1: 8 Group 2: 20 Group 3: 15
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*Note.* Group one were the preprofessional teachers in their second semester, group two were preprofessional teachers in their final internship, and group three were recently graduated teachers.

Table C2

*Codes Shared by Two Groups*

Codes ( <i>Family</i> )	Groups Sharing Code	Definition	Frequency
Connection of Personal Philosophy to Disposition(s) ( <i>Definition of Disposition(s)</i> )	Groups 1 and 3	How the participants made a connection between their teaching philosophies as it applied to their disposition(s) as related to their teaching practice.	Group 1: 2 Group 3: 3
Influence of Personality on Professional Disposition(s) ( <i>Evolution of Disposition(s)</i> )	Groups 1 and 2	The participants' perceived influence of how aspects of their personality influenced their disposition(s) as they relate to their teaching practice.	Group 1: 2 Group 2: 15
Reflective Practice and Disposition(s) ( <i>Evolution of Disposition(s)</i> )	Groups 1 and 2	The participants' connection between reflective practice and disposition(s) as it relates to the development of their teaching practice.	Group 1: 2 Group 2: 2
Problems with Assessing Dispositions ( <i>Evaluating Disposition(s)</i> )	Groups 2 and 3	Issues such as the subjectivity of assessing dispositions by universities.	Group 2: 4 Group 3: 2

Table C2 (continued)

<p>Consideration of How Students are Affected by a Teacher's Disposition <i>(Extrinsic Affect of Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>Groups 2 and 3</p>	<p>How the participant's disposition(s) can influence their students' learning in their classroom (hypothetically).</p>	<p>Group 2: 20 Group 3: 3</p>
<p>Impact of Teacher Disposition(s) on Society <i>(Extrinsic Affect of Disposition(s))</i></p>	<p>Groups 2 and 3</p>	<p>Participants' comments related to how a teacher's disposition can influence aspects of society's views and definition of what a special education teacher is and the impact that teacher has on students' learning.</p>	<p>Group 2: 4 Group 3: 1</p>

Table C3

*Codes Unique to the Groups*

Code ( <i>Family</i> )	Group	Definition	Frequency
Conflict of Program with Disposition(s) ( <i>Special Education Disposition(s)</i> )	1	The information associated with this code has to do with participants who had issues with either the direct influences or mandates of the program or any other peripheral aspects of the program such as the attitudes of participant's cohort members.	2
SPED and ELM Differences ( <i>Special Education Disposition(s)</i> )	1	Comments related to the differences in disposition(s) between elementary and special education majors in teacher education programs.	2
Colleague or Cohort Member Influence on Disposition(s) ( <i>Evolution of Disposition(s)</i> )	2	Comments related to how a fellow member of the cohort impacted the participant(s)' disposition(s) in a positive or negative fashion.	2
Political Education Climate Effect on Teacher Disposition(s) ( <i>Extrinsic Affect of Disposition(s)</i> )	2	The perceived effect of how changes in district, state, or federal policy might influence a teacher's disposition(s) in special education.	2



Table C3 (continued)

Differentiation of Disposition(s) for Type of Teaching Environment <i>(Special Education Disposition(s))</i>	2	Comments related to how certain dispositions are associated with certain roles or settings of a special education teacher (e.g. primary vs. secondary or inclusive vs. resource room).	9
Resilience of Disposition(s) <i>(Evolution of Disposition(s))</i>	3	Comments related to how certain disposition(s) had to become resilient based on a confrontational situation.	2
Teaching Students about Disposition(s) <i>(Manifestation of Disposition(s))</i>	3	Instances where the participant(s) taught his or her students about disposition(s).	2

Table C4

*List of the Families, their Definitions, and their Associated Codes*

Family	Definition	Associated Codes
Evolution of Disposition(s)	The codes and their data were related to how a preprofessional teacher or teacher's disposition changes and adapts over time and the importance and influence of these adaptations on their teaching practice (future or present).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disposition(s) Adaptation or Change</li> <li>• Stability of Disposition(s) Over Time</li> <li>• Future Influence(s) of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practice</li> <li>• Influence of Disposition(s) on Teaching Practice(s)</li> <li>• Maturity and Disposition(s)</li> <li>• University Program Influence on Disposition(s)</li> <li>• Reflective Practice and Disposition(s) (<i>Groups one and two only</i>)</li> <li>• Influence of Personality on Professional Disposition(s) (<i>Groups one and two only</i>)</li> <li>• Colleague or Cohort Member Influence on Disposition(s) (<i>Group two only</i>)</li> <li>• Resilience of Disposition(s) (<i>Group three only</i>)</li> </ul>

Table C4 (continued)

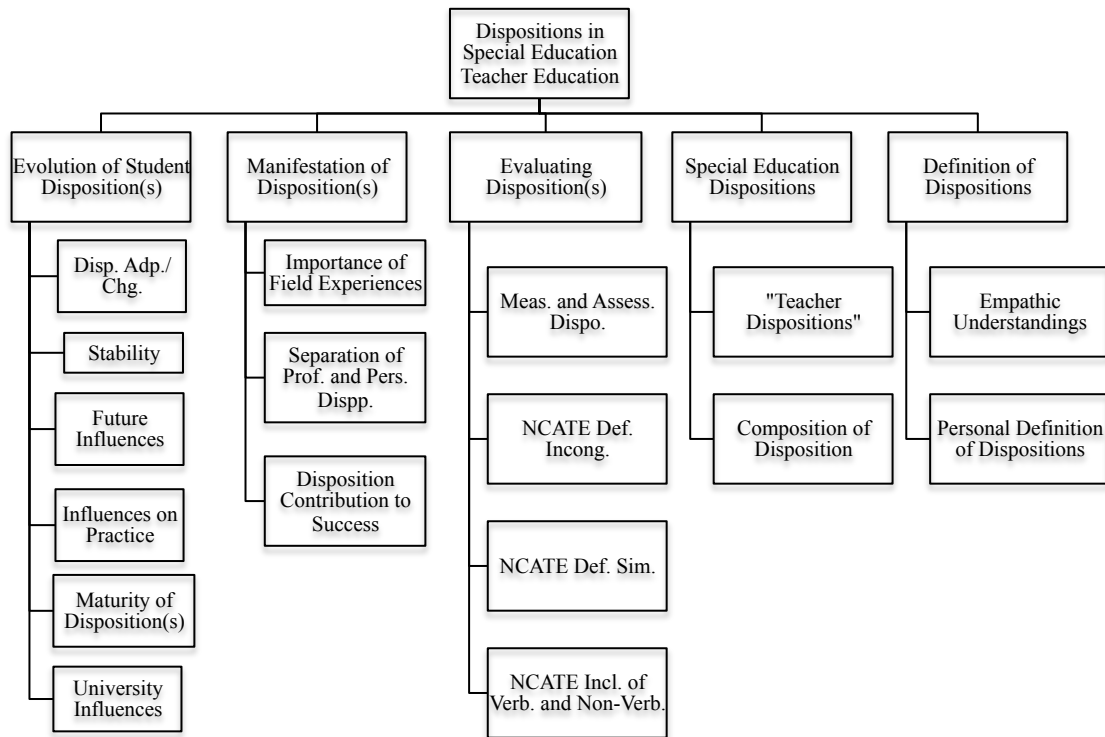
Definition of Disposition(s)	The codes and their data associated with this family had to do with how dispositions are defined (either individually, by universities, by school systems, or by national accreditation institutions).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Definition of Disposition(s)</li> <li>• Empathic Understandings Connected with Disposition(s)</li> <li>• Connection of Personal Philosophy to Disposition(s) (<i>Groups one and three</i>).</li> </ul>
Special Education Disposition(s)	The codes and their data associated with this family were related to an examination of what constitutes a quality special education teacher's dispositions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Teacher Disposition(s)"</li> <li>• Composition of Disposition(s)</li> <li>• SPED and ELM Differences of Disposition(s) (<i>Group 1 only</i>)</li> <li>• Differentiation of Disposition(s) for Type of Teaching Environment (<i>Group two only</i>)</li> </ul>
Manifestation of Disposition(s)	The codes and their data associated with this family were related to a discussion of how dispositions are manifested in a practicum, internship, or actual classroom and how they (disposition(s) influenced or are influencing the participants' practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of Field Experiences in Shaping Disposition(s)</li> <li>• Separation of Professional and Personal Disposition(s)</li> <li>• Disposition(s) Contribution to Success</li> <li>• Teaching Students about Disposition(s) (<i>Group three only</i>)</li> </ul>

Table C4 (continued)

Evaluating Disposition(s)	The codes and their data associated with this family were related to how universities, schools systems, and accreditation institutions assess and measure disposition(s) for teacher (preprofessional or practicing) evaluation purposes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measuring and/or Assessing Disposition(s) by Universities</li> <li>• NCATE Definition Incongruence</li> <li>• NCATE Definition Similarity</li> <li>• NCATE’s Inclusion of Verbal and Non-Verbal Behavior Criteria</li> <li>• School System Consideration of Disposition(s)</li> <li>• Suggestions for How Universities should Integrate Disposition(s) in their Teacher Education Program</li> <li>• Problems with Assessing Dispositions (<i>Groups two and three only</i>)</li> </ul>
Extrinsic Affect of Dispositions ( <i>Found only in groups two and three</i> )	The codes and the data associated with this family were related to how dispositions can affect social systems at the local, state, and federal level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political Education Climate Affect on Teacher Disposition(s) (<i>Group two only</i>)</li> <li>• Consideration of How Students are Affected by a Teacher’s Disposition(s) (<i>Groups two and three</i>)</li> <li>• Impact of Teacher Disposition(s) on Society (<i>Groups two and three</i>)</li> </ul>

Table C4 (continued)

*Note.* Some of the codes associated with the families were only found to be associated with certain groups. This is connoted in parentheses behind the codes with their related groups.



*Figure C1.* The above figure represents how the families (and their associated codes) are linked to the research questions and the subsequent discussion for this project. The group associated with each question is also noted. The families more closely associated with the questions are directly beneath the question with families that would support the question in a less direct way beneath those families.

Table C5

*Codes from Participants' Reflections, their Definitions, and their Frequency*

Code	Definition	Frequency
“Teacher Disposition(s)” (Super Code)	Comments related to how a certain kind of persona or disposition is associated with becoming and being a teaching in special education. This concept is often intangible or difficult to explain, but is something that is important to becoming a teacher and can be exhibited in the classroom.	15
Advocacy	Reflections on what it means to be an advocate in special education and what it takes to do so.	14
Collaboration	Reflections on the importance of including others in the teaching and learning process (colleagues, administration, etc.).	11
Empathy	Reflections on viewing a situation from that individual’s perspective (often students).	1
Ethical Behavior	Reflections on how a special education teacher maintains his or her ethical behavior.	2
Example from the Field	Information from participants’ experiences used to support reflections.	8
Fidelity	Reflections of the importance of maintaining a consistent level of evaluation.	2
Innovation	Reflections on how special education teachers must be creative and keep learning.	2
Integrity	Reflections on how to maintain a high level of professionalism.	4
Maintaining Confidentiality	Reflections on keeping students’ information confidential.	1

Table C5 (continued)

PD	Reflections on the importance of professional development for enhancing one's teaching practice.	5
Reflexive Practitioner	Reflections on the importance of reflections in teaching practice.	5
School Involvement	Reflections on being involved as more than just a teacher in the school environment (e.g. extracurricular activities, planning new events, etc.).	4
Teacher as a Researcher	Reflections on the importance of research in special education (both conducting and understandings its implications).	10
Trust	Reflections on how to maintain trust between either the teacher and the student or the teacher and other teachers.	3
View of L and D	Reflections on how all students can learn and what disability means to become an effective teacher.	7



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Scot McGregor Rademaker grew up in Flossmoor, IL and earned his B.A. in psychology from Miami University, his M.S. in psychology from Barry University, and his Ph.D. from the University of South Florida. He was a former reading interventionist and school psychology intern. He supervised, taught, and co-taught courses at the University of South Florida in the department of special education. He accepted a position of an assistant professor in the department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina.