

EXPLORING TEACHER DISPOSITION TOWARD DIVERSE LEARNERS WITHIN PUBLIC  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

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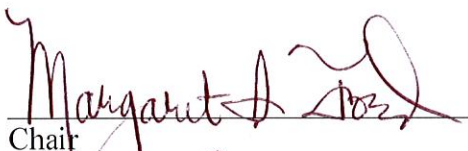
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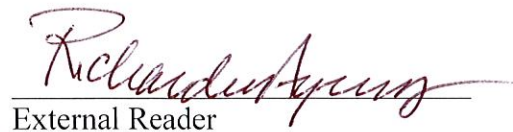
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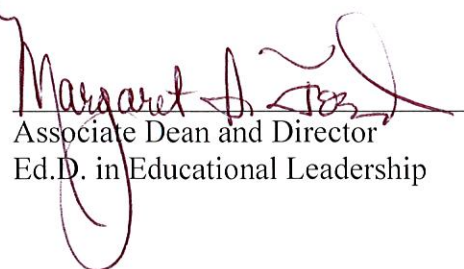
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### **Dedication**

I must thank my family-my wife Susan, and children Kate, Mike, Jon, Hunter, and my mom- for their love and patience these past four years. Thank you for being so positive and supportive throughout this process. It was possible because of you.

Thank you to my doctoral cohort members, the Wolves, for their inspiration and comradeship as we shared this challenging experience together. Thank you Lois, Bob, Steve, Sherry, Michelle, Susan, Kim, Sarah and Yasir. I will remember our time together with much fondness.

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## **Abstract**

### Teacher disposition

While research on pre-service teachers' dispositions is a critical part of the process of developing new teachers, the research on practicing teacher is just as important. More importantly, the dispositions of practicing teachers who work with diverse groups of students are worthy of exploration and understanding. Current research on the dispositions of practicing teachers, those educators who are deep into the process of teaching children and preparing them for the future, is lacking.

This study explores the phenomenon of teacher dispositions toward diverse learners within three public elementary schools. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how the construct of teacher disposition, from several participants' views, is defined, practiced, and assessed within the school community. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will add to the research on disposition, specifically about how educators (teachers and administrators) define disposition, how teachers practice disposition, and how principals support and assess their teachers' dispositions and relationships with diverse learners.

## **Statement of the Problem**

### **Introduction**

Karges-Bone and Griffin (2009) estimate that the term disposition, as it relates to teachers, was first coined by the New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (NTASC) in 1992 (p. 27). Even before that, however, the idea of disposition emerged from the work of Arthur Combs (1974) and others with what they called perceptions. Taylor and Wasicsko (2000), using the work of Combs (1974), posed the concern, “The issues for teacher educators will be to define what is meant by “dispositions,” review the research base, find appropriate measurement tools, decide on the implications for selecting and preparing future teachers, and conduct additional research” (p. 1). Today, the terms are used interchangeably, but the study of teacher disposition has grown. Research on teacher disposition includes topics like identifying effective disposition, assessing disposition, understanding the complexity of disposition, as well as a host of other related subjects.

This qualitative study explores teacher disposition from the view of practicing elementary school teachers and their principals, both of whom work with diverse groups of students. Given the powerful impact that teachers may have on students, disposition is explored through how it is defined and perceived by teachers and principals; how it is practiced by teachers; and how it is assessed and supported by principals. It is important to get a full picture of how disposition is lived by practicing elementary teachers in their diverse classrooms. This will help to inform our understanding about disposition and how it can be used to support all children, regardless of their background and readiness.



### **Statement of the Problem**

Powerful teacher dispositions are needed more in our current educational climate than ever before. “In most U.S. schools, race and class are strong predictors of achievement, and it is rare to find poor or ethnic minority children from less educated families achieving at high levels” (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. x). In an age when the achievement gap and opportunity gap are common terms within the educational community, Lisa Delpit (2012) calls for a new breed of educators, “warm demanders,” those teachers who are able to balance high expectations with a high level of care and support. Delpit (2012) also reminds us that to provide excellence in education, good teachers must, “recognize the brilliance of poor, urban children and teach them more content, not less” (p. xix). More than that, Lisa Delpit (2012) calls educators to get knee deep into the expectations of social justice as we tackle the concept of dispositions. Good teachers of diverse groups of students, in short, must demonstrate dispositions that are tied to a deep understanding of social justice.

The need to develop teachers’ dispositions who work with diverse groups of students has been a concern for accrediting agencies like the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC). “In the early 1990s, InTASC convened a group of state department representatives, teacher union representatives, and teacher educators to develop a set of model standards for beginning teachers” (Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, Schussler, 2010, p. 3). By the early 2000s the standards were adopted by the National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE), driving many teacher education programs to adopt the standards as well as revamping their programs to reflect the new expectations for teacher disposition.

Unfortunately, while the impact of teacher disposition standards affected those students in teacher preparation programs, it did not impact practicing teachers. In addition, the research that developed over the time period did not reach practicing teachers, but was focused on the work of institutions and pre-service teachers instead. Even assessments that were built to assess teacher disposition were focused on pre-service teachers only. Finally, Murrell et al. (2010) stated, “varied conceptions of the notion of dispositions led to political controversy” (p. 3) and organizations and political influence swayed NCATE’s fidelity to the concept of disposition that was built on social justice, eventually eliminating it from its definition all together. In short, disposition is not a critical focus in developing practicing teachers.

Race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and socio-economic status all have a significant impact on how students are viewed and taught within our public schools. In addition, when these same children are assessed in the same way and for the same learning outcomes as their white counterparts, they fare poorly. According to Murrell et al. (2010), this performance, over time, highlights the achievement gap as well as the need for practicing teacher dispositions that are built on the concept of social justice.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards (2008) include disposition within the Performance Expectations and Indicator 1: Vision, Mission, and Goals. This specific indicator assesses leaders’ values and beliefs about the ability of all students to be successful in learning. “Dispositions have been influential in emphasizing the underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs appropriate to an education system that is dedicated to high expectations for each and every student. Effective leaders analyze their assumptions, values, and beliefs as part of reflective practice” (ISLLC

Standards, 2008, p. 6). Effective leaders understand that every child has the right to a full and challenging educational experience.

While evidence of positive teacher dispositions can be found in how teachers conduct themselves and model for their students throughout the school day, the assessment of dispositions should delve deeper than what is expressed on the surface. Murrell et al. (2010) supports that it is important for all teachers to have a deep understanding of whom their students are, especially those students who are not fully challenged because they do not appear ready for the level of academic rigor. Many children, while they do not come to school with a set of skills that support the academic challenges they will face, come to school with a set of skills nonetheless.

This study embraces the idea that while research on pre-service teachers' disposition is a critical part of the process of developing new teachers, the work of practicing teachers is just as important. More importantly, the dispositions of practicing teachers who work with diverse groups of students are worthy of exploration and understanding.

### **Theoretical Framework for a Qualitative Study**

This is a qualitative research study and was conducted using an exploratory approach as described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The researcher intended to explore the research questions but not necessarily draw conclusion to the problem. In addition, Fischetti, Imig, Ndoeye, and Smith's (2010) Five Pillars of the New Framework was used by the researcher to examine the dispositions of the participants as they relate to diverse learners. The Five Pillars of the New Framework, while originally designed for teachers in training, were easily used with practicing teachers. *Teaching as a moral*

*practice* (Murrell et al., 2010) is the larger vehicle for the goal of defining professional disposition, developing professional disposition, and assessing professional disposition, especially as they should exist in teacher preparatory programs. In truth, however, the same concepts and expectations can be held for teachers who are deep in practice and who have already been working with a diverse student population. Murrell et al. (2010) present the concept of disposition as one that has been highly controversial in recent years but nevertheless must be considered when contemplating “what constitutes ‘the good teacher’” (p. iv). Murrell et al.’s (2010) work reflects the efforts of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education’s (AACTE) task force, Teacher Education as a Moral Community (TEAMC). TEAMC has spent a great many years exploring the concept of morals in teacher education.

Fischetti et al. (2010) posit that the Five Pillars of the New Framework are built from the concept that professionalism is “leadership to support diverse learners and their families” (p.150), and that each element within the five pillars is a critical piece of the larger concept of disposition. Each pillar stands on a foundation that Fischetti et al. (2010) call “attitudes and ethics” (p. 150), standards that shape an educator to have strong “professional qualities such as promptness, professional dress, courtesy, appropriate conduct, effective people skills, honesty, acceptance of feedback from others, following rules, maintaining a clear criminal background check, and adhering to the approved code of ethics” (p. 150). Having such attitudes and ethics in place allows a candidate to fully embrace, accept, and demonstrate the dispositions that are proposed in the Five Pillars of the New Framework.

Fischetti, Imig, Ndoeye, and Smith (2010), in the development of the Five Pillars of the New Framework, indicate that the crux of effective dispositions rest within the actions of teachers that support the academic, social, and emotional growth of their students, through cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, classroom leadership, school leadership, and community leadership. The same can be said for administrators, principals and superintendents, who serve as leaders, guides, and examples to all teachers in the school building, and whose moral compass (ISSLC 2008) must support educators within the school in serving students well.

Of the knowledge, skills and dispositions that frame a teacher's command of his/her work, it is disposition that can be the most abstract and difficult to capture and assess. Johnston, Almerico, Henriott, & Shapiro (2011) tell us that professional attitudes may be construed differently because they are nebulous in nature and therefore may be interpreted differently by each assessor. Fischetti et al.'s (2010) "new framework provides a more comprehensive overview of dispositions than previous institutional documents" (p. 150). The five pillars are written to support the development of a teacher preparation program but also serve as an effective tool for practicing teachers and administrators. Fischetti et al. (2010) note that the framework of the five pillars:

...rests on a definition of professionalism as leadership to support diverse learners and their families. The framework also provides a way of thinking about dispositions development that moves from a concrete focus on self, to an expanding sense of self as a change agent in a dynamic community, region, nation, and world. Each element...is crucial for the successful professional to be an effective leader. (p. 150)

In addition, Fischetti et al. (2010) note that “basic attitudes and ethics” (p. 150) are core elements that a teacher or leader must have in order to demonstrate disposition. These two elements represent the foundation on which the five pillars rest. As Fischetti et al. (2010) states, “[A]ttitudes and ethics relate to professional qualities such as promptness, professional dress, courtesy...and adhering to the approved code of ethics” (p. 150). Murrell et al. (2010) states that these elements of disposition will insure that educators will follow the expected rules of conduct and culture as they relate to the greater school community. The five pillars reflect attitudes and ethics but on a different level. Two pillars reflect the cultural expectations of teachers and leaders, including being culturally aware in order to support students and culturally sensitive in order to support families. Three other pillars reflect the leadership of educators, to support diverse learners in the classroom, school, and community, as well as community leadership to support both learners and their families.

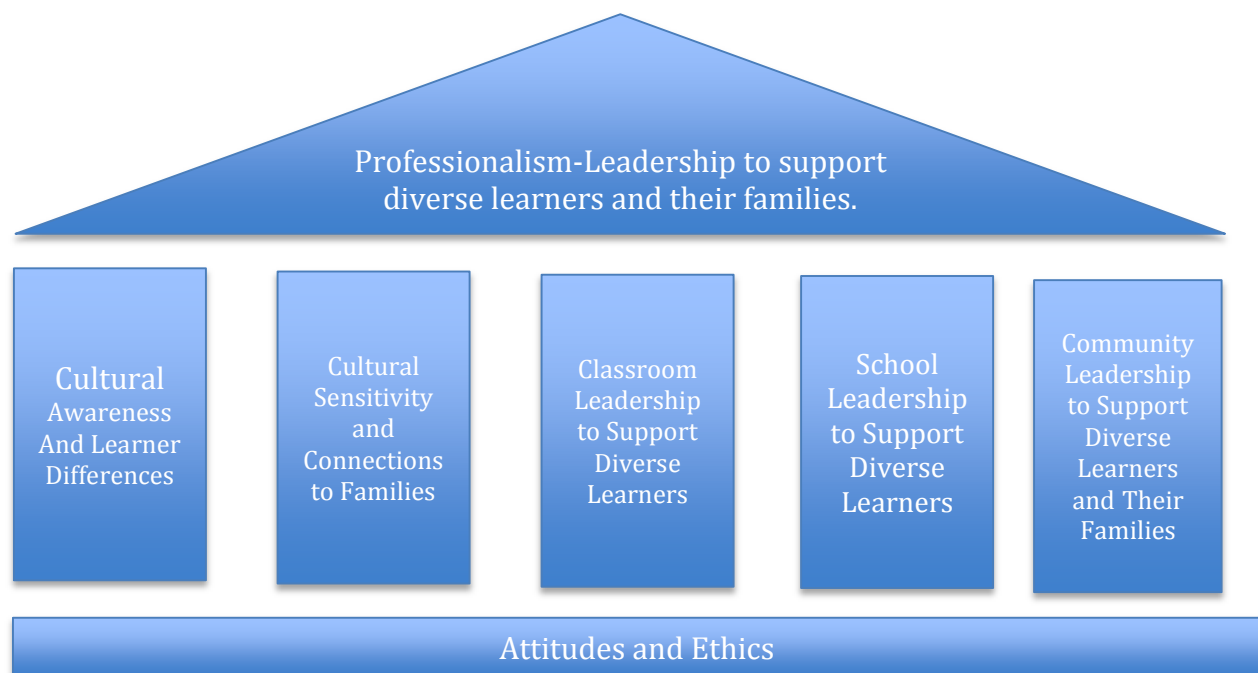


Figure 1: Five Pillars of the New Framework  
(Fischetti et al., 2010, p. 153)

Fischetti et al. (2010) states, “The pillars rest on the foundations of attitudes and ethics and hold up the tenets of a revised definition of teacher professionalism-leadership to support learners and their families” (p. 152). In addition, Fischetti et al. (2010) provides a figure that delineates the dispositional framework and the pillars as they relate to specific potential learning experiences and sample evidence. The framework itself supports teacher preparation programs but also identifies the core expectations of teachers and administrators in the field as they work with students on a daily basis.

Dispositional Framework	Sample Evidence within a Practicing Teacher’s Experience based on tools available
<b>Pillar 1:</b> Cultural Awareness and Learner differences Caring, thoughtfulness, concern, self-reflection, self-direction, recognizes differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment tool</li> <li>• Classroom Observations</li> <li>• Performance Review</li> <li>• Daily Observations by supervisor</li> <li>• Student Evaluation</li> <li>• Parent Evaluations</li> <li>• Lesson and Unit Plans</li> </ul>
<b>Pillar 2:</b> Cultural Sensitivity and Connections to Families Uses awareness to modify curriculum, connections with colleagues, experiences with families, adaptive sensitivity, compassionate, sympathetic, helpful, accommodating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment tool</li> <li>• Classroom Observations</li> <li>• Performance Review</li> <li>• Daily Observations by supervisor</li> <li>• Student Evaluation</li> <li>• Parent Evaluations</li> <li>• Lesson and Unit Plans</li> <li>• Performance at school/community events</li> <li>• Communication Log</li> </ul>
<b>Pillar 3:</b> Classroom Leadership to Support Diverse Learners Commitment to overcoming bias, eliminating prejudice, active leadership for self-improvement, models for students, resourceful, incorporating community resources to benefit students and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment tool</li> <li>• Classroom Observations</li> <li>• Performance Review</li> <li>• Daily Observations by supervisor</li> <li>• Student Evaluation</li> <li>• Parent Evaluations</li> <li>• Lesson and Unit Plans</li> <li>• Performance at school/community events</li> <li>• Communication Log</li> </ul>
<b>Pillar 4:</b> School Leadership to Support Diverse Learners Advocacy on behalf of all students, honesty, responsibility, fairness, classroom, team, professional learning community, school leadership on behalf of all students, models for school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment tool</li> <li>• Classroom Observations</li> <li>• Performance Review</li> <li>• Daily Observations by supervisor</li> <li>• Student Evaluation</li> <li>• Parent Evaluations</li> <li>• Lesson and Unit Plans</li> <li>• Performance at school/community events</li> </ul>

<p><b>Pillar 5:</b> Community Leadership to Support Diverse Learners and Their Families Equity, social responsibility, social justice, self-accountability, personal responsibility, school wide/system wide/community-wide leadership that results in change for the betterment of school and society, seeks solutions to overcome obstacles that prevent family and community involvement, builds partnership with school and community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication Log</li> <li>• Assessment tool</li> <li>• Classroom Observations</li> <li>• Performance Review</li> <li>• Daily Observations by supervisor</li> <li>• Student Evaluation</li> <li>• Parent Evaluations</li> <li>• Lesson and Unit Plans</li> <li>• Performance at school and community events</li> <li>• Communication Log</li> </ul>
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Table 1: **Sample evidence of the dispositional traits of practicing teachers** (Fischetti et al., 2010, p. 154-155)

Adapted from Fischetti et al.'s (2010) Experience to expand candidate's dispositional traits (p. 154-155), Table 1 presents an illustration of how the Five Pillars of the New Framework offer a lens by which teachers' dispositions toward diverse learners can be assessed through evidence that is common to teacher assessment in public schools. In particular, the learning experiences and sample evidence can be directly aligned with interviews, observations, and document analysis that will be completed as part of the data collection. For example, Pillar 1-Cultural Awareness and Learner Differences offers specific sample evidence like "teacher observation" (p.154) and "student evaluation" (p. 154). Some of this evidence can be found in the document analysis of the teacher assessment tool as well as the specific comments teachers make about their experiences. The same is true for the Pillar 5-Community Leadership to Support Diverse Learners and Their Families, which include topics social justice and self-accountability. This can be found through interviews with teachers and the principal as well as observations of the teachers. Each Pillar offers specific indicators that were discovered through the observations, interviews, and document analysis that took place as part of the data collection of this study. Finally, Fischetti et al.'s (2010) five pillars are easily used with



each data collection tool that will be used in the study, including interviews of teachers and administrators, observations of teachers, and document analysis of the components of the assessment tool that relate directly to disposition.

Fischetti et al.'s (2010) five pillars also align well with researcher's definitions of disposition that are included in this study. For example, Bryan and Henry's (2012) definition that disposition is: "The manner in which the teacher's knowledge is shared with students, the way in which student learning is facilitated"... (p. 393), is reflective of the first pillar, Cultural Awareness and Learner Differences. The first pillar specifically addresses the act of planning lessons and units that reflect learner differences and celebrate who students are and how they learn. The same is true for Mueller and Hindin's (2011) definition of disposition as, "Socially conscious teachers act as stewards and leaders; understand, respect, and value diversity; and apply what they have learned about teaching to support diverse learners" (p. 18). This definition relates to the second pillar of Cultural Sensitivity and Connections to Families, as the pillar supports teachers' delivery of instruction that is differentiated to meet students' needs. Murrell's Five Pillars create a clear lens by which teachers and administrators can view perceptions of dispositions.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms are integral to understanding this research study and therefore are included in this Chapter 1:

**Disposition (also referred to as teacher disposition):** For the purpose of this study, disposition will be defined as a teacher's ability to:

- Behave in a way that embraces all learners within the classroom;

- Behave in a way that supports and demonstrates social justice for all students;
- Behave in a way that demonstrates caring within all contexts of the teaching and learning process;
- Behave in a way that fully embraces diverse learners and the lives they live;
- Behave in a way that rigorously challenges all learners. (Amos, 2011; Delpit, 2012; NCATE, 2006; Helm, 2011; Katz, 2007; Lazar, 2013; Murrell & Diez, 2010; Nieto, 2012; Noddings, 2012)

**Behavior, actions, and skills:**

- For the purpose of this study, behaviors, actions, and skills are the ways in which a teacher conducts herself or himself when working with students.

**Caring within context:**

- For the purpose of this study, caring within context refers to a teacher who can establish relations of care in a wide variety of situations (Murrell et al., 2010, p. 180).

**Ethical behaviors that support social justice:**

- For the purpose of this study, ethical behaviors that support social justice are choices and decisions that a teacher makes to support a diverse group of learners.

**Personality traits**

- For the purpose of this study, personality traits are actions and attitudes that are exhibited by the teachers when working with a diverse group of learners.

### **Diverse learners**

- For the purpose of this study, diverse learners are the students who make up the classroom population and vary in their socio-economic backgrounds, race, religion, gender, and ethnicity.

### **Social justice**

- A deep concern for achieving equity and equality for all people...preparing teachers for diversity must go beyond developing multicultural awareness and sensitivity; it must also prepare teachers to be agents for change in our schools (Garmon, 2015, p. 278).

### **Five Pillars**

- For the purpose of this study, the five pillars will be defined as a: A framework that offers a detailed view of disposition and is organized into five categories of leadership and cultural connectedness. The Five Pillars serve as both a way of thinking about the development of disposition as it ranges from self to that of self as a change agent. (Fischetti et al., 2010). In addition, for this study's purposes, the five pillars are adapted as an assessment to measure dispositional qualities.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how the construct of teacher disposition, from several participants' views, is defined, practiced, and assessed within the school community. Specifically, teacher disposition was explored within the context of working with groups of diverse learners. The following research questions were used:

1. How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?
2. How do principals define teacher disposition as teachers relate to diverse learners?
3. How do principals support the practice and development of teacher disposition?
4. How do principals assess teacher dispositions?

### **Rationale and Significance**

Sherman (2006) supports the idea that dispositions have a direct impact on students. He notes that dispositions are related to personal characteristics, the ethical conduct of individuals, and the “relational aspects of teaching” (p. 47)...They “are the propensities of teachers to conduct themselves in a certain way when they interact with students in what they say, do, or convey in other ways in a certain teaching moment” (p. 47). In the same focus, Bryan and Henry (2012) specifically add that dispositions are the way that teachers’ knowledge and understandings are shared with their students and the way that learning is delivered and assessed (p. 393). From these researchers, we develop a deeper understanding of how important it is for educators to have dispositions that fully accept the diversity of learners with whom they work each day. This research study is significant because it looks closely at the understanding, assessment, and practice of disposition by educators within three public schools with diverse student populations. This is important because it represents a clear gap in the research as little focus has been directed toward practicing teachers. In addition the study considers how administrators in each school support and assess practicing teacher disposition within their schools. Exploring this phenomenon allows researchers to understand how practicing educators

value and practice their dispositions, especially as they work with classrooms of diverse learners. The study allows the researcher to look closely at the impact that research regarding disposition has had on our public schools and whether or not disposition is valued as an important element in teaching students from varied backgrounds.

The National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE, 2006), expects that professional education programs will prepare teachers in training to have pedagogical and professional knowledge that will help them to teach effectively as well as teach with the belief that every child can learn, regardless of his or her background. In addition, NCATE (2006) expects that future teachers will “demonstrate fairness in educational settings by meeting the educational needs of all students in a caring, non-discriminatory, and equitable manner” (Para 7), as well as “understand the impact of discrimination based on race, class, gender, disability/exceptionality, sexual orientation, and language on students and their learning” (Para 7). More specifically, NCATE (2006) notes that, “dispositions are values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence a teacher's behavior toward his/her students, families, colleagues, and communities” (Para 7). Inspired by NCATE’s framing of the definition of disposition, Delar and David (2008) also point out that disposition is found within the beliefs and attitudes related to what some might consider values. Examples of these values are caring and social justice (p. 1175). Delar and David (2008) present the idea of a moral practice that is framed with the idea that every child is capable of learning regardless of their needs, and that challenging standards and a safe and supportive experience highlight the school environment. Most important, however, is that the specifics of the disposition are clearly understood by all teachers and assessors of teachers. They must be able to put those

identifiers or qualities in the context of teacher work, and teachers themselves must also have a clear understanding of what is expected of them, how to assess themselves throughout the process, and finally how to make appropriate adjustments in how they conduct themselves.

What teachers are disposed to believe, how they are disposed to conduct themselves, and their willingness to be sensitive to the needs of their students has been a focus of research for the last few decades. “Socially conscious teachers act as stewards and leaders; understand, respect, and value diversity; and apply what they have learned about teaching to support diverse learners” (Mueller and Hindin, 2011, p. 18). In short, all students require a place in the classroom and the opportunity for a dynamic education. All students have the right to a learning experience that is led by teachers who fully embrace who they are and how they learn.

NCATE is not the only organization to weigh in on the dispositional expectation of educators, specifically the school principal. The Council of Chief State School Officers’ (CCSSO) standards are designed to emphasize core expectations of principal leadership. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, 2008) Standards for School Leaders support improving the process of learning and teaching and have been embraced by state and national education agencies to shape principal leadership. Many colleges and university education programs have built their educational assessment models for new principals based on the ISLLC standards. Revamped in 2015 and currently being implemented in place of the 2008 version, the ISLLC standards represent the change process that is happening in educational institutions across the nation, many over the last decade.

### **General Procedures**

This study seeks to explore the phenomenon of teacher dispositions toward diverse learners within public elementary schools. The sites are three Northern New England elementary schools from different districts and were chosen based on their level of diversity as determined by NICHE. NICHE (2015) “Niche K-12 offers unique insight into more than 120,000 K-12 schools” (<https://niche.com/about/company>). It allowed the researcher access to reviews and rankings, but more specifically, the diversity ranking of elementary schools in the state.

The sampling of teachers from different schools and districts provided the researchers with data that is not limited by the practices of one district but included the habits and procedures of three districts. The sample is two teachers and a principal from each school. The two teachers from each school are from varied grade levels, allowing principals some freedom in determining the teachers that are able to participate.

The researcher conducted teacher and principal interviews based on the Three Interview Series by Seidman (2006). Seidman’s process was adapted to two interviews per interviewee, extending the first interview to ninety minutes, thereby combining the first and second interview. In addition, the researcher conducted one classroom observation of each teacher based on the work of Miles and Huberman and Saldana (2014). Finally, the researcher conducted document analysis as outlined in Miles and Huberman and Saldana (2014) on the teacher evaluation program for each school. This document revealed a great deal of information about how the principal evaluates teacher dispositions through a regular process that is mandated by the district.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) state that the limitations and delimitations identify weaknesses evident in the study. The limitations are external conditions that “restrict or constrain the study’s scope” (p. 103). This study does include limitations, some of which are a result of the qualitative nature of the research. The limitations are as follows:

1. Because the study is focused on only three school districts, the findings may not be generalizable to a larger population, but only to the population of similar districts with similar characteristics.
2. The researcher is a former teacher and school principal and therefore has his own biases in terms of teaching, leading, and dispositions.
3. The researcher was present within the school during interviews and observations and this may have impacted how educators act and respond during interviews and observations.
4. The time frame of data gathering was limited to a span of three months, giving the researcher a shortened glimpse of teachers in the process of teaching.
5. Interview data was limited to the interviewees’ own experiences and perceptions and includes the participants’ own biases.
6. Document analysis was limited to each school’s own evaluation tool.
7. Participants were selected with the advice and assistance of the school principal; therefore, each principal’s own bias and knowledge about his/her teachers prevented the opportunity for teachers to be selected randomly.
8. While the researcher attempted to access the most diverse schools in the state, access limited the researcher to one school listed as the most diverse, or Number



9. Another school was Number 25, and the final school was Number 30. These numbers were based on the diversity indicators as described by NICHE in general procedures.

### **Overview**

This study explored the phenomenon of teacher dispositions toward diverse learners within three public elementary schools. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the construct of teacher disposition, from several participants' views, is defined, practiced, and assessed within the school community. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will add to the research on disposition, specifically about how educators (teachers and administrators) define disposition, how teachers practice disposition, and how principals support and assess their teachers' dispositions and relationships with diverse learners. By exploring disposition as it impacts diverse learners, the researcher gained the opportunity to support the body of related research on effective teaching and leading of a diverse student population. More importantly, the researchers is expanding the field of research on disposition by exploring experienced and practicing teachers and administrators and their perceptions about dispositions.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

Wasicsko (2004) suggests that a simple way to define disposition is to consider what it is not. Disposition is neither the knowledge nor the skills of teaching. Wasicsko (2004) posits, “Many attempts to operationally define dispositions result in fuzzy constructs that overlap with pedagogical skills, that have too many and/or too complex elements that would make valid and reliable assessment nearly impossible, or that lack a sufficient research base” (p. 2). Wasicsko (2004) also notes that several models that focus on teacher characteristics, teacher behaviors, and teacher perceptions include ranges of definitions that include personal traits, behaviors, tendencies, values, and even belief systems of teachers. Some of the constructs are more objective and observable while others remain subjective and intangible. Formulating a definition of teacher disposition that is observable promotes its use by teachers who yearn to have an understanding about what is expected and by principals and leaders who may be required to assess teachers’ dispositions.

In defining disposition related to teachers, Schussler and Knarr (2013) declare the dispositions work to enhance teachers’ moral sensibilities. While Schussler and Knarr (2013) are referring to teacher candidates, the same can be said for practicing teachers, those educators who have spent many years working with students. Schussler and Knarr (2013) also state that teacher dispositions help educators to understand what their own perceptions and misperceptions are about teaching, allowing them to best inform their intentions and their practice. This literature review considers much of the current available research on the topic, as far as it pertains to defining, practicing, and assessing

teacher disposition. More importantly, this literature review considers teacher disposition as they relate to diverse classrooms of students.

### **Social Justice and Dispositions**

The concept of social justice can be found in the moral and ethical components of disposition but have not always been considered essential or even important when looking at developing teacher candidates. For example, Murrell et al. (2010) points out, “Varied conceptions of the notion of dispositions led to political controversy, as attested to in both popular media and in the professional literature.” Those institutions that were responsible to teach, advise, and assess future teachers in the development of their dispositions might even look to avoid the moral and ethical aspects of disposition. Specifically, institutions responsible to follow through with NCATE’s requirements regarding pre-service teachers’ dispositions responded as follows:

Because of the high stakes of state approval and national accreditation, the focus of many institutions gravitated toward doing what was necessary to meet NCATE rather than focusing on the kind of thoughtful work required to rethink programs in terms of moral and ethical demands of the profession. (p. 3)

Regardless of the controversy that surrounds disposition, specifically disposition that explores the social justice involved in accepting and embracing students from all walks of life, moral and ethical considerations must be made. Nell Noddings (2012) wrote about this concept of deep disposition in her description of care ethics. She stated:

The carer is first of all attentive... on listening. The attention of the carer is receptive. Its objective is to understand what the cared-for is experiencing to hear and understand the needs expressed. From the perspective of care ethics, the

teacher as carer is interested in the expressed needs of the cared-for, not simply the needs assumed by the school as an institution and the curriculum as a prescribed course of study. We can therefore anticipate a possible conflict that will have to be resolved by caring teachers: When should teachers put aside the assumed need to learn a specific aspect of subject matter and address the expressed need of the student for emotional support, moral direction, or shared human interest? (p. 772)

Noddings (2012) reminds the reader that the carer, the teacher, always speaks to and reacts to the students, careful to maintain a caring relationship. She emphasizes, “Good teachers must be allowed to use their professional and moral judgment in responding to the needs of their students.” Showing both sympathy and empathy are part of the expectations of teachers. Additionally, this concept of care is directly connected to the work of teachers who teach diverse groups of students. Sonia Nieto (2012) notes, “As educators—be they classroom teachers, school librarians, administrators, policymakers, or others—strive to create caring communities, they must also struggle to create a just society.” Nieto’s (2012) just society begins with the teacher dispositions that celebrate and support diverse classrooms.

In his study of cultural competence in teachers, Amos (2011) considered, “The analysis of 54 white teacher candidates' beliefs toward race and ethnicity revealed that the participants' beliefs were deeply embedded in whiteness and that they did not identify white privilege as a type of racism. This connection between culturally competent teachers and their beliefs about racial and ethnic diversity, Amos (2011) suggests, is best addressed in teacher education programs.

Amos (2011) points out that as the P-12<sup>th</sup> population continues to grow in its diverse makeup, the teacher population continues to remain white. In addition, black and Hispanic minorities continue to demonstrate disparity in both academic achievement and graduation rates. Amos (2011) posits that there is a growing gap in what has been traditionally considered the achievement gap between minority students, white students, and Asian students. Teachers who truly understand their students, regardless of their background, also understand that the skills they may bring to the table may not be the same skills that their white counterparts have. Nieto (2012) states:

The second lesson I've learned, closely related to the first, is that *educators need to learn about their students*. Otherwise, how can one ever care for them? The best educators I've met know that teaching is not simply about imparting knowledge; rather, it is about forming learning communities...(p. 30)

Amos (2011) demonstrated that the participants' beliefs about white privilege was that they admitted the existence of it in their own experiences. One male participant said, "As a white male, I've never experienced any sort of marginality in the United States, because whatever I appear to be is normal for people" (p. 487). Other participants shared similar feelings. From this study, Amos concludes,

If white teacher candidates can identify white privilege as a form of racism in their affective side, then speaking of their own privilege and decrying the disadvantages of others can be a path toward a more balanced and effective educational system. It is time that teacher education programs seriously consider preparing white teacher candidates for moral responsibility. (p. 491)

Leonard and Leonard (2006) studied both preservice and inservice teachers' diversity dispositions as they participated in a university multicultural education course. Leonard and Leonard (2006) posit: "In higher education, teacher preparation programs are considered to be key contributors to the cultivation of mores of inclusiveness, where diversity is embraced and appreciated in its multitude of forms. The researchers used autobiographical accounts, online responses to abbreviated biographies, face-to-face discussions related to equity, and instructor observations to gather data on the participants.

Leonard and Leonard (2006) concluded that preparing our teachers to teach culturally diverse student populations is a critical part of their training. They explain that it is not only supported by educational law and researchers, but also by the students themselves who feel unprepared to work with a culturally diverse group of students. Leonard and Leonard's (2006) findings supported the concept that teacher education programs must carefully consider how they are preparing future teachers to teach diverse populations of students:

One notable finding was that students in the course appeared to have reached some level of cultural consciousness, demonstrated as each shared aspects of his or her cultural identity-in terms of race, sex, religion, family, geography, social class, or disability. Family values, religious values, and life experiences appeared to have played a significant role in students' development of cultural consciousness. It was not entirely patent, however, that all participants in the class (particularly those whose group memberships were mainstream) fully appreciated

that their worldviews may have been interpreted differently by others who had different worldviews.

Leonard and Leonard (2006) also found that while one course on teaching diverse classrooms of students was probably not enough training for future teachers, the stand-alone course impacted cultural diversity awareness. In addition, the work that the students put into writing about themselves and their experiences mattered.

Autobiographical writing was a “useful tool for these students' self-examinations of cultural roots and life experiences and of their impacts on students' worldviews, values, biases, and dispositions” (p. 59-60). Lastly, inquiry and reflection should be used throughout teacher education programs to help students reflect on their own understandings and beliefs.

Villegas (2007) defends the concept of assessing teacher disposition related to social justice. She combats the belief by some that social justice is a political viewpoint that should not be forced on practicing teachers. She argues that, “attending to issues of social justice in teacher education is appropriate and that assessing teacher candidates' disposition related to social justice is both reasonable and defensible” (p. 371).

Moreover, Villegas (2007) argues that it is the responsibility of teachers and schools to be socially just as they “perform a sorting function. And teachers, whether consciously or not, play a critical role in the sorting process” (p. 371). This sorting process, the ranking of students based on performance and grades, requires that teachers embrace a disposition that is: “Vigilant about the fairness and equity of the educational enterprise as a whole. This moral and ethical dimension of teaching makes issues of social justice legitimate terrain for exploration in the preparation of prospective teachers” (p. 371). Lazar (2013)

states, “Teaching for social justice means understanding students and advocating for them. These dispositions are especially critical for those who teach in urban communities where low-resourced schools and deficit perspectives toward students prevail” (p. 701). Lazar’s (2013) research study is focused on three early-career teachers who enact social justice strategies in their classroom. “Case studies, largely based on teachers’ written narratives, reveal differences in their orientations toward: (1) caregivers, (2) students’ knowledge traditions, and (3) their ability to raise students’ critical consciousness” (p. 701). Lazar (2013) explains that social justice has become a focus in teaching because of the inequalities that exist in education, “particularly those from high poverty culturally nondominant communities” (p. 702). In particular, the study promotes the concept of teachers embracing their students’ knowledge traditions and cultural capital to promote practices and methods that are necessary for all children to experience educational equity. It requires teachers to be reflective practitioners who can recognize the needs of their students and hold themselves accountable to deliver quality education to all.

The three teachers in the study wrote narratives based on the following questions:

1. Describe where you teach and how you came to serve students in this community. How did you become interested in teaching in this community?  
What factors impact your commitment to this work?
2. Describe your overall mindset toward your work. What are your fundamental beliefs about teaching/learning, particularly regarding literacy?
3. Describe the challenges you face in helping students develop in literacy.  
Please describe how you work to overcome these challenges.



4. Describe the kinds of knowledge that your students bring from their homes and communities. How do you build on this knowledge to help students achieve in literacy?
5. Describe how you feel working with children and families in these communities. (p. 706)

In the data collected from the three teachers' responses, there were differences in three areas. The three areas were, "constructing caregivers, recognizing and drawing from students' knowledge traditions/cultural capital, and raising students' critical consciousness" (p. 720). The teachers all demonstrated commitment to urban education, but they had varying degrees of dispositions, skills and understanding, based on Cochran-Smith's (2010) Theory of Social Justice. Two teachers were exposed to social inequality in their lives that shaped their want to teach in high poverty urban communities. This supports the research that indicates a connection between factors outside education influencing a teacher's commitment to urban education. "Additionally, [one teacher's] experiences with and insights about racial oppression factored into her capacity to form alliances with students and their caregivers" (p. 723). This too connected to research, specifically research on teachers of color being successful in urban schools. "Finally, the school environment affected teachers' authority and their ability to enact social justice practices" (p. 723). Standardized testing and scripted programming limited the teachers' ability to work naturally with their students. In the end, Lazar (2013) notes:

Teacher education programs must go beyond challenging assumptions, however. ... teacher education programs must focus on helping teachers find instructional spaces where student knowledge counts in the official curriculum...instruction

should be guided by questions such as: How can we find spaces in the curriculum where students' conceptual knowledge can be used to access school-valued concepts? How can we transform the curriculum so that students' voices and literacies count as official school knowledge? ... Programs need to be invested in showing teacher candidates how to facilitate discussions about social and educational inequalities and how to design curricula around student activism. Addressing these concepts in teacher education will help produce teachers who embrace a social justice orientation to education and who can enact the practices associated with it. (p. 725)

### **Teacher Disposition Development and Training**

Sherman (2006) refers to dispositions as the moral dimensions of teaching, especially when one is referring to how responsive a teacher is to his/her students. She emphasizes that building the capacity of teachers to relate to and react to the needs of all students is a challenge that teacher education programs face. They are confronted with the expectations of outside agencies as well as the expectations of the communities they serve. May not one infer that the same is true for practicing teachers who adapt to meet the needs of a diverse group of students, whose needs are multifaceted?

Bercaw, Summers, Colby, and Payne (2012) consider the development of disposition in teacher candidates in a study that compares two teacher training programs. Specifically, the researchers consider 200 candidate participants and their perceptions about when and how the program allowed them to develop professional dispositions. In addition, the researchers conducted four case studies to look more deeply at dispositional development. The results of their research were as follows:

Although both institutions had designed opportunities for disposition development throughout their programs, balanced between coursework and field placements, data revealed that candidates did not necessarily perceive a balance between the two. What became evident in the analysis of data from the surveys and the case studies was the mirror image of the two institutions. (p. 522)

While one group of candidates believed that disposition development occurred “predominantly in their field placements,” (p. 522) the other group of candidates believed that disposition development took place “mostly in their teacher education courses” (p. 522). The findings suggested, “what is explicit at SU West (disposition development in the field) was implicit at SU East and what was explicit at SU East (disposition development in courses) was implicit at SU West” (p. 522)

It is important to note that while both institutions were from different geographical locations, they both ascribed to the National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education’s (NCATE) definition of professional disposition (p. 515). NCATE (2007) defines professional disposition as, “Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities” (n.p.). In addition, both institutions support the belief that dispositional qualities can be learned and developed and eventually become part of a teacher’s skills in working with students. The heart of the work on disposition in both institutions was encouraging students to be self-reflective throughout their training, looking closely at their own development.

Bercaw, Summers, Colby, and Payne (2012) state that there are three areas of relevancy of the study. The first is that the study explores effective practices in teaching

training programs in regards to disposition. Exploring practicing teachers' perceptions about dispositional development is the second relevancy. The third relevancy is the intention by the researchers to look at the comparative data from the two institutions to support the exploration of disposition.

In looking closely at the two institutions, the first institution prepares an estimated 300 post-baccalaureate students in elementary and secondary education with a student population that is largely white and English speaking. The institution created five focus dispositions that emerged from the unit's "conceptual framework and the 10 Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC; 1992) principles" (Bercaw, Summers, Colby, and Payne, 2012, p. 516). The five dispositions are as follows:

1. The candidate appreciates and values human diversity.
2. The candidate believes that all children can learn.
3. The candidate is committed to continuous, self-directed learning, critical thinking, and reflection.
4. The candidate demonstrates pride in the education profession.
5. The candidate is committed to the expression and use of democratic values.

(Bercaw, Summers, Colby, and Payne, 2012, p. 516)

The second program is within a college of education in a larger university. It is a 4 year undergraduate program with a student population that is predominantly white and English speaking, with about 230 students graduating each year. Three dispositions were developed for all education majors. They are as follows:

1. Candidate exhibits a commitment to meeting the needs of all students.
2. Candidate exhibits a commitment to reflective practice.

3. Candidate exhibits a commitment to professional and ethical practice.

Data collection included information from surveys and the case studies. The survey was given to 222 students in both programs combined at the beginning of the semester in which they student taught. Candidates were asked to respond to three questions on the topics of defining disposition, their own development of disposition, and the activities they participated in to develop their disposition. Two students from each school participated in a case study that included two phases, a written response based on the survey and semi-structure interviews based on the same.

Bercaw, Summers, Colby, and Payne (2012) show that the results of the study yielded information that allows other similar programs to review their process in a similar manner. The majority of the first institution's candidates indicated that they found the development of their own dispositions was within the field experiences, while the majority of the second institution's candidates found the development of their own dispositions was within their coursework. In addition, the case study participant responses aligned with their appropriate schools. Bercaw, Summers, Colby, and Payne (2012) discovered that, "despite the intended design of each program, candidates' perceptions of where and how disposition development occurs appeared to be related to where they were assessed" (p. 517).

Amos (2011) conducted a research study that explored 23 white male and 31 white female teacher candidates' dispositions. Specifically, the study looked at the "candidates' beliefs about race and ethnicity" (p. 483). Self-analysis papers and reading reflection papers were the main sources of data collection. All of these candidates are in the same teacher education program at a mostly white university that is located in the

“Pacific Northwest” (p. 484). The conceptual framework for the study was supported by research that revealed that racial prejudice is still alive and well in society, and Amos (2011) chooses to explore the concept of white privilege among the ranks of white practicing teachers. Further, Amos (2011) contends that these same applicants should examine how their privilege affects the students learning within their classrooms.

Amos (2011) found that most of the candidates had not been exposed to inner city children or children of color prior to entering the program. Stereotypes often associated with specific minority groups were found to be present in language and reference of the teacher candidates. “For example, they considered African Americans to be ‘ignorant and lazy,’ and ‘not highly educated’...Latinos were seen as ‘violent,’ ‘working illegally for less than 50 cents an hour picking strawberries’ (p. 484)...” Additional examples of white privilege were seen in the classrooms when the teacher candidates underplayed the minority students’ claims about racism after watching the video *Skin Deep*. The teacher candidates believed that the students were “perpetuating racism themselves” (p. 484), instead of speaking the truth about what they witness on a regular basis. The teacher candidates also viewed themselves as not being prejudice or biased and were not truly committed to seeing white perceptions about minority groups. The findings suggest that white teacher candidates who have little exposure to inner city students or minority students lack the dispositions to work with those students. Amos (2011) suggests that to truly prepare white teacher candidates “a process of transformative learning” (p. 490) must take place. The white candidates must delve into deep reflection about their own racist beliefs and how that impacts the students they teach before they can truly serve the students well.

### **Teacher Disposition in Diverse Classrooms**

Eberly, Rand, and O'Connor (2007) used Robert Kegan's (1998) adult developmental theory to address their core research questions about teachers' ability to demonstrate cultural sensitivity with children in the process of teaching. Specifically, they ask, "Why is it so difficult to change these dispositions of teachers" (p. 31)? In addition, Eberly et al. (2007) believe that each teacher's disposition is born from "an underlying psychological meaning-maker structure" (p. 31) and they seek to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

Eberly et al. (2007) found:

The response our students made to these cases clearly demonstrated that they are functioning at third order. If our teachers are to learn how to respond effectively to the expectations of the multicultural classroom, they will need to take the steps needed to gain the more complex world views found in fourth order consciousness. It is our role to understand how to help them take these steps. (p. 31)

Kegan (1994) developed his theory of "evolution of consciousness, the personal unfolding of ways of organizing experience that are not simply replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind" (p. 9). People who are functioning in Kegan's (1998) 3<sup>rd</sup> Order have moved beyond the egocentric face of "me" and toward the middle stage of "us". However, they lack the meaning-making and consciousness of understanding the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Orders of world-centric thinking in which "care and understanding is now extended to all people regardless of race, class, creed, gender, etc" (Eberly et al., 2007, p. 32). The teachers in training are not yet mature enough (in

thinking) to move forward in how they think about their diverse groups, their families, or the greater community.

Thorton (2013) “examines one middle level teacher preparation program ...intentionally focused on the cultivation of responsive dispositions, grounded in meeting the needs of a diverse group of young adolescents.” All members of the teacher education program including faculty, candidates, and master teachers from partner schools worked together on participant research. They investigated what dispositions are and how they manifest themselves in practice with students. Thorton (2013) continued: “The construct of responsive dispositions was examined with these Professional Development Schools (PDS) participants, and validation studies occurred prior to adopting their use in the field” (p. 4). In developing their research model, the group posed the following research questions. Within these questions, the terms responsive pedagogies and responsive dispositions refer to culturally relevant practices and behaviors (Rajagopal, 2011).

1. What does the manifestation of teacher dispositions look like in the classroom for teachers prepared in programs focused on responsive pedagogies and responsive dispositions?
2. Do new teacher candidates graduating from such programs articulate a difference in their dispositions once they enter the teaching profession?
3. Do their dispositions, as evidenced through classroom dialogue and interaction, change over the first five years of teaching, as compared to student teaching experiences? (Thorton, 2013, p. 4)



Thorton's (2006) Dispositions in Action (DIA) highlighted the link between what was practiced and what was perceived in this study and served as the framework for the program's assessment of educator dispositions. Data collection was completed through interviews and observations of practicing teachers and yielded findings that indicate that teachers' dispositions:

Remained fairly consistent over time. This was especially true of the two teachers, Caitlyn and Sarah, who evidenced Level 3 (consistently responsive) dispositions consistently in student teaching, year one, and year five. Even though they came from two different contexts, rural and urban, and two different content areas (language arts and science), these two teachers remained responsive in their interactions across all areas of the DIA framework. (p. 4)

Additionally, the practicing teachers' dispositions affected the way in which they responded to mandatory testing of their students. While the most responsive practicing teachers, "stayed focused on best practices that emphasize teaching for understanding and developing higher-order thinking and decision making in students," (p. 13) the other practicing teachers, those "who were moderately responsive took a more technical approach to teaching, sometimes centering on student behavior and attaining information and correct answers, all of which are becoming more prevalent in today's accountability-focused schools" (p. 13). Positive dispositions coincided with better decision making in teaching, regardless of testing pressures.

### **Teacher Dispositions-Assessment**

Early disposition assessments date back to Arthur Combs (1974), as he identified several perceptions that are critical for effective teachers, including perceptions that are

identified with diverse groups and a frame of reference that is people oriented. These perceptions have evolved over time and have become the focus by which others have built disposition assessments. Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) state:

The interest in the dispositions of effective teachers is not new. Researchers have been examining the dispositions (albeit by names such as attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, etc.) of effective teachers for decades and have found relationships between effectiveness and the dispositions that teachers hold.

In their work developing assessments for teacher educators to use in examining their students, Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) note, “Portfolios, observations, and standardized tests have been routinely used to assess the preservice teachers. However, assessment of dispositions of the preservice teacher calls for a modified approach” (p. 4). Shiveley and Misco (2010) while engaged in the process of assessing teacher dispositions, developed a four-step process to both integrate and assess the teacher candidate dispositions. The steps, in simple form, are completed as follows:

1. Clearly define and agree upon what is meant by dispositions.
2. Determine how this definition can be operationalized.
3. Determine the types of assessments needed to evaluate the degree of competence and growth in those dispositions determined to be important.
4. Collect and analyze data on these assessments and use this data to revise the program’s focus, teaching, modeling, and assessment of dispositions.

Perhaps one of the more challenging of the steps is Step 1, as it calls for a group of people to agree upon what is meant by dispositions. Shiveley and Misco (2010) refer to many researchers’ definition including Villegas’ (2007) definition as “tendencies for

individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs” (p. 373). Regardless of how a group of educators define disposition, assessment of disposition is critical for teacher candidates and practicing teachers to reflect on their work teaching all students well.

Cochran-Smith (2003) posits: while many teacher education programs report that they promote social justice as a core element of their teacher training, schools often fall short of this ideal. Diversity and multicultural perspectives are not dominant themes in the programs. Furthermore:

There are dramatically different takes on ‘teacher preparation for diversity,’ ‘multicultural teacher education,’ and ‘teaching for social justice’ as well as major disparities (sometimes even among people considered like-minded) in notions of ‘equity,’ ‘teacher learning,’ ‘social change,’ and ‘highly qualified’ teachers for ‘all students.’ (p. 7-8)

Cochran-Smith (2003) suggest that educators need to look closely at the theory and practice that support or purport to support the teaching of social justice, diversity, and multiculturalism in teacher education programs. In addition, it is critical that the political agendas in teacher education and disposition are understood. Cochran-Smith (2003) offers a conceptual framework that is:

Intended to be useful in examinations of all sorts of research, practices, and policies that in some way are related to or have an impact on the preparation of teachers for a diverse society, regardless of epistemological or methodological paradigms and regardless of whether these policies and practices themselves would be considered “liberal,” “conservative,” or otherwise. (p. 9)

This tool can be used by educators for recruiting, preparing, supporting, and assessing “teachers for a multicultural society” (p. 9). It is made up of “eight key questions, three external forces, and the larger historical and social contexts related to preparing teachers for diverse populations” (p. 9). The three external forces include Institutional Capacity, Relationships with local communities and schools, and Governmental/Non-Governmental Regulations. The eight key questions are as follows:

1. How should the increasingly diverse student population in American schools be understood as a challenge or ‘problem’ for teaching and teacher education, and what are the desirable ‘solutions’ to this problem?
2. What is the purpose of schooling, what is the role of public education in a democratic society, and what historically has been the role of schooling in maintaining or changing the economic and social structure of society?
3. What knowledge, interpretive frameworks, beliefs, and attitudes are necessary to teach diverse populations effectively, particularly knowledge and beliefs about culture and its role in schooling?
4. How do teachers learn to teach diverse populations, and what, in particular, are the pedagogies of teacher preparation (e.g., coursework assignments, readings, field experiences) that make this learning possible?
5. What are the competencies and pedagogical skills teachers need to teach diverse populations effectively?
6. What should the consequences or outcomes of teacher preparation be, and how, by whom, and for what purposes should these outcomes be assessed?

7. What candidates should be recruited and selected for America's teaching force?
8. To what degree are the answers to the first seven questions connected to and coherent with one another in particular policies or programs and how, are diversity issues positioned in relation to other issues? (p. 10)

These questions are considered in relationship with the external forces to assess teacher preparation program and their inclusion of multiculturalism.

King, Hilber, and Engley (2007) analyzed the classroom dispositions of pre-service teacher candidates using a rubric that examines “emergent professionalism” (p. 14). The Emergent Professionalism Rubric, “was designed to assess various dispositions appropriate to and exhibited by pre-service teachers within the college classroom” (p. 17). King et al. (2007) acknowledged that teacher dispositions are now seen as important as the knowledge and skills teachers must have in their work with students and that schools of higher education are also now responsible to measure teacher candidate dispositions as part of their training program. In particular, King, Hilber, and Engley (2007) explored the negative behaviors from students on college campuses as they interact with their teachers.

In looking closely at the causes behind large-scale negative behaviors by students on college campuses, King et al. (2007) state that while there may be many reasons, including tuition increases and societal erosion of authority, some view it as a response to “impersonal classes and poor instruction” (p. 14). Regardless, King et al. (2007) state that the college students may not always be the cause of the problem, but instead the problem may lie in the hands of professors who lack effective dispositions to teach their

students. King et al. (2007) cites the Boice (2000) report in which college faculty members were found to be patronizing and less than supportive of students.

King et al. (2007) considers methods by which teachers can be assessed for effective disposition and questions how to “accurately and effectively describe and evaluate” (p. 14) specific dispositional qualities such as attitude and leadership within the teacher’s work in the classroom. King et al. (2007) presents the term “emergent professionalism” as positive dispositional behaviors in the college classroom, a term that can easily be used in all classrooms from higher education to primary education.

In looking at developing an assessment of emergent professionalism, King et al. (2007) considers a mixed method action research study. The research study was conducted in an “early childhood block courses of a Southeastern University” (p. 16). The two questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. Would using a rubric and holding individual conferences increase the occurrence of the desired behaviors?
2. How would students perceive this evaluation method?

(King, Hilber, and Engley, 2007, p. 16)

The instrument used was the Emergent Professionalism Rubric or EPR and its purpose was to assess specific dispositional qualities of pre-service teachers within a college classroom.

King et al. (2007) note that the participants in the study included the spring semester of 8 Caucasian students and 3 African American students, all of whom were female. In addition, the fall semester, included 1 African American student and 13 Caucasian students all of whom were female. A mixture of juniors and seniors were in

both classes. All students were given an overview of EPR and the dispositions of which they would be assessed. The data gathering tools included midterm and final notations of students' progress on the rubric and surveys that were given at the end of the semester. Researchers' notes, written before and after the study, were also used. The data questions were focused on dispositional qualities of the students within the classrooms and not of their work with students. The EPR, designed in this way, looks closely at emergent professionalism such as classroom behavior, dress code, and participation by the students in the classroom.

Findings between the two groups revealed that, "each group of students had its own distinct personality that affected not only their personal progress on the rubric, but also our response to them" (King et al., 2007, p. 17). One group was less appropriate in professional dress while the other group rated higher on the rubric. Participation in class was a clear weakness for both groups. Tardiness was an area that, in the groups' evaluations, demonstrated a clear gap or a difference in opinion as to the level of importance groups felt it had.

Mueller and Hindin (2011) analyzed the factors that influence pre-service elementary teachers developing dispositions. They state that teacher preparation programs must focus on more than the knowledge and skills of their candidates, but instead look closely at dispositional qualities as well. The purpose of the study is to both assess dispositions of teacher candidates as well as to determine what factors impact or influence disposition. The research question is: "What is the relationship between candidates' dispositions and their experiences?" (p. 20). The participants are 65 teacher

preparation candidates who are primarily Caucasian with 9% African American and less than 1% Hispanic or other.

Data was taken from two scenarios, one that involved inclusion in the literacy classroom, and the other on cultural stereotypes during a social studies lesson. The first scenario was completed by 60 students in sophomore year. The students read a short “Inclusion Scenario” about a teacher who neglects to include special education students in large group discussions. The second scenario was completed by 45 students in their junior year. The students read a short “Cultural Stereotypes Scenario” about a student intern who cuts short a discussion about negative stereotypes to get back to the main lesson. Students were required to answer 7 questions related to the readings. Mueller and Hindin (2011) point out that the data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The results of the study yielded the following results regarding the two scenarios. One hundred percent of the students could identify the problem in the first scenario and drew on course and field experiences as well as personal experiences to answer the question. At the same time, 87% of the students drew from their work in the course *Diverse Learners* to answer the question. In addition, 30% of the student reported that they saw the opposite happen in their field experiences and that the teachers include all students. Reportedly, 48% described to have seen something similar happen in their field experiences, and 100% of the students could identify the problem in the second scenario. All of the candidates drew on information from classes. While 53% of the candidates drew on their field experiences, 49% of the candidates drew on personal experiences, and



33% of the candidates described similar scenarios in their field experiences. Finally, 30% noted positive experiences in their field assignments.

The results of the study provided many points for discussion. To begin with, the fact that students report that they drew on information they received from their course supports the importance of quality programming on dispositional topics. Additionally, the data on field experiences suggests that it is critical for teacher preparation programs to select high quality schools for candidates' field placements. Mueller and Hindin (2011) make a critical point in their statement that, "[t]hese results are a concern in the face of research that shows that experienced and newly certified teachers see clinical experiences as a powerful, sometimes the single most important, component of teacher preparation" (p. 29). Field experiences must be high quality experiences for teacher candidates. Lastly, personal experiences play an important role in dispositional development and help to shape decision-making in teaching depending on the topic or situation.

### **Principals and Disposition**

For the purposes of this research study, the school principal is in focus because it is important to understand how school leaders define teacher disposition, as well as how they assess it in the end. Grissom and Loeb (2011) posit: there are few studies that identify those skills that principals must have to promote successful schools or in turn to support their teachers. While their research does not specifically isolate teacher disposition, it does consider the skills and dispositions that correlate with successful schools. Grissom and Loeb (2011) posit: "Unfortunately, existing research does not tell us enough about the skills principals need to promote school improvement, making the design of policies geared towards recruiting and preparing effective school leaders

challenging” (p. 1092). Both data availability and the complexity of principals’ work stand as the obstacles to research. The research approaches the study of principal effectiveness through a wide lens, looking at different sets of principal skills that support positive school outcomes. Several questions are considered, including the following: How does principal efficacy vary across leadership task? To what extent can efficacy on individual tasks be grouped? Do domains of task efficacy vary systematically across principal and school characteristics? Does principal task efficacy predict key school outcomes?

Grissom and Loeb (2011) consider the study of principal effectiveness by investigating specific research studies. In particular, they considered principal effectiveness in terms of instructional leadership because it is prevalent in the literature, but approach their study from the perspective of those practices and skills that fall outside instructional leadership. They note that, “the dominance of instructional leadership as the primary frame for understanding the job of the principal has, to some extent, crowded out the study of other aspects of principal work” (p. 1092). The study’s five main research questions consider how principal efficacy varies in terms of leadership task, how efficacy of individual tasks can be grouped statistically in terms of effectiveness, how task efficacy varies systemically among principals and schools, how task efficacy predicts key school outcomes, and finally how assistant principal assessments of the principal compare to the self-assessments of the same principals.

Michael Fullan’s (2015) work suggests that top down leadership is not a long term answer to the principal’s impact on the school. There is not enough buy-in from the masses when top-down leadership is in action. Fullan (2015) points out the following:

Governments have become less and less effective at leading system change. The old model – prioritize and implement – is no longer suitable. It cannot generate innovation and learning fast enough for the demands of the 21st century. For the latter you need continuous innovation in real time generated and assessed through co-learning (laterally within and across classrooms, schools and districts; and hierarchically school to district to province). For this kind of innovation, the middle is essential.

Fullan (2015) stresses that principals must break free of the constraints of what they have known to be the process of change in schools. Instead, it is the “the middle” or district that must increase what is called “the capacity and internal coherence of the middle.” In turn and simultaneously the district becomes a better partner toward the state and downward to the schools, parents, and educational community, achieving a larger system of coherence and agreement. This is connected too to the concept of the district/system player to which Fullan (2014) outlines as one of the principal’s roles as he/she maximizes his/her impact on the school and its success. In the same role, Fullan (2014) expects that the principal will become the lead learner who participates with teachers in the learning process and therefore become a great support to the teachers and the school as a whole. Finally, the principal as a change agent has those push and pull skills that allows principals to challenge the status quo but build sustainability at the same time. These qualities that outline Fullan’s (2014) hope for principals also support the idea that principals can become great supporters of their teachers, especially as they work to develop powerful dispositions that positively impact all students.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher disposition as it is practiced in elementary classrooms with diverse groups of students. Teacher disposition continues to be a growing research area in education. A great deal of the current research, however, whether it is about defining the term, training, assessment, or social justice, is focused on the development of pre-service teachers, specifically students in teacher education programs. Much less research is devoted to the dispositions of practicing teachers, and yet practicing teachers have already been deeply involved with impacting the lives of students. The research that has been done on pre-service teachers; however, those models are valuable for the research that will develop about practice teachers. Theory on disposition, research studies, and detailed assessments all offer future researchers of practicing teachers a great deal of ground work and tools that will support the research ahead. This study will build upon this research base of teacher disposition and offer new insights into the development of practicing teacher disposition as it relates to perceptions, assessment, and practice.

## **Chapter 3-Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore teacher disposition as it is practiced in elementary classrooms with diverse groups of students. In addition, the researcher explored how disposition is defined by teachers and principals, and supported and assessed by principals. While teacher disposition continues to be a growing research area in education, not enough research has been focused on practicing teacher disposition. Mueller and Hindin (2011) state that it is useful to reflect on model dispositions as well as to consider the circumstances by which those dispositions grew. In addition, teachers must take the time to reflect on what they believe and how that plays out in the classroom. “Given the interactive nature of teaching, dispositional characteristics... may play important roles in a teacher’s ability to interact in...effective ways with children” (Ripski, LoCasale-Crouch, & Decker, 2011, p. 1). Positive or negative, a teacher’s impact on students is undeniable. Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) note that the results of low dispositions highlighted by low expectations for students have a devastating impact on children, building a philosophy that not all children can learn. This concept is certainly born from Weiner’s (1972) Attribution Theory, which supports the idea that students are affected by both environmental factors and by personal factors in their learning experiences. A teacher’s disposition is part of the environmental factors that influence students.

What teachers are disposed to believe because of their own experiences has an impact on how they may perform as teachers. Sherman (2006) supports the idea that dispositions have a direct impact on students. As a matter of fact, Sherman (2006) notes

that dispositions have the proclivity to guide how teachers will interact with their students on many different levels, including during the process of instruction. Disposition guides educators' ethical thinking, especially in their work with students.

Creswell (2013) notes that, "When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities...researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities" (p. 20). This idea is inclusive of looking at the different perspectives of what a construct, like disposition, is in the minds of different participants. Creswell (2013) writes that these different views allow researchers to gather evidence from multiple sources and to examine and report the findings.

Gair (2012) reminds that within the "helping" literature, empathy is a critical element with which the researcher must grapple as he or she experiences the lives and beliefs of their participants. While Gair (2012) suggests that helping literature is derived from social work, medicine, psychology, and nursing, this researcher expanded this to the literature of education. Gair (2012) explores both the definition of empathy and its relationship with insider/outsider status, and notes that one of the aims of qualitative research is the hope of capturing the real experiences of participants. Gair (2012) links the concepts of qualitative research, professional practice, and empathy to explore the research on empathy, especially as it relates to insider/outsider status. Most important, Gair (2012) ponders:

There appears to be agreement throughout the literature that qualitative researchers and research students need to listen intently to understand the lived reality of participants, whether those researchers are positioned as insiders or

outsiders. Their mission is to reproduce authentic, empathic stories in research presentations, reports, and publications. (p. 137)

In terms of this research study, the researcher attempted to fully embrace the lives of teachers and principals as they were presented by the rich language of the participants and within the depth of the stories of their students and their students' families.

### **Research Questions**

This research study seeks to reveal how teachers' dispositions are practiced, supported and assessed within three public elementary schools.

The following questions will guide this research study:

1. How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?
2. How do principals define teacher disposition as teachers relate to diverse learners?
3. How do principals support the practice and development of teacher disposition?
4. How do principals assess teacher dispositions?

### **Research Participants**

The setting of this study is three Northern New England public elementary schools. The researcher used the NICHE website to determine those schools in the state that are most diverse based on NICHE criteria. NICHE determines degree of diversity by using a comprehensive assessment of both the diversity as well as the culture of each elementary school. Several factors are considered in the examination of each school. NICHE considers ethnic make-up of the overall school population, as well as students

that receive free or reduced lunches. Lastly, NICHE considers diversity at the district level. Recent calculations include records for 53,705 public elementary schools.

NICHE offers specific information about the factors used to rate schools as well as where they obtain their statistical information. The table below specifies that information, including the weight of each factor:

Factor	Description	Source	Weight
Student Diversity - Most Represented Ethnicity	Percentage of students belonging to the most represented ethnicity (lower is better).	<a href="#">National Center for Education Statistics</a>	45.0%
District Student Culture & Diversity Grade	Niche District Student Culture & Diversity grade, which incorporates statistics and student, alumni, and parent surveys regarding student culture and diversity in the district.	<a href="#">Niche</a>	35.0%
Free/Reduced Lunch Rate	Percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch (closer to the national mean is better).	<a href="#">National Center for Education Statistics</a>	20.0%

Table 2: NICHE Factors Considered

*Statistics obtained from the U.S. Department of Education represent the most recent data available, usually from 2013–2014, as self-reported by the school district (<https://colleges.niche.com/rankings/most-diverse-colleges/methodology/>).*

Based on the results of the NICHE data, the researcher attempted to access schools that were listed in the top 10 of the most diverse elementary schools in the state. Only one school in the top ten agreed to participate in the study. That school was listed



as the Number 1 most diverse school based on the NICHE 2015 data. The other two schools were listed as Numbers 25 and 30 of the 100 most diverse elementary schools listed for the state.

Once the schools were determined, the researcher requested that each principal suggest two teachers to serve as the participants based on availability and willingness to be included as a participant. The teachers vary in their roles in the schools. While some are regular classroom teachers, other are specialists. The table below offers information on the specifics about each teacher and principal.

Teachers	Area of Teaching	Years of Experience	Gender
Teacher 1	Library	20 +	Female
Teacher 2	ESOL	20 +	Female
Teacher 3	Grade 4 Elementary	1	Female
Teacher 4	Grade 5 Elementary	20 +	Female
Teacher 5	Grade 2 Elementary	4	Female
Teacher 6	Grade 2 Special Education	5+	Female
Principal 1	Reading/Admin	20 +	Female
Principal 2	Physical Education/Admin	20 +	Female
Principal 3	Speech Pathology/Family Studies/Admin	15 +	Female

Table 3: Participants

Because the teachers were chosen by the school principals, the sample is a convenience sample. While Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) note that the convenience sample is the least desirable, disposition is discoverable and worthy of exploration in any sample of educators that participate in the study. Exploring the educators in three elementary schools from different districts provides the researcher with a wider range of participants, all working under the auspices of different leadership. The researcher hoped to learn how different educators value and practice the construct of disposition, especially as it relates to diverse learners. The research also hoped to understand whether or not school leaders support the concept of teacher disposition in

what they say and how they guide their schools. In this study, the principal participants were chosen because their schools were selected from a list of the Most Diverse Schools in the state. Like the schools themselves, the selection of principals was highly dependent upon access. Each principal chose the teacher participants based on availability and willingness of teachers to participate.

### **Plan and Methods of Data Collection**

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) work was used to gather the information needed to conduct this study. To begin, the context in which the study took place was an important element in the research. Information about the participants and their schools were gathered through several methods including document analysis, principal and teacher interviews, and teacher classroom observations. Demographic information was gathered from each participant during the interview process. This process supports Seidman's (2006) expectation of revealing the background of the participants. The background of each participant in this study on disposition is of interest because it helps the researcher to build a comprehensive picture of each educator. Ripski, LoCasale-Crouch, and Decker (2011) remind us that specific characteristics of educator's disposition allow them to work with students in a way that support academic and social growth. The background information was gathered during the first interview as participants revealed how they became teachers and administrators. Participants' views of teacher dispositions as they related to practice and assessment were explored in the second interview. Interview questions connected to both the research questions and the theoretical framework. The interview questions guided each participant interview.

Theoretical information, as it relates to the information needed, is outlined in Table 4. At the center of the theory is Fischetti et al. (2010) Five Pillars of the New Framework, which serves as an indicator of the core dispositional characteristics that guide the exploration of teacher and administrator disposition. Some of the learning experiences and sample evidence were edited to create a reworked sample evidence section that reflects the research that was done as part of this study. Aligned to the sample evidence section is the theoretical framework of Fischetti et al. (2010) Five Pillars of the New Framework, as well as themes in the work of other researchers and resources such as Mueller and Hindin, Sherman, and NCATE. In addition, the methods of data collection and research questions are aligned to the evidence to reinforce the purpose of the research and clarify the process of the research.

Dispositional Characteristic	Related Theory and Research	Method of Data Collection
<b>Pillar 1</b> How does the participant demonstrate cultural awareness and learner differences Caring, thoughtfulness?	Fischetti et al. (2010) <a href="#">Five Pillars of the New Framework</a> Mueller & Hindin, (2011) <a href="#">Socially conscious teachers support diverse learners</a> Sherman (2006) <a href="#">Dispositions have a direct impact on students</a>	Interview <a href="#">How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?</a> <a href="#">How do principals define teacher disposition as teachers relate to diverse learners?</a> <a href="#">How do principals support the practice and development of teacher disposition?</a> <a href="#">How do principals assess teacher disposition?</a> Document Review <a href="#">How do principals assess teacher disposition?</a> Observation <a href="#">How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?</a>
<b>Pillar 2</b> Cultural Sensitivity and Connections to Families	Fischetti et al. (2010) <a href="#">Five Pillars of the New Framework</a> Mueller and Hindin, (2011) <a href="#">Socially conscious teachers support diverse learners</a> Sherman (2006) <a href="#">Dispositions have a direct impact on students</a> NCATE (2007) <a href="#">Operationalize the belief that all students can learn</a>	Interview <a href="#">How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?</a> <a href="#">How do principals define teacher disposition as teachers relate to diverse learners?</a> <a href="#">How do principals support the practice and development of teacher disposition?</a> <a href="#">How do principals assess teacher disposition?</a> Document Review <a href="#">How do principals assess teacher disposition?</a> Observation <a href="#">How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?</a>

Dispositional Characteristic	Related Theory and Research	Method of Data Collection
Pillars 3, 4 & 5 Classroom, School and Community Leadership to Support Diverse Learners	Fischetti et al. (2010) Five Pillars of the New Framework  Sherman (2006) Dispositions have a direct impact on students  NCATE (2007) Operationalize the belief that all students can learn	Interview How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners? How do principals define teacher disposition as teachers relate to diverse learners? How do principals support the practice and development of teacher disposition? How do principals assess teacher disposition? Document Review How do principals assess teacher disposition? Observation How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?

Table 4: Method of Data Collection

The method of data collection provides the study with data that Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) call, “vivid...nested in real context, and have a ring of truth that has a strong impact on the reader” (p. 11). The specific methods of gathering data for this study included a principal and teacher interviews, teacher observations, and document analysis. The interview method followed the work of Seidman (2006) who emphasizes that it is not fact that we necessarily get from in depth interviews, but people’s own experiences of a concept or idea. It is through a well-constructed and delivered interview process that researchers can delve into the perceptions of others. Seidman (2006) also points out that the best way to investigate an institution, especially the way in which an institution treats disposition for example, is to talk to the individuals who run the institution and work with the topic on a day to day basis.

Following Seidman’s (2006) structure for in-depth interviewing, this research study’s interviews were conducted with open-ended questions that allow the participants some latitude in exploring the topic from their own points of view. Seidman’s (2006) Three Interviews Series were conducted in a modified two interview format to honor the time constraints of the participants. The first interview was extended to allow enough

time to address the purposes of Seidman's Interview 1 and Interview 2, and giving the researcher and each participant time to build a rapport and an accurate picture of the participant's lived experience. All principal and teacher participants took part in the interview process. Following Seidman's (2006) advice to honor the structure of the series, the researcher focused on the participants' life histories, present life experience, and the meaning of the experiences, or specifically how they relate to disposition.

Specifically, a qualitative study served as the means by which this research took place. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) note: "Qualitative data are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of human processes" (p. 4). The human processes that were observed were those in which teachers interacted with and spoke about the diverse students they teach each day. The nature of this research allows the researcher to delve into the concept of disposition as it was revealed through the works and actions of educators. The first interview followed Seidman's (2006) protocol to provide time to allow participants to adequately reflect on their experiences. The second interview followed up from the first interview responses and connected the interviewees to the concept of disposition. In addition, a minimum of three days fell in between the two interviews, giving the participant time to think about the interview and how she responded. Seidman (2006) states that transcription of interview notes should take place as soon as possible after the actual interview. The researcher audiotaped each of the interviews, and timely transcription supported the researcher in documenting the experience with a fresh memory of the experience.

After conducting two sets of interviews on all nine participants, the researcher conducted one classroom observation for each teacher. Creswell (2013) outlines

nonparticipant observers as being present during the activity but not engaged in the activity. The researcher observed each teacher participant for a full class period, regardless of the particular lesson that was planned for the period. Creswell (2013) supports setting up clear observation protocols, which the researcher will follow. The protocol included keeping an observational notes page that includes both descriptive notes and reflective notes. Creswell (2013) states that the field notes should allow the researcher to give some chronology to the sequence of events as well as providing notes that describe what is taking place and the researcher's reflection about what he observes. In addition to keeping the observational notes page, the researcher looked closely at teacher talk and student response as a way of organizing the experience into notes. The teacher's language, in tone and words, and the student responses to that language provided the researcher with a method for organizing the experience into the observational notebook.

The final form of data collection was completed through review of each schools teacher evaluation/observation tool. Coincidentally, each school used the Teachscape model of evaluation. Teachscape is based on the work of Charlotte Danielson's (2013) A Framework for Teaching, which breaks down the observation/evaluation process into four core areas.

<b>Domain 1: Planning and Preparation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1a Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy</li> <li>• 1b Demonstrating Knowledge of Students</li> <li>• 1c Setting Instructional Outcomes</li> <li>• 1d Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources</li> <li>• 1e Designing Coherent Instruction</li> <li>• 1f Designing Student Assessments</li> </ul>	<b>Domain 2: Classroom Environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2a Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</li> <li>• 2b Establishing a Culture for Learning</li> <li>• 2c Managing Classroom Procedures</li> <li>• 2d Managing Student Behavior</li> <li>• 2e Organizing Physical Space</li> </ul>
<b>Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4a Reflecting on Teaching</li> <li>• 4b Maintaining Accurate Records</li> <li>• 4c Communicating with Families</li> <li>• 4d Participating in the Professional Community</li> <li>• 4e Growing and Developing Professionally</li> <li>• 4f Demonstrating Professionalism</li> </ul>	<b>Domain 3: Instruction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3a Communicating With Students</li> <li>• 3b Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques</li> <li>• 3c Engaging Students in Learning</li> <li>• 3d Using Assessment in Instruction</li> <li>• 3e Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness</li> </ul>

Table 5: Charlotte Danielson's *A Framework for Teaching* (Taken from smartblogs.com)

While the three data collection methods are important individually, they are just as significant when used together as layers that have what Creswell (2013) calls “logical connections” (p. 108). These connections, in the end, promote a data collection process that is rich with varied qualitative data. In addition, the data collection method supports what Oliver-Hoyo and Allen (2006) call, “a careful reviewing of data collected through different methods in order to achieve a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results for a particular construct” (p. 42). In this case, the construct is disposition.

### Data Analysis and Synthesis

Seidman (2006) notes that in order to fully prepare data to be analyzed and synthesized it must be well organized. In terms of interview notes, the researcher performed the initial stages of organizing data soon after it had been gathered, and conducted an in depth analysis after all interviews of teacher and principals were

completed (Seidman, 2006). The researcher utilized interview transcripts to code, identifying and pulling critical passages from each interview.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) remind us that “Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 71). Coding is more than a mere organization of data, but it is a specific “deep reflection about and, thus, deep analysis and interpretation of the data’s meaning” (p. 72). As part of the first cycle of coding, the researcher used in vivo coding to look closely at specific words and phrases from each participant. These particular codes, Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) report, are from “the participant’s own language in the data record” (p. 72). Eventually, these codes were organized into a second line of coding and became common categories. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) note that these categories are usually fewer in number and pull the initial codes together under a common title. For the purpose of this study, themes began to develop within the more condensed categories.

Observational data of the six teachers was analyzed differently than the interview data. The descriptive and reflective observational notes were, as Creswell (2006) explains, read and noted in a way to explore and make some sense of the material. This included making notes in the margins of the field notes. Eventually, the researcher developed codes from the notes, by classifying and interpreting the data and placing like data in the same categories. These codes eventually were organized into larger themes under what Creswell (2006) calls “common ideas”. Finally, Danielson’s (2013) A Framework for Teaching was reviewed specifically for its focus on disposition and its evaluation.



### **Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

Every effort was made to conduct this research in an ethical manner in accordance with established research practices as outline by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). To name a few, these practices include being confidential and protecting the identity and rights of the participants, being competent as a researcher by conducting research with a “do not harm” policy and guarding all notes and research as outlined in the informed consent agreement, and above all, being honest and trustworthy in actions and deeds. The policies and expectations of the Institutional Review Board for the university was reviewed and followed. The researcher was sensitive to any ethical issues that could have arisen because of the nature of the study and informed consent was obtained from each participant before research was started. Full disclosure was given to all participants and they were aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants understood that they would gain no financial reward from their agreement to participate in the study. They also understand that after the research study is completed, it will be published but that all names and associations will be kept in strict confidentiality. In particular, the name of the state, district, and school will not be included in the study or released in any way. Throughout the process of the research study, the researcher will conduct himself with a ‘do no harm’ philosophy.

As a former principal and teacher who currently works in a university School of Education, the researcher does bring to the study his own biases about what teacher disposition should look like. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) note, “Although we discuss these biases...they influence the analysis deeply, both during and after data collection” (p. 296). The researcher made every attempt to prevent his bias from

influencing the research study, including keeping a research journal that includes reflective notes about the process. On the same note, the researcher's experience in the field gave him repeated and substantial involvement with the setting, teachers, and administrators, strengthening his understanding of disposition within the school community. The data analysis included a specific process regarding coding that lessened the possibility that the researcher's biases impacted the findings. The researcher used in vivo coding of verbatim transcripts of the interviews to identify the themes of the research. Multiple methods of data collection, including interviews, observations, and document collection, strengthen the process and ultimately the findings of the study.

The dependability of the research study is supported by a thorough explanation of how the data was collected, stored, managed, and analyzed. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) note, a clear audit trail strengthens the dependability of the research process and allows for easy review by others. Additionally, a well written study that is rich with detail promotes the work to be transferable within the context of the study.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) state that the limitations and delimitations identify weaknesses evident in the study. The limitations are external conditions that "restrict or constrain the study's scope" (p. 103). This study does include limitations, some of which are a result of the qualitative nature of the research. The limitations are as follows:

1. Because the study is focused on only three school districts, the findings may not be generalizable to a larger population, but only to the population of similar districts with similar characteristics.

2. The researcher is a former teacher and school principal and therefore has his own biases in terms of teaching, leading, and dispositions. Gair (2012) reminds us of the following:

The notion of insider/outsider status is understood to mean the degree to which a researcher is located either within or outside a group being researched, because of her or his common lived experience or status as a member of that group (p. 137).

While this researcher did not serve as an insider to the participants' world, it is his lived experiences in education outside of the group from which his biases are derived.

3. The researcher was present within the school during interviews and observations and this may have impacted how educators act and respond during interviews and observations. Teachers and principals may have felt that they had to act or speak in a way that demonstrated effective disposition to the researcher.
4. The time frame of data gathering was limited to a span of three months, giving the researcher a shortened glimpse of teachers in the process of teaching.
5. Interview data was limited to the interviewees' own experiences and perceptions and includes the participants' own biases.
6. Document analysis was limited to each school's own evaluation tool.
7. Participants were selected with the advice and assistance of the school principal.

While the principal chose teachers based on availability and willingness to participate, the principal's own bias may have impacted her choice of participants.

8. While the researcher attempted to access the most diverse schools in the state, access allowed the researcher to access one school listed as the most diverse, or Number 1. Another school was Number 25, and the final school was Number 30.

### **Chapter Summary**

This qualitative methodology provides a clear picture of how the researcher conducted a research study that explored the construct of disposition, from selected teachers' and principals' points of view. Three data collection methods of interviews, observations, and document review followed clear procedures to bring about useful data from each participant. Nine participants, two teachers and one principal from each of the three schools, allowed the researcher to observe perceptions of disposition from different levels of the organization. Special attention was given to data gathering and analysis procedures to promote a research study that is both ethical and trustworthy.

## Chapter 4-Findings

### Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of research that was conducted in three separate elementary schools in a state in Northern New England. As a point of reference, each of the school's diversity specifics are included in Table 6: School Diversity.

	Size	Grades	Free and Reduced Lunch	White	Hispanic	African American	Asian	Multiracial	Other
School 1	604	K-5	89.4%	34%	33%	16%	7%	6%	4%
School 2	211	K-5	38.9%	59%	27%	2%	7%	2%	3%
School 3	302	K-5	30.5%	75%	5%	1%	12%	5%	2%

Table 6: School Diversity

*(Statistics obtained from the U.S. Department of Education represent the most recent data available, usually from 2013–2014, as self-reported by the school district (<https://colleges.niche.com/rankings/most-diverse-colleges/methodology>))*

The qualitative data were collected in three different methods including interviews of two teachers and one principal from each school, classroom observations of each teacher, and document analysis of the evaluative tool, Charlotte Danielson's (2013) *A Framework for Teaching*. A bulk of the data came from the teacher and principal interviews. This data was analyzed by using four levels of coding that ultimately identified three main themes that ran through or were common to most interviewees. The three themes that emerged from the interview data were family connection, empathy, and

systems and supports. Each one of these themes was prominent in many of the interviews, in both the initial set of interviews and the second set of interviews.

Principals and teachers alike expressed some level of personal investment in these three themes, especially as they relate to teacher disposition with diverse groups of students.

The following research questions were explored:

1. How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?
2. How do principals define teacher disposition as teachers relate to diverse learners?
3. How do principals support the practice and development of teacher disposition?
4. How do principals assess teacher dispositions?

### **Teachers' Definition of Dispositions**

Over the last two decades, teacher disposition as it relates to teachers in training, has attracted the attention of researchers and educators alike. When partnered with knowledge and skills, disposition serves as the third set of competencies by which both teacher candidates and practicing teachers are evaluated in many organizations and institutions that prepare teachers in training to teach. While the definition of disposition varies from organization to organization, evaluative tools have emerged over the last decade that help institutions to define and assess the dispositions of teachers in training. The same tools, however, are not as readily available for practicing teachers. Determining the perceptions and beliefs about teacher disposition among practicing teachers and their administrators is an area that requires more research.

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of practicing teacher dispositions toward diverse learners within three public elementary schools. Mueller and Hindin (2011) state: “For teacher educators, modeling ideal dispositions as well as having discussions that target the nature and origin of their dispositions can be helpful” (p. 3) in developing effective teachers. Teachers must take the time to reflect on how their own beliefs might play out in their own classrooms. Leaders must take time to reflect on what they believe and how that might support the work of teachers in their schools. Ripski, LoCasale-Crouch, and Decker (2011) state: “Given the interactive nature of teaching, dispositional characteristics...like assertiveness and openness or emotional states such as sadness...may play important roles in a teachers’ ability to interact in...effective ways with children” (p. 1). Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) add, “Positive or negative, teachers’ impact on students is undeniable. Low expectations are destructive to students, limiting, and self-fulfilling, portraying a mission focused on a mantra that only ‘some children can learn’” (Vernon-Dotson and Floyd, 2012, p. 46). In their research on dispositions and diversity, Mills and Ballantyne (2009) state that the dispositional factors can be significant predictors of how likely it is that teachers will develop a tendency to be sensitive and concerned for the uniqueness of each student and his or her background.

Three themes emerged from the coding process: family connection, empathy, and systems and supports. All three themes were drawn from the interviews of all participants, teachers and principals alike. While family connection and empathy connected to all research questions in some way, systems and supports connected most

closely to research question 3: How do principals support the practice and development of teacher disposition?

It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will add to the research on disposition, specifically about how educators (teachers and administrators) define disposition, how teachers practice disposition, and how principals support and assess their teachers' dispositions with diverse learners. The following definitions of teacher disposition were offered by the participants in this study:

**Research Question 1: How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?**

**Teacher 1:** I would say that it is a teacher's attitude towards their job. Of course, it isn't a simple thing is it? It can change year to year and class to class. On top of that, it evolves with experience. Everything that you bring to your work (your background, your education, your family situation, your professional development, your work with students, your readings, world events like Columbine or Sandy Hook) affects your disposition.

Finally, like anything, you can impose your will over yourself and change your disposition. Wake up each day and decide that you will be excited about teaching, come into the class each day ready to show that difficult student more patience, or that quiet student more attention. Or, take what you've learned from a workshop or colleague and work to incorporate it into your disposition / attitude.

**Teacher 2:** Disposition is, how you would react in a certain situation in your classroom, how you perceive the children and how you react, how you deal with



the things that come up, whether you judge people or not. Disposition is how I look at people.

**Teacher 3:** Disposition is just the way you act, the way you are, the different qualities you have, the different experiences you have, different knowledge of different areas and things and the world. Just how you view things and see things in your perspective.

I see it as your experiences, like what do you bring to the table? How do you handle yourself? How do you react? How are your actions towards diversity, towards teaching?

**Teacher 4:** Disposition [is] being accepting and open and kind of fan the flames of the fact that this is a cool thing to be, from a different country because they are growing up in such a global world.

**Teacher 5:** It's really important to have empathy all the time. If students don't see you as someone they can relate to, they are not going to invest in that relationship. It's important to be as positive as you can, even in situations that can be hard. You need to be aware of what your outside disposition looks like and then deal with it emotionally.

**Teacher 6:** Meaning how I act towards, well my attitude towards it is like welcoming because I feel like I don't know, so I feel like I kind of want to be able to learn.

### **Principal's Definition of Disposition**

In terms of principals and administrators, Grissom and Loeb (2011) write that there are few studies that identify the dispositional skills that principals must have to

promote successful schools. Their research specifically considers the skills and dispositions that correlate with successful schools. “Unfortunately, existing research does not tell us enough about the skills principals need to promote school improvement, making the design of policies geared towards recruiting and preparing effective school leaders challenging” (p. 1092). Both data availability and the complexity of principals’ work stand as the obstacles to the research.

On the other hand, Robinson (2011) states, “In schools where students achieve well above expected levels, the leadership looks quite different from the leadership in otherwise similar lower-performing schools” (p. 3). Robinson (2011) also states that the principals in higher performing schools are much more focused on “improving learning and teaching” (p. 3). A focus on improving learning and teaching suggests that principals should have a firm understanding of teacher disposition, as it is a critical element of effective teachers. In addition to the teachers’ definition of disposition, it is just as important to understand how principals define disposition. The way that the three principal participants define disposition is explored below:

**Research Question 2: How do principals define teacher disposition as teachers relate to diverse learners?**

**Principal 1:** One disposition doesn’t work for all people, so that’s what makes education wonderful. Because then we get to see all different types of...behaviors and beliefs, values, together.

**Principal 2:** Disposition would have to be that you view 100% that you feel every child can learn and that’s what your disposition would be and so it’s that positive view that every person can learn.

What we need to be able to do is to view every child as having unique needs and we need to be able to figure out what they are, and so if our appreciation of them is anything less than that they have great potential, then we are viewing a child as a negative opportunity.

**Principal 3:** Engage to let a student know that they are valued, that they are being heard...that their work is important even though they are not a top student...You also bring a student down a little bit who thinks they are the end all, be all. And help them recognize what their strengths are and weaknesses are, and then support them and grow.

### **Principals Support of Teachers' Dispositions**

In addition to how principals define disposition, the third question probes how principals support teachers in their work with diverse classrooms.

#### **Research Question 3: How do principals support the practice and development of teacher disposition?**

Helm (2011) claims that much can be done by the school system to support our students of diversity. Helm (2011) states, "Dedicated teachers, who possess the right dispositions, can be the keys to reach students who do not come from wealth or privilege" (p. 109). Additionally, Steware and Eick (2010) posit: because teacher disposition helps to determine how effective a teacher will be with their students, it is the principal's responsibility to monitor teacher disposition. In their study of elementary science teacher disposition, they concluded that principals can support their teachers by ensuring they have the proper materials and resources needed to deliver a quality experience for students.

In this study, the researcher observed how three principals supported disposition through what the principals revealed in their interviews. In addition, teacher participants also reflected on the school and principal supports that directly impact their ability to be disposed to reach all of the learners. Much of the principals' support of teachers was closely tied to the systems in place at the school and district level.

### **Assessment of Teacher Disposition: Pre-Service and in Practice**

Assessments of teacher dispositions, when designed effectively, are critical indicators of how successful teachers will be at teaching all children to find their places in the world, to embrace learning, and to take their places among their peers. Prior to entering their first teaching assignment, teachers must believe that, "We can educate all children if we want to. To do so, we must first stop attempting to quantify their capacity" (Delpit, 2012, p. 49). Quantifying children's capacity limits a teacher's belief in children and builds the self-fulfilling prophesy that certain children have limits based on their race, socio-economic position, or other factors.

The same is true for practicing teachers who have had the opportunity to teach and work with students for long periods of time? Do they not have an understanding of the challenges their students face each day in school and after school? That is what this study was determined to address. With that said, this qualitative investigator began with the assumption, among others, that we must accept the notion that children's experiences differ and that they each bring with them a personal readiness for learning. As Delpit (2012) argues, "We must be convinced of their inherent intellectual capability, humanity, and spiritual character...Finally we must learn who children are - their lived cultures" (p. 49). More so, as a society, we must embrace the idea that educating all children is good

for our society and necessary for our existence. Teachers must understand that to truly educate their students, they must first understand who they are in terms of their home culture and lived experiences.

Other scholars argue, each child can eventually find his or her place in the world, but not without having learned important lessons from the adults and teachers around them. Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, and Schussler, 2010 ask, “What are the moral and ethical aspects of teaching, schooling, and education? And with respect to the means, how do we prepare teachers to act morally and ethically as professionals” (p. xi). In addition, Rath (2001) ponders, if we believe that it is ethically right to change others’ beliefs, which are the most important for us to teach? While higher education organizations like The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) strive to build and outline certain parameters for assessing teacher dispositions, the evidence still remains murky, and personal subjectivity, rather than documented research, is still a significant deterrent to successful disposition protocols and methods in schools of education.

This study posits that understanding how principals assess disposition is helpful in gaining a bigger picture of how disposition is treated in the practicing teacher environment.

#### **Research Question 4: How do administrators assess teacher dispositions?**

The assessment of teacher disposition by school principals was examined through the use of Charlotte Danielson’s (2013) A Framework for Teaching. While Teachscape is the online mechanism and broader collection of evaluation tools for administrators and teachers, the main evaluative instrument within Teachscape is Charlotte Danielson’s The

Framework for Teaching (2013). The Framework is aimed at, “provid[ing] educators with a deep, shared understanding of what great teaching looks like and builds confidence in the observation process.” It too was analyzed for its focus on teacher disposition.

A Framework for Teaching (2013) is broken down into four domains, exploring the following areas of teacher effectiveness: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Professional Responsibilities, and Instruction. All domains address teacher disposition to some degree. For example, Planning and Preparation requires that the teacher demonstrate knowledge of students, which includes understanding each child’s interest and cultural heritage. Each component within the domain is assessed on a four level proficiency rubric that includes unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished. The rubric includes critical attributes as well as possible examples from which assessors and teachers can draw. Domain 1, Planning and Preparation, for example, is broken down into several components, but the second component specifically assesses teachers’ knowledge of the students they teach.

Component 1b specifically states:

Teachers don’t teach content in the abstract; they teach it to students. In order to ensure student learning, therefore, teachers must know not only their content and its related pedagogy but also the students to whom they wish to teach that content. In ensuring student learning, teachers must appreciate what recent research in cognitive psychology has confirmed, namely, that students learn through active intellectual engagement with content. While there are patterns in cognitive, social, and emotional developmental stages typical of different age groups, students learn in their individual ways and may have gaps or misconceptions that the teacher

needs to uncover in order to plan appropriate learning activities. In addition, students have lives beyond school—lives that include athletic and musical pursuits, activities in their neighborhoods, and family and cultural traditions. Students whose first language is not English, as well as students with other special needs, must be considered when a teacher is planning lessons and identifying resources to ensure that all students will be able to learn. (p. 9)

This component specifically isolates the expectation that teachers must plan lessons that consider students' backgrounds, interests, cultural heritage, language proficiency, and special needs. Like all components in the assessment program, the rubric that is used by assessors to evaluate teachers has four levels that range from unsatisfactory to distinguished and call on teachers to demonstrate specific attributes like the “teacher seeks out information from all students about their cultural heritage.”

In addition, Domain 2 is called The Classroom Environment, and it too has specific expectations that are directly connected to building teacher disposition. Domain 2 states:

An essential skill of teaching is that of managing relationships with students and ensuring that relationships among students are positive and supportive. Teachers create an environment of respect and rapport in their classrooms by the ways they interact with students and by the interactions they encourage and cultivate among students. An important aspect of respect and rapport relates to how the teacher responds to students and how students are permitted to treat one another. Patterns of interactions are critical to the overall tone of the class. In a respectful environment, all students feel valued, safe, and comfortable taking intellectual

risks. They do not fear put-downs or ridicule from either the teacher or other students. “Respect” shown to the teacher by students should be distinguished from students complying with standards of conduct and behavior. Caring interactions among teachers and students are the hallmark of component 2a (Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport); while adherence to the established classroom rules characterizes success in component 2d (Managing Student Behavior). (p. 25)

The concept of building an environment of respect and rapport applies to all members of the classroom and sets the stage for a learning experience that is considerate of all students regardless of the socio-cultural background. Finally, Domain 4 is Professional Responsibilities and its component 4c, Communicating with Families, is another important element that is not only a critical thread in the five Pillars of disposition, but also one of the three themes that emerged from the coding process. Component 4c explicitly states:

Although the ability of families to participate in their child’s learning varies widely because of other family or job obligations, it is the responsibility of teachers to provide opportunities for them to understand both the instructional program and their child’s progress. Teachers establish relationships with families by communicating to them about the instructional program, conferring with them about individual students, and inviting them to be part of the educational process itself. The level of family participation and involvement tends to be greater at the elementary level, when young children are just beginning school. However, the importance of regular communication with families of adolescents cannot be



overstated. A teacher's effort to communicate with families conveys the teacher's essential caring, valued by families of students of all ages.

The Framework for Teaching (2013) was the assessment tool for all three schools that were sites in this research. Danielson's work is used by many districts in the area. It has been adopted by states as well and has become a core player in teacher assessment tools.

Regarding assessment, Principal 2 reported that they use the Charlotte Danielson model to assess their teachers. The model is called Teachscape (A Framework for Teaching). When asked how she assesses for teacher disposition, Principal 2 said:

We use the Danielson model. So okay, a culture for learning, respect and rapport and so we actually get trained in the Teachscape model and so you are actually looking for some of those engagement elements through a rubric so tangible-evidence based pieces but you certainly can pick up on some of those pieces. How you are engaging, who you are engaging with, who are you providing for, scaffolding and uh, other tools for the students. So, I think it's probably difficult to maybe pinpoint some of them, but I think those would be the avenues of how you would get there [i.e. to assess dispositions]: How you are engaging with your students and I was a little curious about how you were coming to sit in on a class and measure in on that also and see how...

After she explained the process of observing the teachers, Principal 2 further explained their use of A Framework for Teaching (2013):

And I think it's [disposition] intertwined with some of the pieces because right, professional responsibility it's in there but I think that that is somewhat subjective so I think when you can see it and name it, so that's part of the Teachscape and

part of our learning is bias comments. Because it's just evidence this is what I witnessed, this is what I saw, but when it's, um, you know, you leaned into the student to show the graphic there are ways that you can do it that are totally evidence based on that and I think sometimes the disposition will come out and I think that sometimes it's just so interconnected that it is hard to pull it apart. But that was very difficult, the training was about 35 hours. But great.

### **Themes from Coding**

In addition to the research questions, the researcher uses the Five Pillars of Disposition (Fischetti, Imig, Ndoye, Smith 2010) as a lens through which to view teacher disposition. The themes that emerged from analyzing the data were also viewed carefully in the light of the Five Pillars of Disposition, specifically in the areas of: Cultural Awareness and Learner Differences; Cultural Sensitivity and Connections to Families; Classroom Leadership to Support Diverse Learners; School Leadership to Support Diverse Learners; Community Leadership to Support Diverse Learners and Their Families. Each one of these pillars is addressed to some degree as they help the researcher to analyze the specific themes that have emerged from the interview data.

Each teacher practices disposition in her own way. The data detailed below offers a rich sense of how each teacher uses their own disposition to teach their group of diverse learners. For example, Teacher 2 values gaining a deep understanding of students before they are expected to perform at grade level. She points out the following:

Be empathetic and culturally sensitive. You know and understand that fair doesn't mean equal. Yes we want our kids to be able to function in the real world but when they first get here, we can't treat them like somebody who is in the

mainstream classroom. Because we don't know, well for some of them we don't know what they saw.

Teacher 5 believes that a teacher is responsible to create a classroom environment that supports each student and how they learn. She said:

Most of my kids...have...an accommodation and their IEP. So, they have a separate location with limited stimuli and some, not him, but other kids often watch how quickly peers around them are finishing so they don't always take their time. So it is easier when they are in an environment where they are typically doing that kind of learning anyway, to know that they can work at their own pace. And I have all of their tools, manipulatives that they use, as part of their intervention so it's just more manageable that way.

Of the three themes that emerged from the coding process, family connection, empathy, and systems and supports, family connection was interwoven throughout each interview and was the most dominant theme within the data.

### **Family Connections**

The Family Connection theme is deeply connected to the Five Pillars of the New Framework. Specifically, Pillar 2 (Cultural sensitivity and connections to families), as well as Pillar 5 (Community leadership to support diverse learners and their families), are contained in the words of both administrators and teachers. Referring to Pillar 2, for example, Fischetti et al. (2010) states:

Candidates stretch beyond knowledge of self as they develop cultural sensitivity and connections to families. This element is demonstrated by candidates' using awareness of learner differences to modify curriculum; seeking out connections

with colleagues to help understand how students learn; exhibiting effective collaboration and teamwork skills; initiating experiences with families; showing sensitivity to adapt and modify practice; demonstrating compassion, sympathy, and helpfulness; accommodating to special situations faced by students and families; and exhibiting cultural sensitivity and recognizing and respecting differences. (p. 151)

In the same respect, Fischetti et al. (2010) specifies that Pillar 5 is reaching beyond the immediate school community and “advocating on behalf of equity issues in the community, promoting social responsibility, striving for social justice, exhibiting self-accountability, demonstrating personal responsibility, and contributing as a community-wide leader for the betterment of schools and society” (p. 152). In short, teacher leaders as well as school leaders must look beyond their classrooms and schools to support the over-arching obstacles that stand in the way of students and families of diversity and their progress in the community and greater world. Murrell et al.’s (2010) comment that educators must “look honestly at the congruence between their rhetoric and their practice” (p. xi) in the development of teacher dispositions resonates here.

Differentiating in the classroom is not enough. Leading in the greater community to fuel “the connection between intention and action” (Murrell et al., 2010, p. xi) is the crux of Pillar 5.

**Principal and family connections.** In terms of school leaders, family connection was important to each principal interviewed. Principal 1 clearly stated that, “When you talk to families and you understand all of the barriers and struggles, you are able to make better decisions because they have so many challenges.” This principal was referring to

decision making in general, those decisions that would impact the students. The same principal commented that she has received some feedback from her students about her work as the principal. She noted that she has “lots of relationships with students and parents here, so fortunately or unfortunately, many of the kids that I have in school, I had their parents.” She believes that she “has their history” and that these “long term relationships” help her to work through even the negative feedback she may get from parents. This belief supports the concept of building the cultural sensitivity and connections to families that is the essence of Pillar 2.

Principal 1 also spoke too of having an understanding of how parents think about their children and this impacts them. She described a visit from a parent who came in with pre-school age children for a conference. Principal 1 said, “Like the Nepalese-they just, they love their children. But they have no rules for them so it’s just, like the kids will come in and they are just like kittens-all over the office...usually I just let it go and what else can I do?” She also relayed a story about a “little Spanish boy” whose parents love him so much that they allow them to manipulate them. The boy often misses school and the principal has worked closely with the parents to better his attendance. On the day of this interview, the boy was on the ground outside, refusing to come in. Principal 1 said, “The mother had left, you know, because she knew we would take care of it.” Principal 1 went outside to the boy and said, “Marco, we aren’t doing this. Get in the building.” The child got up and went in the building. Principal 1 ended the anecdote with, “We have gone through this a ton of times, he and I, and I have not changed anything I do.” Principal 1 went on to explain, “This family has been through hell. The father was arrested because they are illegal, and so on purpose, they were moving and

moving and moving.” Even so, Principal 1 pointed out that the school has built trust with the family.

In her second interview, Principal 1 talked about having to go into her office with a mom and a Spanish translator just before our meeting. She explained that the mother was very upset with her child’s teacher. Principal 1 said, “There is a teacher who is taking her son who has an IEP and making him feel stupid is what her words were.” The principal went on to explain that she, “knows the person she is talking about is a paraprofessional and I know she has really, really high expectations and I am not sure if she is being too demanding of the child.” The principal also wondered what the parent really wanted for her child. “Does she want him just to come to school and be happy or does she want him to learn?” The principal also added that the paraprofessional does not understand that the approach is not working with this child.

During her first interview, Principal 2 expressed her school’s relationship with parents in several stories she told. The first experience that she introduced was that of a family who was moving back and forth between her town and a larger city. The father had been sent to jail and the son was living with his grandmother in another state. The mother was staying in the school’s state, trying to maintain residency and stopping by the school to express her want for her son to attend even though he is currently in another state. The mother said, “You know we are just trying to get it together. I know that this is the best place for my child.” In the end, it was the principal’s community leadership to support diverse learners and their families (Pillar 5) that assisted this family. The child is still attending school with Principal 2. In another family, a mom came in to ask if the principal could write a letter for her husband who is in the process of being deported.

She asked, “Can you write a letter explaining why this wouldn’t be a good thing for me or my two kids?” Principal 2 noted that the relationship with parents that allows them to come in and share is important. Principal 2 said, “They know us, they trust us...” She continued to say, “You know the families. That is your first engagement so I mean we had a parent last year that was so excited. We voted to have the schools renovated and three of the schools weren’t and we were one of them.” Principal 2 explained the real need for a renovation and how the parents became involved. She continued with, “I had one of the dads who said he went to register but wasn’t a citizen. ‘They told me I couldn’t but I wanted you to know Miss [Principal 2] that I tried to vote. I tried to vote for the school but I am not a resident.’” Principal 2 continued to explain that many people, including parents, see the school as an extension of the family, a support to the learners and their families (Pillars 3, 4, and 5).

In her second interview, Principal 2 expressed the need to develop trusting relationships with parents. She said, “But how do you approach your disposition? [Are you] just going to call up a parent and they will just show up or that they will be able to help out at home? It’s not that way and it’s not that they don’t value education. It’s just different.” Principal 2 connected what the parents might be feeling for their children. She explained that kids come into her school with no exposure or prior experience about what will be learned in class and discussed in groups. Principal 2 pointed out that it is important to keep trying with parents. Her school uses several methods to keep parents informed including social media through *Facebook* and *Parentlink*. She said, “We paid to have extra parent meetings for the teachers to be here, you know to see if that would help, you keep trying. How do we get the diverse population in other ways?” Principal 2

believes that one of the most significant impacts on increasing parent involvement was the establishment of a parent ESOL program so that parents could learn English while their children attended school. This is discussed in more detail under the systems theme below, but the program itself provides the school with a mechanism to touch base with parents regularly. More than that, it magnifies the schools commitment to their families, especially their needs to learn as their children learn.

Principal 3 has a strong Montessori approach to education. When she spoke about it in detail she reflected by saying, “How do you engage parents, but really how do you cultivate on the social/emotional aspect of these kids? And then what does it look like?” She reflected on her experience when she first came to the school. “I was shocked when I came here,” she noted referring to the level of diversity in the district, especially the social-economic diversity of her school in particular. She said, “I was thinking, how come no one told me about this? I live here. I was embarrassed. I live here. This is my community and it was a complete culture shock.” At the time of becoming principal of her school, Principal 3 had lived in the community for many years but saw her community through the lens of its vibrant downtown and not through the lens of the struggling families who lived in the smaller apartments and homeless shelters.

Principal 3 described the diversity of her school as including a “vast Indian population, which was a whole learning experience for us, from food to parental engagement.” In detail, she described the Indian fathers as being more, “actively involved than the moms. The moms usually don’t drive. So how you engage with those parents is very different than how you engage with somebody who is an American.” Principal 3 also had to do, “a lot of P.R. around the Indian parents” understanding of



math curriculum without a dominant textbook and higher order thinking skills in the reading process. Many families are also transient; “They might come for a project for three months or six months or nine months and then they go.” Many can’t afford the rising rents or utility costs. They stay for a few months and then find a town that is cheaper to live in and move on. Regardless, Principal 3 was determined to develop strong bonds with family through community leadership, leadership that would be demonstrated by the principal and her staff.

As Principal 3 talked in more detail about her relationship with families, she said, “I have a really soft heart for the dysfunction outside of here. I am an advocate for kids, and at times I have probably crossed the lines, specifically with families,” suggesting that she has become more involved than she needed to. She said, “I hear and see what is happening and no child should live that way.” Principal 3 also said, “For my staff, it was a lot of excuses at first. Oh, dad left, mom is an alcoholic, heroine, the whole heroine piece. We have had four kids affected by that this year.” She continued with, “So it has definitely been a shift in their thinking, but we know a lot. Sometimes I know too much. And I have an open door. Parents are more than willing to come in and put their whole life on the table.” Principal 3 continued to discuss balancing what information was necessary to share and what should be kept private. She asked, “How much does a teacher really need to know in terms of shifting their practice, because it wouldn’t shift their practice, but maybe they need that one day where okay, she [the student] is coming in and she is a hot mess.” The principal wanted the teachers to consider the child’s emotional state but still hold them accountable for learning. She understood that in order to do so, the teachers needed some information about what is going on at home.

As Principal 3 continued in her second interview, the connection that teachers have with families, became an important focus in her story. She pointed out that by her fifth year in the school, “parents have evolved into an extension of teachers and an extension of me in regards to volunteering, in regards to systems thinking, in regards to every aspect of what we do.” The school’s “strong volunteer program” has made parents “an active part of the process...and so there is an ebb and flow. Doors are wide open.” Once a month, staff members present to the PTA on what is going on in the school. For example, staff members present on new programs and curriculum and celebrate this with parents at the meeting. Principal 3 said, “For me, the parents are my backbone. I can really go to them and say, ‘Ok, these are the inner workings of the school. What can the PTA do to help that?’” Principal 3 pointed out that the PTA communicates and is responsible for “messaging out”. Newsletter updates keep parents connected to volunteering in the school. The principal called the school entrance a “revolving door”.

When Principal 3 talked about her first year, she said, “We had school choice.” Thirty of her students left for another school in town. “It hit the teachers hard because they had definitely felt that they had given their all.” The teachers wondered why parents and families had chosen to send their children to another school in the city. Some parents, however made political signs that said Proud Parent of XXXX School. They were all over town, all over the neighborhood. They made bumper stickers for cars.” Principal 3 expressed that since then, the parents have “rallied together” to support their school. Also since choice was implemented by No Child Left Behind, the newspaper has become a “vehicle of information”, a way for the school and the PTA to get positive information out about their school.

As the years allowed the principal and her teachers to develop stronger relationships with families, teachers began to feel more support from parents as well. In turn, Principal 3 began to share more information with teachers about families. She said, “I used to protect the families and I wouldn’t share with teachers, and so now, we have been able to call an in-house meeting if there is a child we are concerned about. We will come to the table and what I will do is almost give a profile.” In the same respect, Principal 3 explained, “I don’t know if this is a strength of mine but I wouldn’t say a weakness...is that people trust me, so I am more than willing to engage in their drama.” She confessed that sometimes she takes on too much, knows too much which is the difficult side of having family trust. She believes in being very direct with parents; it keeps her grounded.

**Teacher family connections.** In describing the students she teaches, Teacher 1 painted a picture of their families. She said, “95% are low income. Over 50% speak another language-one of the largest in the state. We have 8% homeless.” She continued to describe her school as a minority school in that a majority of the children are in the minority. In answering what she knows about the lives of her children outside of school, Teacher 1 said:

We have so much poverty and you have students who are in crisis. As a teacher, you don’t get a lot of information to start...The philosophy seems to be if you knew everything about every kid in the room, you wouldn’t be able to teach.

Teacher 1 spoke about one child whose mother passed away unexpectedly a few weeks ago. The girl and her sisters live with their father and other family. Her aunt came from Colorado to stay with them. The girl was back in school soon thereafter. While she has

the support of many family members and structure at home, that is not the case for many of the children. Teacher 1 said:

We have a lot of families that don't move out of this city, white poor families whose grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, [have] all come through the system. We know the whole family...they can't break the cycle of poverty and they can't get out of here.

Teacher 1 also said, "We have a lot of immigrant children who are moving constantly...migrant workers." She explained many cases of children whose families are in the school for just a short time and then have to leave because of work or family needs. She also said that many children have parents who are in jail and the children are "counting the days until they are released. They are very excited."

Teacher 1 explained that teachers must understand that people from different cultures have different values. For example, "In their culture, visiting family, if there are five top things in your life, family and visiting family is at the top of the list. They need that car to get to Massachusetts, New York or wherever they are from to visit family." This sensitivity to the real needs of her students' families echoes Pillar 2 in that it demonstrates Teacher 1's support of connecting to her students' families. She continued, stating, "They might be driving a nice car, but they have it because they need to get back and forth..." During her second interview, Teacher 1 explained:

The truth is, I am a firm believer in family culture versus any other kind of culture. I really feel like each family is individual even though you know these five children are Puerto Rican. It's really looking at their family and what their family celebrates and honors and wants for their children.

She believes that having a deep understanding about what the family values and wants for their children is important. The language barriers can seriously impact connections to families, however. Teacher 1 said that she tells her students to remind their parents about the parent meeting dates. This helps, as some of the parents do attend, but the language barrier still blocks in the way. Teacher 1 reports that the parents come in, and “I get the religious blessing, ‘Oh, thank you teacher, you are a great teacher.’ I even got a bag of oranges once. I don’t think there was real communication going on but there was trust building.” She believes that this process prepares the children and the families for future meetings. As they learn more English and better understand how the school works, they will be more prepared. Having the children perform in school concerts or plays, as well as having them participate in International Night strengthens the trust with parents and families as well. If a parent, “can come in four out of five times per year, and it is because of something good, their child is performing...they are bringing food from their culture...then you do have a better relationship with them.” Lastly, Teacher 1 believes that as a teacher better understands the culture of her students, she “really becomes an advocate for them in school where teachers knew nothing about them.” Through these words, Teacher 1 is specifically connecting her work to Pillar 4 by describing how teachers rise as school leaders for the diverse children within the building.

Teacher 2 addressed family connections and Pillar 5 by looking at the big picture of her experiences with parents and families. She began with some of the experiences that concerned her. She said, “I hear things that happen at home that I don’t want to hear. I have never heard about a kid being abused or neglected, but I heard of other things going on in the family.” She also relayed ways in which she tries to connect to the

family. She said that she had attended a birthday party for twin sisters last year. “It was really a traditional Nepali birthday party. They were putting this-I forgot what they called it-this stuff on their forehead. It was just amazing.” She talked about her feelings for the children. “I am so close to them. It’s unbelievable,” she said.

In another story, she talked about a student who came to her classroom limping. This continued for several days. When Teacher 2 finally talked to the mother about it, the mother told her that the child was fine. After a few more days, the child was sent to the nurse and it was decided that the child must go to the hospital. Teacher 2 tried to explain this to the grandmother. Eventually, the child was taken to the hospital where she received the care she needed. Teacher 2 said, “That is way beyond a job of a teacher, but that is what my life is.”

Like Teacher 1, Teacher 2 noted that the communication barrier causes difficulty in many ways. She said, “My kids don’t have families that speak English, so communication is real. It’s a whole other layer of complexity to the job, but yeah it’s not just teaching.” Teacher 2 views that act of teaching as the simple part of her job. “It’s everything else, the managing of kids. It’s the communication with parents.” During our second interview, Teacher 2 brought this particular student up again. The girl had come back to class with stitches but was then beyond the date that the stitches should be taken out. She said, “I am not sure that they know that she needs to go back to the doctor to have her stitches out...I am worried that she will not be able to go on the field trip on Thursday.” Teacher 2 explained that she would have to talk to the parent liaison to get in touch with the parents. Regardless, Teacher 2 demonstrates a sense of the greater

community of which her students are part. Her empathy for their situation drives her to lead within that community for the sake of the children (Pillar 5).

Teacher 3 began to talk about family connections when she discussed the different language her students speak. One of her ESOL student's mother has difficulty speaking English, but Teacher 3 reported that the mother, "is practicing and working on it, but helping her daughter... the work we do is challenging...I know that support is minimal but she is always willing to do whatever she can, 'How can I help?'" She noted that some of the students' home lives are not "fabulous". She said, "They are not living the life of luxury, and I know that." When asked if there were things that she did throughout the year to connect to parents, Teacher 3 said, "We do an Open House, which is this week, and I do communicate with parents a lot if I have an issue." She sometimes finds that parents don't respond when she contacts them, "but for the most part they are very supportive of what I do, and they appreciate what I do...I know my ESOL student whose mother speaks Spanish is very appreciative." In her second interview, Teacher 3 was asked what qualities a teacher who is teaching diverse students must have. She said, "Being involved with the community for different events I think is huge, because trying to get parents involved is very challenging in the diverse community because they are so diverse." She explained, parents "aren't really comfortable coming to school where most people speak English....I have had parents come in here where they do feel comfortable...it's caring, it's compassionate, it's sincere, it's like a family. Teacher 3 explained further and said, "I want to learn more about their differences, culture, and background and their language." She explained that the school is accepting of anybody

and she feels the same. Lastly, Teacher 3 explained that she tries to get involved with afterschool activities so that she can be involved with the family and see the family.

When Teacher 4 was asked what she knew about the lives of her students outside of school, she talked about one of her students whose mother is a drug addict and that her daughter lived with her at one time. She said that the details are “sketchy” but she stated that the girl and her mother were homeless. Eventually, the father found out and took custody of the girl. Teacher 4 said that everything has, “kind of come together for her [the student] but it was very rocky.” Teacher 4, however, was less connected to the parents of her students. When asked at what level she communicates with students’ families throughout the school year, she said, “Well, I don’t have a ton of communication with them... We have our parent conferences in November...” Later, in her second interview, Teacher 4 stated, “You have to connect with the person first and find out where they are from, and the person sitting there is like, ‘She cares about my background and my family.’ That matters.” While she initially reported not being in touch with families often, Teacher 4 expressed a focus on knowing her students and their families well.

Teacher 5 explained, “Most of my families are low-income...they live sometimes multiple families in a small apartment...they don’t even understand half of what educators say.” She continued to reveal her relationship with some of her parents. She is able to talk to them about how they might be able to work their schedules out so that their son could play baseball. She talked with one of her students’ parents about helping their child read. She said, “I am going to give you some really easy books and you are just going to put a stuffed animal in front of them while you are cooking. But you can still do



what you need to do.” She explained that it was, “really just a different mentality of making sure that everyone’s child is centered.” She is a special education teacher who sees “mom or dad or grandma and grandpa as people, whomever is in charge, they are all part of our team.” She believes that relationships with parents are very important. She has found that it has helped parents to be “pretty forthcoming” with her about difficulties or challenges at home that may impact the child’s learning in school. Finally, Teacher 5 shared some of her strategies with parents. She said, “I have parents email or call me asking about ‘How do I make a calm down jar’ or ‘What is my child talking about when she says squishy?’” Teacher 5 talks freely with parents about tools that work for their child in her classroom. She hopes to be an important resource for them as well. Even so, her constant communications with families has brought families close to the work she has done with their children.

Each of the principal and teacher participants discussed their experiences, attitudes, and ethics as they shaped a picture of their work with children and families of diversity. The threads of Pillars 2 and 5 were highlighted in many of their words. The same can be said for the theme of empathy, though empathy is farther reaching.

### **Empathy**

Empathy is intrinsic to all of the Pillars of disposition. Fischetti (2010) states that the “foundation of professional dispositions consists of basic attitudes and ethics...as candidates embrace” (p. 150) them, “they do so on multiple levels: classroom, school and community” (p. 150). The cultural awareness and sensitivity that teachers demonstrate and live are done so by their leadership in these multiple levels. Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, is required in any teacher who is aware and

sensitive to his or her students' needs. Beyond that, it is empathy that drives an educator to fully embrace Fischetti et al.'s (2010) sense of professionalism-leadership to support diverse learners and their families.

**Principals and Empathy.** Empathy emerged as dominant theme from the data gathered from principal and teacher interviews. Principal 1 first mentioned her sense of empathy for children of diverse backgrounds when she talked about a family visit to her brother. She visited her brother in Africa with her two small children. She said, "I remember...taking a book off a bookshelf and it said, 'You and your family will be killed today', and I started reading the book and it was about the Rwandan Genocide...It was only 1998. And I'm like, 'Oh my heavens.' Like my whole world opened up. Like I could not believe this had happened." She went back to her school and was struck by the children from Rwanda in her school and what they might have been through. She was also struck by her own ignorance and wondered, "How these children [had] found the pathways towards an education..." She attributed this experience with creating an interest for her in working with diverse groups of children. Principal 1 believes, "Everybody in education has a lot of empathy and compassion and it's just something I think most teachers have..." She does worry, however. She worries that her teachers who show deep empathy for their students may be less effective because of it. She said, "Sometimes when teachers know so much about the kids and where they came from, not intentionally, they lower their expectations, because they are compassionate and push them in a different way and I don't think they make it as hard sometimes." Principal 1 stressed that teachers must balance their empathy and compassion for the children with consistent high expectations. She said, "So, I guess that is what I would want for my

teachers, that even though they have all these sad things, they still have to persevere. Sometimes, I see our teachers getting caught up in all the sadness.”

In her second interview, Principal 2 talked explicitly about how teachers should approach students who are limited in their exposure to American schools. She said, “It’s not that way and it’s not that they don’t value education. Kids coming in with no exposure, no schema whatsoever, to what [our school] is, some of the vocabulary...It’s not the students’ fault; it’s just how you approach it must be entirely different.” Principal 2’s empathy is supported by an understanding that children and their families need the school community’s support and its understanding. She spoke about a teacher who had worked for her for several years who lacked that understanding and empathy. She described the teacher as, “I think her mentality of coming into here and not being in such a diverse culture before...and she had to watch herself a little bit with the comments she might have made, you know, ‘they aren’t prepared or nobody is helping them with their homework’...or whatever...” Principal 2 explained, “It was a very quick learning curve for her...I think you have the wrong perception about the parent. You know, it’s not about that she doesn’t want to help; she isn’t able to.” Principal 2 was asked, if you “were standing there in front of your staff to give the definition, how would you define disposition?” Principal 2 responded with, “Maybe I would spin it, saying what we need to be able to do is to view every child as having unique needs and we need to be able to figure out what they are, and so if our appreciation of them is anything less than that they have great potential, then we are viewing a child as a negative opportunity.” Principal 2 closed the second interview with her thoughts about her students moving on to middle school. She said, “This is their second home, and...there are some kids that I don’t want to go to

middle school next year, because you know that is too big and there is no sense of belonging. There is no one that is going to be there for our diverse learners.” It was difficult for her to think about letting go of some of her most needy students who had come to know her school as a safe and supportive place.

In interview one, Principal 3 was shocked when she first took over as the principal in her community. She said that she had lived in the community for several years but did not realize the need for a homeless shelter or low income housing. This set the groundwork for her deeper understanding of what her community was about, what their needs were, and how she might guide her staff. She spoke to the district leadership about stepping away from the focus on testing and taking a different approach. Principal 3 said, “So, we needed to break that and so my hiring process and also through the messaging that every child deserves an equal education, and all children can learn, that was kind of my mantra for a long time.” Eventually, Principal 3 pushed for a shift in thinking among her staff members as well. She said, “All kids have the right to learn and as a teacher, you are expected to give that to them.” She has seen growth in how accepting her teachers are of their students. They don’t complain like they used to about getting another transient student added to their enrollment. Instead, “they have invested so much time of who they are in them and you always have to remember, ‘Okay what are they leaving with?’ Think about the gift you gave them beyond the curriculum but how did you empower them?”

Principal 3’s “soft heart for dysfunction” goes beyond her relationships with families. She said, “What I don’t want it to be is a pity party for this child...there is a

fine line of giving them that information but still holding the child accountable because they will rise to the occasion because they want to please.”

**Teachers and Empathy.** Teachers of diverse groups of students contend with the need to balance having a deep empathy for their students with the courage to offer them a rigorous and challenging teaching experience. These teacher participants experience working with students who not only face the challenges of learning in the setting of a dominant culture, but also the experience of working with students who contend with the challenges of poverty every day of their lives. When asked what feedback she gets from students about her teaching, Teacher 1 recalled what a student had said to her.

One of my first students, I taught at the high school at the very beginning, and I am still in contact with her and she graduated with her MBA. She wrote me a letter giving me feedback on how wonderful a teacher I was, she certainly did not remember a single lesson that I taught but she remembered being terrified. She was from Bosnia. They had just come, they had just spent a year in Germany after the war. She came to America and she was terrified she didn't know who was Muslim and who was Christian and I was so nice to her that she assumed I was Muslim. One of the first things that she said to me was Muslima? Very excitedly and I was like no nothing. I am nothing. Um, but that sense of being cared for and to be respected and being accepted you know, is what she remembers. It's what they remember when they are newcomers when they arrive.

Teacher 1's powerful story and the empathy that a student found in her care resonated throughout her first interview. Her cultural awareness and sensitivity to her

learners and their families (Pillars 1 and 2) helped her to shape her classroom and her school. She describes her school as a safe haven, especially for what she described as, “for kids with underlying circumstances.” She sees the same need in her students today and designs her instruction accordingly. “Any issue that I bring up to you about teaching or how I have to change my teaching it's not because of the diversity, ethnic diversity of my students; it's really because of the poverty level and the crisis that we are in constantly.” Her empathy comes from the view of what she sees in her students. She is specifically empathetic about the children’s lives and daily routines.

But being the middle class white, it's so hard to put yourself in that position when the children are here an hour early, getting into fights outside, you are here an hour early because you are here for breakfast. And they don't want to take a chance to miss it. Because they didn't eat anything last night. Or when you realize the children are here at 7:30 in the morning to get breakfast; they are here all day, they are in the after school program, they get a snack...they get lunch here, they get a free healthy snack here, they come to after school program and they get another snack, and when they leave here at 5, they go to Salvation Army for dinner. And they stay here until 6:30 -7:00 until somebody picks them up or they walk home. They do their homework, they go to bed. They start up again. Why are they so tired? Why is this child, you know, exhausted in my classroom? Well, they've been up since early in the morning and they have a longer day than I do... for whatever reason.

In her second interview, Teacher 1 talked about the need for teachers to take on the barriers that get in the way of the children’s learning. She considered the barriers in

the classroom, school and community, reflecting the foundation of Pillars 3, 4, and 5. She called them “huge barriers” and pointed out that the school already helps with some of these barriers, like food, but it is the teacher’s job to be concerned for their students beyond academics. Those teachers who cannot look beyond academics tend to transfer out to a different school. She notes:

I think people are aware that there could be cultural barriers just like there are educational and poverty barriers whereas at other schools you feel like some of the teachers, they are not aware that some of them could even exist so they are not looking for them. And when these things happen, they are just assuming that it is the child's behavior.

Teacher 1 reminded the researcher that her city is a city of immigrants. She said:

We are very proud to say that we are a city of immigrants. We had the Mills, we had the Canadians who came, we had the Greeks who came, we had the Irish who came and everybody is very proud of their little community; we had churches; we must have like 20 churches within the city. The Polish had their own church and the Irish were over here and all that. And we are very accepting of immigrants, they like to say.

She continued to explain that the immigrant population has changed. She said, “We never had such visible immigrants before...” As she said this, she also worked in that she was from an immigrant family as well, and continued to explain how the immigrant population has changed and how it has impacted the city. In the end however, she reports “on the other side, our school has wonderful donors, we have wonderful relationships and partnerships because we are the biggest and we are the poorest and

whether they do it to feel good because they consider us a token multicultural, whatever!” She knows that her school needs the funds to help students overcome the obstacles they face each day.

When asked how her children are accepted in the greater school when they leave her classroom, Teacher 2 explained that it’s hard to really know. She said, “It’s hard to put yourself in their shoes and see how they are really experiencing it. And it's hard for me to imagine that they are not being accepted because I love them so much, I can't imagine anybody not accepting them.” She believes that her students are accepted by their teachers. She pointed out, “I think that you can't work at this school without having a love for every child and being tolerant and wanting to celebrate the diversity of kids. But as far as other students go... I'm sure there must be... When they are on the playground, they do tend to stay together... The magnet kids.” In terms of teachers working with a diverse classroom, Teacher 2 said:

I think a teacher who would be teaching this classroom would need to understand that the kids that are here have different experiences than the kids in the United States for the most part...your expectations have to be a little bit different. I don't know how many kids here are suffering from PTSD from what they saw in Iraq. So, even though I have high expectations for them, I always have in the back of mind you know, what is this kid going through in their own lives? In their memories of where they were before, or what is going on with them right now? I've had kids who are homeless, you know, so I think you just really have to be accepting of differences and know that this is a whole different world. The kids



that are here have a whole different world than the middle class people. And they are dealing with things that you just can't imagine.

Like Teacher 1, Teacher 2 explained that you are focused on so much more than the children's academic needs. "You are a social worker. You are everything." She explains that it can often be overwhelming:

It never really completely leaves until maybe the middle of July. It takes several weeks after school is over for me to really leave it behind. I've gotten a little bit better though, of being able to separate myself, like, I can actually enjoy a Friday night or my whole day on Saturday.

Her concern for her students is something that impacts her life far beyond her classroom or the doors of the school. When asked what characteristics a teacher must have to teach such a diverse group of students, Teacher 2 explained,

Well they have to be empathetic and culturally sensitive. You know and understand that fair doesn't mean equal. Yes we want our kids to be able to function in the real world but when they first get here, we can't treat them like somebody who is in the mainstream classroom, because we don't know. Well for some of them we don't know what they saw... you know they might be having PTSD, you know so a tantrum isn't necessarily a tantrum because they didn't get their way. A tantrum might be because something triggered a memory or whatever so you have to be a little bit... softer I guess with kids. And like, with experience you get to know when you need to be firm but when you need to kind of stray from that and cut them some slack because something else is going on with them.

In the end, Teacher 2 stated that a teacher of a diverse group of students must be empathetic and culturally sensitive. They must have a deep understanding of where their students are in their readiness to learn each day. Teacher instruction is guided by that.

When asked to sum up her teaching philosophy, Teacher 3 explained:

The kids need to feel safe, they need to feel every day when they come here that they are not going to be made fun of, not going to be laughed at. We all work together as one and we all treat each other how we want to be treated.

She wanted students to feel that they truly belong in their classroom and that it is a safe place. Additionally, she said that parents need to feel the same. When asked what specific qualities a teacher should have to teach a diverse group of students, Teacher 3 said,

It's caring, it's passionate, it's sincere... it's like a family, like I care about each student and I want to learn about their differences, culture and background and their language and I think the parents see that and I think that is a huge quality that they notice.

Teacher 3 explained that her school is, "So accepting of anybody and anyone and anything that comes in and it's nice and I think that is one of the main qualities." At the same time, Teacher 3 explained that it's important to know the students enough that you understand why they make the choices they do. Her connection to Pillar 4, (school leadership to support diverse learners), was evident when she said:

A student lies his way through whatever it may be and I think it's a way of life for him. I don't think it's because he wants to have the wrong intentions-an example of walking down the hall and getting a snack when it is not snack time. And he is

probably not eating at home, so when he was spoken to, like you are not allowed to come down here and have a snack,, it's not snack time, please don't take it...and he said 'Oh this person said I could'. It was a lie. Nobody said it was okay. And the guidance counselor and myself were like... not worth it. Just knowing the background and the home life, it's not worth going, 'Hey why did you lie about snack?' When he really wanted to go, well I didn't eat anything at home... he is not even going to say that.

When asked how she felt her disposition was towards her students, Teacher 3 talked about the importance of really knowing her students. In the same sense, she also demonstrated a knowledge about her students' families as well. She said:

I think my greatest success is that I made a connection with everybody, every student that I have I feel like I just know them, their personalities, so well like what they want to read, what they don't like, when they come to school or when they don't come to school, if it's raining or not raining, what kind of mood they'll be in you know. I just feel like I know them so well and as a first year [teacher] I think I am proud of that. I think that is hard to do is to make a connection with everybody.

Teacher 4's empathy for her students is based on who children are at that particular point in their lives. She said:

I just love the essence of what a child is. I don't know if people value that as much as, to me, like they are so pure at elementary and I love 5th grade because they are on the cusp of so many things. But I just, when I am teaching I get into that groove of it and you feel something, you know it's the X factor I don't know

what it is for a word or anything but it's just a feeling that you feel like you made a difference in somebody, that something clicked in somebody else's head and that, you made that happen. That is everything to me. It's very spiritual, it's like I tear up.

As Teacher 4 talked about this a little more, she said, "You gotta love them first and foremost. You have to really love them in order to do anything with them. You have to love them even when they are unlovable." As she delved into her own philosophy of teaching a bit more, Teacher 4 talked about the balance that she believed teachers must make when teaching their students:

I think it's all about connecting with another person. I think it is a privilege to be in somebody else's life, we spend a lot of time with these people, and I feel like I only have a short time. I mean at the beginning of the year, I feel like I have so much to tell you, ha ha. 'You know, Grasshopper'... that kind of thing and you know I feel like I am just mentoring, I am their guide. I am going to take you through this, I will try to be as gentle as possible on this but I am going to have high standards for you and you're going to meet them. And I think being positive with people and believing in people just changes their view of themselves and to be witness to that again, is such a privilege that I feel like I have impacted somebody's life. Who gets to do these things? Who gets that? It's such a magical little experience too. It's very, very, difficult at the same time and sometimes you hate it of course but that is why you love it sometimes too. It fills all of that, from this to that. So my philosophy is to connect to them on some way because that is

the only way in; otherwise, I am just a talking head up there and just deliver and deliver and nothing is going to happen. You gotta love the kids.

While Teacher 4 explained about her philosophy further, she pointed out that she is not her students' mother, nor is she their friend. She believed in building mutual respect between students and the teacher. She wants her students to be able to do the work themselves. She said, "I hope it feels calm, but productive and very meaningful. I don't want to give them anything that I wouldn't want someone to do to me. Like I will do the work too, usually with them and I want to be with them." She never sits at her desk, but instead Teacher 4 is usually close to where the students are working. She values proximity to her students.

Teacher 4 also expressed her interest and respect for her students' lives. She recalled a lesson they had being an American citizen. She said:

Everybody is a citizen okay now how about your parents? Are they citizens and some people aren't, and it's cool. I go well there is a story there. That is your story? Like a little girl, her parents are not citizens they are from Syria and I am like well, Syria is like in the news and it's like lots going on so why did they come here? There is a story about why you are here now and I love that stuff, and they go 'I don't know,' and I'm like, why don't you know this story? This is you! Like, this is everything. Go ask them and then tell us the story tomorrow. Bring that to us because this enriches everything.

Teacher 4 was reaching out to her students as well as the families here, demonstrating her belief that the children's lives outside of the classroom was integral to the work in the classroom.

When she was asked if her students have a sense of the diversity in their classroom, she said, “They know, um in 5th grade, they do know but they don’t care. It doesn’t matter to them. It’s just all based on personality than anything else. Like if I like that person or not, that is what is cool or not.”

Teacher 4 also described her student population, specifically some of the difficulties that her students face. She pointed out that one of her students is currently living with her father and stepmother, but she had previously lived with her drug addicted mother who was unable to care for her. Two other students have connected, not only because of their ethnicity, but mainly because they have both experienced trauma in their lives and they are able to confide in each other. Teacher 4 stated, “They are like, yeah, that was like me. And certain books that we read. It’s like I haven’t finished it and this girl is like you have to read this book because it’s just like me. And you know, homeless and crappy family, but she is just one of the best kids that I have ever met.”

When Teacher 4 was asked if there was anything she would have done differently, knowing what she now understands about teaching diverse students, she said:

It seems like you are just surviving and here I am I feel like I am pretty thriving. I’ve got a job, I’ve got a family, I feel pretty good so, and I don’t, you know that mile in their shoes [having a deep understanding of her students’ lives]. If you haven’t experienced it, you really don’t know. You think you have compassion but I don’t think I had enough because I don’t think I have ever been there, in that to really like, not that I’d let them off the hook but being more compassionate in how I dealt with them maybe. And same with kids, you know, you are hard. You

know I am pretty tough and firm with people and maybe I shouldn't be because I don't know what you just went through.

Her desire to empathize with the children was evident, but so was her awareness and sensitivity to her students, their families, and the lives they live. (Pillars 1 and 2)

Teacher 5 revealed the concept of empathy and its importance in her experience early on in the first interview. She talked about the personal experiences she had watching her disabled brother make his way through public school. She said:

So I remember going to school and seeing my brother put into a closet because he didn't fit in the classroom, I mean he is selectively nonverbal I mean he stands and has typical characteristics of autism. He wasn't violent and didn't do anything to hurt other people, but because teachers didn't know what to do with him...it was easier for him not to be in the classroom...

It's not until Teacher 5's brother had a teacher who was empathetic to his needs and his place in school and the classroom that she was able to see empathy contribute to his well-being in school. She said:

He had a teacher, Mr. Moran. I couldn't tell you the name of my teachers but I remember Mr. Moran, my brother's teacher, because he was the first one who said, "Oh no, bring him in the classroom. He is a part of our community. He deserves to be with his peers, and then from then on, all of his peers developed empathy and understanding, and so the kids would often advocate and I was like, I want to be like Mr. Moran when I grow up... I want to be that person.

When Teacher 5 considered the kind of teacher she is today, she knew that her students see her as someone who cares about them. She values knowing her students and who they are. She said:

Last year was the first year that I worked with 5th graders, which was a really scary experience because they are bluntly honest. But you can have more candid conversations with them. ‘What did you think of this last one?’, or ‘Hey I want to try something new. Is that okay?’ So my kids, I mean I don’t know, I just know that I have a great relationship with them.

Knowing who her students are extends beyond her classroom and the school. It includes knowing who her students are at home and in their personal world. Teacher 5 said:

I don’t know what it’s like to have two parents who are out working, you know, third shift because that makes the most money and big sister is at home taking care of you. So, I try as best as I can to show them empathy for that. I understand that things are harder for you at home... or you don’t have help at home.

Teacher 5 believes that knowing her students so well takes some pressure off of them.

The students know that you are aware of their lives and that they can confide in you when they need to. She explained this classroom leadership to support diverse learners (Pillar 3) further by saying:

I think it is really important to have empathy all the time. Even if you see someone walk into a chair, you say, ‘Oh I am so sorry that happened to you. I hear that your grandma is really sick. How can I help you?’ Because if students don’t see you as someone that they can relate to, they are not going to invest in that relationship, which will only make your job harder. I also think it is



important to be as positive as you can even in situations that are hard. And I am guilty of this as much as the next person. Special ed. is like its own island and so sometimes, we spew negativity all the time.

As she ended her second interview, Teacher 5 brought back the concept of understanding who her children are and how they live as something that is important in her work.

Valuing each student's background or culture is very important when trying to connect to students. Teacher 5 said:

When you talked about these kind of cultural and socioeconomic things you have to be a bit more sensitive about it because you had somebody in the class who was this and if you said "weird" to that, that is going to be a lot different than when you say "weird" to someone who is not in your class so having kids of different backgrounds. I loved it, I got to learn so much from them and it created more of a community where we could learn from each other, not just about culture but you can teach me a math problem too. And so that everybody has something to offer

Teacher 6 connected how she felt as a student in school to how she treats her own students. Her teachers gave off a positive energy and taught her to love school and learning. She said:

I think of the positive energy that they had toward the subject or toward what we were doing, and I also felt very loved and that is something that I try and make sure that all the kids in my classroom know. Sometimes it feels like you aren't supposed to love them you know but that is one of my goals that each kid feels like I love them, more so that I am going to keep them safe, I am going to teach

them all that I can teach them and if I get to that level I feel that they open up enough that they can learn anything.

Combined with the concept of loving her students, Teacher 6 expanded on the idea that a teacher must know where their children are before they can teach them. She was asked, “What is your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe is most important about teaching students? She replied with:

I feel like that if you don’t take a step back and breathe and look at who is in front of you, then I think that you start to lose perspective so I don’t know if this is really my philosophy but meeting each child where they are at, whether that is socially, they need something taken care of first before they can get to math that day. Or at home, they didn’t sleep and so they have to eat breakfast and take a little rest before they can go to do their reader’s workshop, or meeting those immediate needs first especially socially in first grade...

### **Systems and Supports**

Systems and Supports, or those programs and structures that have been put in place in classrooms, schools, districts and communities to support its efficient functioning, is a third area that emerged from the coding process and stood out as important to teacher disposition and its effectiveness. While systems did not necessarily alter or influence teacher disposition, they supported the work that teachers do to practice positive disposition with their diverse group of students. More importantly, systems often delineate the core ways that principals can support the dispositions of their teachers. At the same time, the systems and supports are integral to the success of all teachers as they model the Five Pillars of disposition. Just as Fischetti (2010) believed it necessary

for schools of education to support their teacher candidates as they develop their dispositions based on the Five Pillars, so, too, principals must believe in the systems and supports available to them to support their practicing teachers as they develop their own dispositions.

**Principals and Systems and Supports.** In her first interview, Principal 1 noted the change that has occurred with the connections between the school and outside agencies. She talked about her own school and said:

So as a teacher you would always be advocating and there would be lots of roles. So now I feel like education and everyone is working in silos. So DCYF was working in a silo, the health department was working in a silo, now I think these silos as a principal are being broken down. And we have [City] Health working right in the school on Tuesdays. We have community health workers that are even able to provide car rides to parents to get to the doctors. I mean, I remember this poor woman she had a hysterectomy and she had to walk to the doctors and walk back because she didn't have the money to take a cab. Now [that] we know these types of stories, we can get community workers involved.

Principal 1 continues to be open minded as to the level of her teachers' involvement with the outside organizations that assist with family needs. She wants her teachers to continue to offer their students a rigorous educational experience and is not sure how the experience will impact her teachers and their thoughts about their students. She said:

And I think that I am in a complete struggle where I am so I am not sure if this is good for your study or not, because sometimes when teachers know so much about the kids, and where they came from, not intentionally, they lower their

expectation. Because they are compassionate and push them in a different way, and I don't think they make it as hard sometimes. So I am not sure where I stand.

Principal 1 is certain that the work that her school is doing with City Year, an organization designed to work with communities of high poverty by reaching their students to tackle those barriers that get in their way. She said:

And as far as City Year, we have City Year working in the grades 3-5 and they are all about service and so they are here to educate and they have the goals of making sure the kids come to school every day. So their goals are attendance. So if kids are having difficulty... but it's the kids that are just having a hard time but not a lot of complications. They are really just there to build the relationship and say "Hey you are here, you count". They help with making sure the kids have their homework. They try to set the kids up for success.

City Year directly supports the work that teachers are doing with the students, especially in the area of student attendance as well as homework completion. Another system that supports teachers even more directly is the professional development that Principal 1 has supported. Her focus during this particular year was to help her staff to better understand anxiety. She said:

Okay so this year I had XXXX come and speak to the staff about anxiety and how to manage angry kids or anxious kids in the classroom. We had a book study on you know, we handed out the books that she wrote about anxious kids and what happened at the workshop or what I got a lot of feedback on was... she really went through the biological and physiological things that happen when people have anxiety, you know the triggers, how the epinephrine goes down to your

spine and you start to sweat; your heart races. She went through that. And a lot of the feedback that I got from teachers was like, ‘Wow I didn’t realize how anxious I was.’ It’s made me change how I respond to situations. Though I feel like that was one of the ways to support teachers, and I think that is a lot of what our SIG [School Improvement Grant] Plan is about, relationships, knowing yourself, knowing what your triggers are and what your limits are.

In addition to the training with the professional development speaker, Principal 1 noted that she also talked about Safe Approach for Managing Aggressive Behavior Training (SAM) (<http://www.samprograms.com/about/index.php>) as a second way of supporting her staff. Teachers and staff members are part of training of this nature because they both work directly with students and their families. The researcher noticed that the secretary in Principal 1’s office was very capable at working and communicating with the many adults and students who visited. Principal 1 said:

She has been a secretary here for a long time. But I think we include her in a lot of our training. So, for instance that SAM training, we have gone to workshops called Fierce Conversations where we have gone through the steps of how you have those difficult conversations so that it is a win at the very end. She has had that training. She is like my first responder to make sure that she deescalates the situation so that people come in a bit rational. So, I think that is how that happens with her and even with our SIG Plan. We are going to Keene, she is part of our team, and she is coming.

Principal 1 was asked how teachers are assessed and if that includes assessment for disposition. Principal 1 said:

We use, it's a version of Charlotte Danielson's, so I was trained in the 40 hours coursework for Teachscape, which was on Danielson and so one of the domains is about professionalism and how to behave and how to talk especially to kids. So we are in a try it out year, piloting year so the teachers are aware of it. Also, our superintendent has said on many occasions that one of our non-negotiables is no yelling. And so, that has been a huge transition I think for a lot of educators or administrators and even myself where you have to fluff yourself up and look stern but mainly it's about reflecting on the practice of no yelling and what that looks like.

Used by all three of the schools that are the focus of this research, Teachscape houses a teacher evaluation tool for teacher effectiveness. Specifically, the Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument:

The 2013 Edition, provides educators with a deep, shared understanding of what great teaching looks like and builds confidence in the observation process. A significant refinement of previous editions (2011, 2007), it is designed to provide practitioners the most practical and easy to use tool to accurately observe teaching. By using a common language of effective teaching, teachers and observers have more constructive conversations that lead to professional growth. (<https://www.teachscape.com/solutions/framework-for-teaching#overview>)

There are several editions of Teachscape, including the most recent 2013 version which was written in response to the new focus by many schools and districts on the Common Core Standards. The introduction to the 2013 Edition specifically states the following;

To the extent that the CCSS deal with what students should learn in school so they will be prepared for college and careers, the biggest implications are in the areas of curriculum and assessment. Educators and policymakers must revise their curricula and their classroom and district assessments, and must locate instructional materials to support the new learning. But teachers will also have to acquire new instructional skills in order to bring the CCSS to life for their students. Teaching for deep conceptual understanding, for argumentation, and for logical reasoning have not, after all, been high priorities in most school districts or preparation programs. In most classrooms, students don't take an active role in their own learning, nor do they (respectfully) challenge the thinking of their classmates. All of this will represent a major departure, and therefore a major challenge, for many teachers. (Danielson, 2013, p. 3)

Principal 2 spoke about the many systems that have been put in place over time to help teachers in their work with students. While some of the focus is on achievement, some is also on the students' lives as a whole, learning how they learn and what they need. Principal 2 said:

I think that the most valuable piece for me is that it is like shared leadership. Knowing that, we have a building leadership team... That there is a strong vision from up top and then we kind of have that principal leadership level where we come into the building and you know, I have the conversations with the building leadership. You know, here is the road map.

Principal 2 outlined the specific system put in place for teachers and administrators to discuss the important goals of working with the students. She said:

It's vertical teams so I meet with the leaders of those teams prior to and they kind of have goals that they want to accomplish for the year and then they are in charge of, so instead of a staff meeting we have cohort time. They are kind of out there and are all based in our initiatives but how are you going to approach it? What's important to you, what kind of conversations...And then we come back and kind of talk about that and make changes.

Finally, the larger school system works its way down to the individual teacher and how that teacher will reach the students in her classroom. Principal 1 explained:

I think about our instructional model that we have in the classroom. We do almost everything from a workshop model so I am explicitly going to teach you something. I'm going to give you time to go out and independently practice, I'm going to touch base and have groups and confer with you and then we are going to come back and share. I am going to check out what you've done, what you need to work one. It's I do, you do... it's the exact same thing that I want from the teachers.

In transitioning away from the school structure, Principal 2 was asked what she knows about her students' lives. Before she answered the question, she explained that there are also systems in place for parents to connect to the school and their children's lives in the school.

All right, so we started this program in January so it's our parents that we have come here during the day on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 – 11:00. Whether they have children in the school or little kids, we have babysitting so they can learn English during the day. So we just started up the second session, so how



cool! We knew at the high school they had the night school program but nobody is going to go over there. They know us, they trust us, their kids are already in school. That barrier of why they wouldn't go is now wide open for them.

Principal 2 explained that the importance of this program is real and has a direct impact on parents' ability to connect with their children and their children's classrooms.

...I think they are excited to be here, the kids get excited and say "my mom is coming to learn English!" and they will wave as they pass by the classroom. It's such a win-win and for the parents then right, they come in. I have one parent who drops her daughter off at 8:30 and then sits for an hour on the bench waiting and they'll be all dressed up on the bench, four of them, waiting and they come together in their little outfits.

Finally, Principal 2 talked about the systems and programs that are community based and support the children in the school and the teachers in their work. Principal 2 explained:

The police and fire department got a grant and they gave coats, measured coats and measured kids and purchased \$1300.00 worth of coats and distributed them in this school and the other elementary schools, so many kids here. Just that piece of helping the kids I could go on and on about. Snow on the sidewalks and they are going to walk so you go and help them walk or picking them up to come here.

Principal 2 described other programs that are in place to support families, students, and the school, all of which benefit the school as a whole. From guidance services to ESOL services, many in-school and after school programs support their students. Principal 2 said:

So I think leading now, I think having a lot more valuable data that we have in assessments that also kind of helps us take a look at students that are struggling. Whether it's cultural diversity, academic diversity, by that we are able to see where the needs are and able to provide some other instruction and interventions that way. So that, we've kind of targeted as a school in our goals, a population on the lower end that are receiving different kind of services.

In her second interview, Principal 2 explained how important it was to have the school ESOL teacher work closely with teachers in their work with students who are learning English as a second language. Principal 2 said:

And again, if I said this before but our ESOL teacher is from Russia originally and she has for the district as well as here for the paras and for the adults, taught a class in Russian. You know, you come in and ...how would it feel to be in a classroom with somebody up front where you have no idea what they are saying. So just that feeling and you kind of have to sit with it and then the teaching part...she did the exact same lesson but she did it with visuals and tactile and manipulatives and we all could speak and had some idea of what was going on, though she still taught the lesson in Russian. So I think it was just how powerful... this is, how those two kids are feeling in your class right now so it's nothing that, you know, they aren't dumb they are just that exposure but if you provide them with visuals and all these other skills and tools, you are able to walk out-because she would-the repetition.

When Principal 2 was asked how she has supported her teachers' disposition, she explained:

I think one is our school goal, our goal is about having for our pocketed students of ESOL, Title I, special ed. that not only are we looking for annual growth but catch up growth. Really, we are focusing on the population of students, the diversity, maybe the struggling diversity and saying that we are going to collect data we are going to do interventions we are going to focus on making sure that one of the expectations is that if you are doing an intervention that the teacher is working with the neediest kids and not the para[professional]. So, it's even that mind shift that this is what is important. This is what we are going to measure, that we are successful as our most diverse needy students are... We are going to see success and I think instructionally, we use the workshop model so it's differentiating for kids of all levels. It's saying it's an even playing field. I am not just going to work with the neediest or the kids at the other end; I've got to figure out what my kids need, that mind shift. I want everybody in my class and I want to teach to where they are and I feel that is about having a positive disposition about all kids whether, regardless of where the diversity is.

Principal 2 reported that they use the Charlotte Danielson model to assess their teachers.

When asked how she assesses for teacher disposition, Principal 2 said:

We use the Danielson model. So, okay, a culture for learning, respect and rapport and so we actually get trained in the Teachscape model and so you are actually looking for some of those engagement elements through a rubric. So, tangible-evidence based pieces but you certainly can pick up on some of those pieces. How you are engaging, who you are engaging with, who are you providing for, scaffolding and uh, other tools for the students. So, I think it's probably difficult

to maybe pinpoint some of them, but I think those would be the avenues of how you would get there. How you are engaging with your students.

After the researcher explained the process of observing the teachers, Principal 2 further explained their use of Teachscape:

And I think it's intertwined with some of the pieces because right, professional responsibility it's in there but I think that that is somewhat subjective so I think when you can see it and name it, so that's part of the Teachscape and part of our learning is bias comments. Because it's just evidence. This is what I witnessed, this is what I saw, but when it's, um, you know, you leaned into the student to show the graphic. There are ways that you can do it that are totally evidence based on that and I think sometimes the disposition will come out and I think that sometimes it's just so interconnected that it is hard to pull it apart. But that was very difficult, the training was about 35 hours. But great.

In closing her second interview, Principal 2 talked about the system of social media that is in place in the school to help teachers to promote their work and parents to be informed about what is going on in the school. She said:

I think some of the other pieces too is as a district plan. Community involvement is huge. Some of the social media, some of the things that we never had the opportunity for is we now have an app. So, if we get you signed up, we are pushing information out. So, we have Facebook. We have Twitter. We actually pay. Every single school has a social media coordinator so they are constantly gathering pictures or things that are going on in the classroom. So, the goal this year was at least every other week you are posting something happening in

somebody's classroom with a blurb about them. And then everything is linked, so if we took a picture, if it is the newest five pictures in the districts site, it's going to show up on the app. It's going to get pushed out to the app anyway but even...

Principal 3, much like Principal 2, supported her teachers' work with students through professional development. Much of her work began with instructional methods in reading. Principal 3 said:

They have worked really hard to get there and then during the early release, it used to be, two years ago, I had a consultant come in and we really focused in on reading. And looking at units of study from the Lucy Calkins model. And creating those units as a team. Now they are refining that without a consultant but what I realize is they don't want to be managed. And so, because I have empowered them to have a voice, what I now do is my professional development for early release days are less structured. So I give the overview of what the agenda might be, they know what they have to do ahead of time but they come together and it is a conversation. And so, like right now, January and February, they are refining, they are looking at refining the expectations at grade levels around conventions-looking at when we teach punctuation and type of grammar things. I am just at a higher level helping manage it and organize it and disseminating it. Which is a shift.

Principal 3's background is embedded in Montessori philosophy and she talked about this during both of the interviews. It is also what she uses to support her teachers both in professional development and also as she offers feedback from her observations of them. She said:

I want to watch how they engage with their language, I don't want to hear "Oh great job. You got them all right." I really try to find the specifics of what they are giving a compliment to? When I think about the children, I spend a lot of time working with them or looking for how they are naturally going to build a student up. So you have some that come from really great homes and have that confidence. But you also have children who do not have anything beyond that six hours that they are here. And so how do they engage to let a student know that they are valued, that they are being heard, that they, their work is important even though they are not a top student. Yes, it is the management piece: 'What would you do with a student that is difficult? How do you engage parents but really how do you cultivate on the social/emotional aspect of these kids? And then what does it look like?' Watching those interrelationships still occur within the building, is really a true testament to those teachers who are stepping up and making a difference in the lives of those kids.

As she closes her first interview, Principal 3 explains that her work with her teachers in their own professional development has evolved to a place in which they can work closely together. She said:

I would say that I am also a learner with them. I do a lot of PD [professional development]. We are doing a mindfulness workshop and so there are six of us. We are doing this online piece and we are thrown right into the mix of it and so they see me as an equal but also as that leader. I am not [their boss], I don't think they would ever refer to me as their boss. It's really much a part of that culture.

Principal 3 talked about systems that also connected families to the school to support teachers and their work with the children. She pointed out that the school's volunteer program has grown over the last five years. She said:

The parents have evolved into an extension of teachers and an extension of me in regards to volunteering, in regards to systems thinking, in regards of supporting every aspect that we do. And so when I first started, it was very much typical PTA, money driven how are we going to raise money to support the schools? More on helping with field trips so like enrichment. Now they are an active part of the process. And when I say that [I mean] that we have a strong volunteer program. So what teachers have done is they can leave anything they want from copying, to laminating, to asking for help in a classroom. They have a sign out and the PTA has created this system where they just come and look at the book regardless of grade level their child is in and volunteer in classrooms. So I might have a 5th grade parent working in a 1st grade classroom because she has two hours to give on Tuesday. And so it is very ebb and flow. Doors are wide open. Staff goes to the PTA to share if they need either some extra support from a funding standpoint...Or what can you do as families to help support that? So they do a lot of messaging out they do the newsletter, a quarterly newsletter that talks about the inside working, how they supported teachers and how teachers have come to them, all of their volunteer hours they calculate each month and it's a revolving door.

In her second interview, Principal 3 continued to discuss the systems that support the students and her teachers. The parent group that has grown strong over the last few years has been a support in many ways. Principal 3 said:

Since then, they have come together as far as, ‘Okay, what do we need to do to help message out?’ And so when we talk about systems thinking...the student and the family and then the family within the school. And so we had a group of teachers and parents who sat on this committee and talked about what are our strengths and what areas do we need to grow in? And part of that was just sharing how all the good things that we were doing here and so the newspaper became a vehicle of information... any parents would call, anytime we would have an event, from a costume event to a PTA supported event, just to get the newspaper even if it was a photo in the paper. To say, ‘This is what we are doing that helps just some of our thinking.’ I got a lot of feedback about academics and so what are some things that they are looking for that they haven’t been happy with or what are some things they really like but they want to maintain that I wasn’t changing too much of that.

The parents were initially concerned that the principal was making major changes in academics but learned that was not the case. In addition to the PTA, the Principal focused on the support that is given by outside agencies as well. She said:

And because there is a new system in New Hampshire there...before the Homeless shelters and the Housing Authority worked in isolation but now there is something called Coordinated Access. So it’s one database that you have that family that would qualify for housing and/or a shelter. They all go through that



and so that could bring people...we just had a family come...into housing and we had another family come into the shelter. So depending on that fallout, how they get here, depends on who arrives. Before, when that system wasn't in place, I would have the shelter downtown just call and say, 'Okay. Here is my wait list!' And so I always had a number that I knew I might be getting a 3rd grader or a 4th grader or they might be coming and living here but they will continue to bus them to [another town] because it is going to be short term. Now it is pretty much last minute. So I have had to navigate the waters there a little bit differently in regards to registration, talking about means. I think there is a little more red tape that I have to kind of manage, where before it was very much open communication. I have a great relationship with both housing and the homeless shelter but it's not as cut and dry as it used to be where I could see 'Okay! Here is the wait list.' Okay, so I always need to think on my radar what that looks like. Now it could be that someone shows up. I mean we got a phone call last week. We might have two kids coming but we don't know if they are going to stay, if they are going to come to housing.

When asked where we could find written comment or written expectations about teacher disposition, Principal 3 discussed the system that is in place for assessing teachers.

We use Danielson's model so under professional responsibilities in Domain number 4, there is that piece that I would usually articulate that in which I could definitely pull some and take the name out for you... I leave a lot of these little cards in teacher boxes when I notice something. So, like for me I take the time to write a note saying, 'Thank you so much for talking to so and so or you made a

huge difference in Cameron's life. I appreciate you engaging with the grandmother. So, those teachers are constantly getting that validation and a thank you from me that way...but I can't think of something that would have, like, that you would see that the greater community would be able to...

**Teachers and systems and supports.** Teacher 1 remembers that a couple of decades ago, the classroom systems that were put in place to support the students and the teachers were experiential. When asked about the feedback she gets from students about her teaching, Teacher 1 said:

I remember now, they remember the food days we had, the festivals, they remember being on the spirit team, we do still have that. I mean it's those kind of experiences, the field trips, when I was still in the classroom, when we still had some freedom, it was all about field trips for the newcomers. We would go to the grocery store, we would go down to the river, we would go to the park, we would do this, it was all experiential learning and those are the kinds of things that they remember.

In addition to the experiential learning that her student found helpful in the learning experience, the student also shared with the teacher that the classroom and school were welcome places:

She wrote me a letter giving me feedback on how wonderful a teacher I was, she certainly did not remember a single lesson that I taught but she remembered being terrified. She was from Bosnia. They had just come, they had just spent a year in Germany after the war. She came to America and she was terrified she didn't know who was Muslim and who was Christian and I was so nice to her that she

assumed I was Muslim. One of the first things that she said to me was Muslima? Very excitedly and I was like no nothing. I am nothing. Hum, but that sense of being cared for and to be respected and being accepted you know, is what she remembers. It's what they remember when they are newcomers when they arrive. One of our students that went on to run a program like this at another school, Sarah, she and her brother came September 12th, the day after September 11<sup>th</sup>. They were terrified. Their family was terrified of what was gonna happen, that the children were going to hate them. Our school is so diverse that that's not an issue. I've never, fifteen years that I've been at this school, I've never had any children racially or ethnically or anything like that; that's not what the problems are. That's not on their radar. It just feels like a very safe haven for kids with underlying circumstances.

Teacher 1 expressed that the current administration has a commitment to increasing the availability that teachers and students have to technology. She said:

The newest principal, we had a principal for 15 years and she retired. We got a new principal and she was very experienced. She stayed two years and now we have this new principal for one year and our vice principals new, also, the newest principal is very committed to technology in every classroom. So we've gotten 16 chrome book carts and they are discoursed around the school. What might happen is they might take it out of my classroom and put them into other people's classrooms but then that's, we will just teach something else.

Teacher 1 also expresses that while there are many internal supports in place to assist the children, they do not all directly support teachers who are not regular classroom teachers.

She said:

Yes, at a school like ours, where you've got so much poverty and you have students who are in crisis. As a teacher you don't get a lot of information to start. You will get the students paperwork filled out by the family and if the student is Special Ed you'd get their IEP, if they are on a behavior plan, you'd get that. And that's what you get formally. We have a guidance counselor. We have a family liaison. We have a social worker. Those people will come to you at the beginning of the year when that student arrives. If the student has some kind of existential circumstances that you should know about. The philosophy seems to be if you knew everything about every kid in the room, you wouldn't be able to teach. That some children are in such crisis constantly that it would be hard to treat them fairly or the same as to keep objective. So it's really on a need to know basis and as a specialist, that doesn't usually extend to me. But there are certain, I mean, a lot of our Farsi end up in the newspaper. You see that. They are on the news. So you know that kind of information. Some children, their crisis is so specific that it affects their behavior to the point where they can't leave a room without an adult. Or something like that.

Teacher 1 pointed out that important school-based systems are put in place also work in collaboration with city systems. She said:

And our social workers and guidance counselors and liaisons know the specific families and one of the things that our school does is give out gift cards to local

grocery stores when families need them, something like that. But for the teacher, we have free breakfast. We have free lunch. We have after school program with free snacks. And then a lot of the children we know go on to the next evening program down the street where they get free dinner. Even when I was in charge of the summer school program, we would try to finagle the hours so that the kids got free breakfast, and then they could leave here and the city would give out free bag lunches to kids who would come across to the park that was the give out point. So the kids would leave here with a free breakfast, the teachers would provide snacks and then they would go get their free lunch.

Additionally, the school has systems in place for clothing as well. She said:

We have come to that point: We have a basement. We took part of our basement and made it a closet of clothes with winter hats and winter clothes and boots and we are one of the poor schools in the state, people do donate to us they are like you know, where is a poor school that needs used coats? And we get them. So it's not like we don't have the stuff, it's about educating the children on the middle class culture of why do I have to wear this big coat? I had a lot of Hispanic girls, they needed a winter coat but it was big and puffy and made them look fat and they didn't want to wear it or it wasn't a pretty pink or whatever and it really was a cultural thing like. 'You don't understand honey you are going to be out there freezing.' And it was a lot. 'This puffy coat doesn't look good on me,' or something like that. And I mean we are even at the point where we got a grant called Community of Caring and got books specifically on those issues so that... there is this book called Two Shoes, I think it is called, about a boy who

desperately wants the newest pair of basketball sneakers and he takes the grandmother to the store and she couldn't afford it and dah dah dah...and by the time she gets the money the only pair that they have of those shoes are too big and so he buys them. He stuffs socks in and is so proud to go to school and then his best friend breaks [his shoes]. His sneaker breaks and he has no shoes. So he ends up giving those to the other kid. I mean discussions like that you don't have to have in a middle class or affluent school, those kind of issues.

In the first interview, Teacher 2 was asked to explain what a magnet classroom is. She explained:

Basically the magnet classrooms are for kids who don't have enough English to be able to participate in the regular mainstream classrooms. They wouldn't be able to access the curriculum because they don't have enough English proficiency. So when every child registers for school there is something that everyone in the country has to give and it's called the Home Language Survey and it asks questions about what languages are spoken in the home, and if we see that there is something other than English, the child has to be screened with a special test. We use one that is called the W-APT, depending on what the score is, it measures their ability, uh, their proficiency across four domains; listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In explaining this school support further, Teacher 2 said that a student's attendance in the program is based on English proficiency. She said:

So not all schools, I mean not all places have magnet classrooms, have newcomer classrooms. As long as they are getting support, and there is a whole table

[diagram] that the State has that says if they are at this level of proficiency then they are required to get "X" number of hours of support. If it's this level then it's this number of hours. The more proficiency they have, the less support they have to get. But that support can come in any context it doesn't have to be a magnet classroom for a newcomer. You could put a newcomer in a regular mainstream classroom but they are going to have to have instruction for like, I think, two hours per day at least from an EL certified teacher.

Teacher 2 believes that the magnet program is vital to her work with students. She explains how the program allows her students to eventually transition to the regular classroom:

So, the mainstream classroom is doing an author study; where they are reading different books by one author and teaching them about how to form opinions about books and how to write that opinion down. And all the second graders like doing the same author. But that author is not appropriate for my kids because the language, there are just too many words on the page, it's too complex for the kids that I have in here now. So, I adapt my author study. I make sure my books have really good pictures and a storyline that's not too complex and so, I don't water it down. They are still getting a lot from our author study but I try to make at least part of it be accessible in some way to the kids who don't speak English.

Teacher 2 also explained that the culture of the magnet classroom is also strong. It is a place that students feel safe and can be difficult to leave when the time comes. She said:

It was a big deal for them because they had been with me all last year and then half of this year and there I was sending them out, they are leaving this nest,

leaving some friends behind and it was a real family dynamic in here so it was a real big deal for them to leave for those two particular kids. They were very sensitive kids. One of them thought that he was ready and then he got there and he was in tears the day that I brought him to meet the new teacher.

Teacher 3 was asked if there were supports in place to help her with her work with the children. She said:

I think that just with the Principal that really knows the school, um is very aware of everything and very supportive of what we do, just if any incidents or anything comes up with the socioeconomic or the home life, anything I feel very supported by my Principal where I could go to her and say, 'You know I need your help. Can you reach out? I need help.' I definitely don't feel nervous about it. The guidance counselors are another great resource to have and between those two I think makes a big difference. I think the Principal knowing the diversity here, knowing the children's background and home life, and what they need is definitely beneficial and helpful in this school.

Teacher 4 stated that as a teacher, she sometimes needs support from the school. She said:

'Like, what's going on with this girl because she is so agitated, she seems like all over the place, and I would go and talk to the guidance counselor and ask do you know what's going on...or talk to her if she is going to open up to me... but Susan may know things that I am not privy to...and I don't like to be privy to a whole bunch of things because you know there is something going on...I want to help but you know it's tricky because you know in 5th grade, they are just a little more



worldly, little more street smart if that is going to be the problem and they know enough not to tell. A lot of the times, they are not like six-year olds. And then you want to be that “safe” person that doesn’t know sometimes. Then can I just be school... can I just have my school life so that you don’t know what’s going on in my home life...

Teacher 5, who is a special education teacher, was asked if she ever has difficulty getting parents to understand what the child needs in school. She gave an example of how she talks openly to parents. She said to one parent:

‘You know remember we are here for your daughter and the plan we have in place for your daughter is to help her become successful.’ And the mom came into the meeting and was like, ‘Yup, you know, you are right.’ And we have put all these systems in place and we know that this is her reality. So, let’s talk about if this is my daughter’s reality then what are going to put in place?

The special education team structure is very important to Teacher 5. She sees it as the tools that allows her to treat respectfully all people who are vested in helping the child. She said:

So, I guess I never really understood the Case Management part of it, I got the teaching part down but it’s always hard when you think about the other professional adults you work with. So, I am big on, we are going to have regular meetings, we are going to talk about the child as a person, we are going to talk about mom or dad or grandma and grandpa as people, whomever is in charge, they are all a part of our team...and it doesn’t matter how old the child is. It doesn’t matter if they don’t have mayonnaise at home it doesn’t matter if the

parents can't be home because they have to work or if they are home and are neglectful. They are still part of this team and I am going to respect everybody as collective members of the team.

In addition, Teacher 5 viewed the work done to provide data for decision making was important. The system helped her to substantiate decision making for her students' program.

Right, now I am fighting the, are you in the "positive reinforcement camp" or are you in the "intrinsically motivating camp" with classroom teachers you know. And there is a spectrum with all of this that I am constantly coming up against. I understand as a teacher that you might not think they need five minutes of IPAD time for doing 20 minutes of work but if you got them to do 20 minutes of work, you have to give them something. Because otherwise they are just going to shut down and they are not going to continue. So it's almost a philosophical battle at this point that I know from what research says and I have data, I can show you, I have data coming out of my ears about what kids are doing that's expected, what are they doing that is not expected, and we take what data says and actually help change student performance.

Additionally, Teacher 5 views the team system as a critical component of supporting her students. She said:

So the third grade teachers meet every week to do some common planning. So they will let me know the "big picture". So within their core curriculum this week, their goal was to get them to understand line plots and line charts. So I take the big picture and try and rehash it using the same language from the classroom

but in a lot more hands on and interactive way because what these kids struggle with the most is keeping up in the classroom.

Teacher 5 echoed her principal's support of professional development as a critical system. She said:

We just took a course called Making Thinking Visible if you ever have the opportunity to take it or refer students to take it. It's amazing. It is a lot of work but it is amazing. It was all about, 'Oh I should have done one today so you could've seen it.' It's all about using thinking routines. So, some of it is, 'Tell me more,' or 'What makes you say that?' Just teaching kids those kinds of questions, but some of it is I might show a kid a cover of a book and say, 'Tell me what you see.' And they will say literally, 'I see a red bird. I see a blue ball,' whatever. And then I will say, 'What does that make you think about? And so they will say, 'Oh, it's a nice day for playing outside.' 'What does that make you wonder about?' So just getting from the cover of a book, kids are now having a totally different experience as they read because they have transitioned from the concrete to a pictorial sort of thing, to a more abstract way of thinking. So even my lowest readers are able to infer things just from this simple routine. So we took the class together.

When asked if she participated in the training with the school principal, she said:

Yep so now I can go into Mandy's class and support whatever she is doing... whole group... I could preview whatever routine she was going to do with my students who just need that extra time to process it or I could take her lesson and teach it through a different routine so the student could access core curriculum

because my student in there is probably three-fourths of a year below grade level but accessing first grade curriculum... I mean you wouldn't know it being in there but it's because we have a partnership where we have put systems in place...really exciting so I am glad you got to see...

Teacher 6 stated that the school itself is supportive of communicating fairness in the classroom. She said:

Ok so, well first of all when it comes to diversity and learning styles and such, I think [my school] does a really good job at explaining to students what fair means versus what equal means. And so we go, almost nearly every classroom, they all know in my class and even in other classes that the expectations are the same for everyone, but the way you meet those expectations might need a modification or you might need more time to do it or you might need an extra lunch session one time because you needed something to talk about. So those types of things, my students, I like to think that my students and all students at [our school] understand that there is fairness and then there is equality and the teacher is trying to make every kid successful in whatever way that they can.

### **Observational Data**

The researcher conducted one classroom observation for each teacher. Creswell (2013) outlines nonparticipant observers as being present during the activity but not engaged in the activity. The researcher observed each teacher participant for a full class period, regardless of the particular lesson that was planned for the period. Creswell (2013) supports setting up clear observation protocols, which the researcher is expected to follow. The protocol included keeping an "Observational Notes" page that includes

both descriptive notes and reflective notes. Creswell (2013) states that the field notes should allow the researcher to give some chronology to the sequence of events as well providing notes that describe what is taking place and the researcher's reflection about what he observes. In addition to keeping an Observational Notes page, the researcher looked closely at teacher talk and student response as a way of organizing the experience into notes. The teacher's language and the student responses to that language provided the researcher with a method for organizing the experience into the observational notebook.

### **Teacher 1**

During her classroom observation, Teacher 1 was focused on an author study of Kevin Henkes (1987) and his book *Sheila Rae the Brave*. She used the following language to engage her students in the learning process:

"I love how these boys are ready."

"Close your eyes and think of a time you were brave."

"...share with someone."

"How many of you walk to school?"

"How many walk with your families?"

"I like how you said that."

"Did you ever have to be brave?"

"Were you afraid of anything?"

"Tell a partner, the connection to the story I made is..."

Teacher 1 noticed that one student was neither paying attention to the video clip on *Sheila Rae the Brave*, nor was he participating with the pairs of students who were

working together to answer the teacher's questions. Bringing herself to his level, she spoke to him quietly one-on-one. At the close of the lesson, the students were given a few minutes for free time. Some students colored, others read, and a few others worked on models. The student who did not participate in the lesson, showed an interest in his task. As she finished up, Teacher 1 said the following:

"If you put your name on it, I'll save it and put it on my cabinet."

The student appeared interested.

## **Teacher 2**

Teacher 2 used the following language to teach a lesson on mammals:

"What is one word we studied yesterday that starts with an m?"

"Characteristics of mammals. Here are some of them. Remember, I already read this book?"

"Another thing I need to tell you and it's called being warm blooded."

"That's a good guess..."

"You guys are being so good"

When students returned to their desks to complete a worksheet they also looked at pictures and guessed the mammals' names that the teacher showed them.

"I know that's hard."

"Raise your hand if you can tell me five important things about mammals."

One student asked, "Can I say in Spanish?"

Teacher 2 replied with, "Yes."

The boy said, "Fur?", "Milk?", "Babies?"

"Yes, live babies, except one. The Platypus."

The boy explained in Spanish that he saw a horse have a baby. Teacher 2 continually showed pictures of each mammal. Teacher 2 directed students back to their seats.

Teacher: Clap, clap “Mona”.

Students: Clap, clap “Lisa”.

The teacher said, “Lots of quiet coyotes. Good job.”

She began to take students through the process of creating a mammal book. She used modeling to demonstrate. As the students worked, Teacher 2 said, “Lots of good printing. Lots of good finger spaces.”

Teacher 2 played the friendship song as the students worked. She touched a student’s back and said, “Nice putting your things away.” Throughout the class, her students demonstrated an excitement to be there. Regardless of their different languages, they appeared to interact with each other easily and they modeled the same acceptance and sensitivity of other students’ cultures in the class.

### **Teacher 3**

Teacher 3 used the following language to teach her students a lesson on reading. The students were gathered around their teacher and sitting in the reading area on a rug. They were discussing a chapter in a book they had been reading. To get their attention, Teacher 3 said, “To infinity and beyond.” The students immediately quieted down and gave their attention to the teacher. The teacher sentences were as follows:

“Ok, that’s a good start.”

“I like how you said that.”

“Aha moments happen often in this classroom, especially with me...” Teacher 3 laughed and said, “You’re right.”

“I’ll read first and show you what it looks like.”

“He’s a little weird like all of us and myself (about a character). I’m just thinking out loud for you.”

“I think I’ll go back and read this again because I’m not sure if they are his parents.”

“Somebody I haven’t heard from today?”

The teacher said, “Hocus Pocus”.

The students responded with, “Everybody focus.”

Students appeared excited as they were directed to “Turn and Talk”. They naturally interacted during their “talk time”.

#### **Teacher 4**

Teacher 4 was observed teaching math to her students. She had the children arranged in groups and the groups rotated to three stations, one with the teacher, one with the classroom para-professional, and one that required students to work independently. The teacher’s group of students sat on a rug at the front of the room. She joined them and was directly involved with the process of solving a math problem, the same one the students were solving.

She said to the group, “Let’s see what they are asking.” She continued to think out loud as she solved for the problem.



Teacher 4 laughed as a student explained a problem. The student laughed too. The students appeared natural and comfortable as he explained his thinking to his teacher and the group.

### **Teacher 5**

During an observation of Teacher 5 teaching a small group of five students line plots, she used the following language to communicate with her students:

“Someone had the brilliant thought that a pattern was emerging.”

When she picked one student to get the group started, he looked confused and one of his peers said, “If you need help, we’ll help you.”

When the student caught on, the Teacher 5 said, “Thumbs up if you agree. Rock star.”

She commented, “He actually did two things that are really great. He scanned and said, ‘I noticed.’”

When she noticed one of her students becoming fidgety, Teacher 5 said, “Keep it together bud.” That same student interrupted a point she was trying to make to the class and

Teacher 5 said, “Hold on. Put a bubble in your mouth for a second.”

She asked another student to, “Walk me through how you are going to solve this problem.”

After hearing the student’s explanation, Teacher 5 said, “I heard you say two great things.” She explained what they were.

### **Teacher 6**

Teacher 6 was observed teaching her students opening activities for the day and then math that followed. Class began with a song, “Our Class is Awesome”. All students sang after the teacher got them started.

The “Good Morning!” message was given in Spanish, the language and culture that the class is currently studying. The teacher introduced Anna, one of her students, who read a letter from a relative in Spain who also wrote the letter in Spanish. Teacher 5 showed Spain on the gallery walks globe and then transitioned to math.

The students were responsible to take a test on a current math topic they were studying.

Teacher 6 reminded them to, “Explain your thinking.”

She also reminded the students to, “Use different algorithms for adding and subtracting,” and to “Set up your office.” Teacher 6 touched the top of each child’s head as she passed out quizzes.

Teacher 6 said, “You silly goose,” to a girl who struggled on the quiz. The girl laughed when the teacher said, “You got it girlfriend. Show me how you do it.”

These observations should be viewed in relationship with the teacher interviews.

Together, the interviews and the observations present a more complete picture of how disposition is practiced on a daily basis. For example, Teacher 5’s belief that “outside disposition” is important and necessary to teaching effectively may be explored more closely when viewed alongside the observation of her teaching her students. The same is true for several of the teacher observations.

### **The Five Pillars of the New Framework**

Fischetti et al. (2010) posit: The Five Pillars of the New Framework are built from the concept that professionalism is “leadership to support diverse learners and their families” (p. 150), and that each element within the Five Pillars is a critical piece of the larger concept of disposition. Each pillar stands on a foundation that Fischetti et al. (2010) call “attitudes and ethics” (p. 150), standards that shape an educator to have strong

“professional qualities such as promptness, professional dress, courtesy, appropriate conduct, effective people skills, honesty, acceptance of feedback from others, following rules, maintaining a clear criminal background check, and adhering to the approved code of ethics” (p. 150). Having such attitudes and ethics in place allows a candidate to fully embrace, accept, and demonstrate the Five Pillars of the New Framework. Moreover, having such attitudes and ethics in place allows a candidate to be open to each student’s individual’s qualities, backgrounds, beliefs, strengths, and struggles as they access public education.

More important, the Five Pillars are the lens by which the researcher viewed how participants defined disposition, how teachers practiced disposition, and finally how teacher disposition was assessed by principals. The lens supports each research question with the constructs of leadership in classroom, school, and community, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, learner differences, connections to families, and diverse learners. The Five Pillars are revisited throughout the research process and especially when analyzing the findings from the interviews, observations, and document analysis.

### **Summary**

Delpit’s (2012) notions about teachers’ impact on student success is substantiated in research. Gaynor (2012) notes that while “[i]t is useful to focus—as is common in the literature—on particular factors such as teacher quality, early childhood education, resilience, parenting practices, language development, and school leadership... racial, ethnic, and social class achievement gaps have proven to be stubborn and lasting” (p. 28). In addition, Chambers (2009) specifies that teachers and administrators alike must be thoughtful and purposeful in the way that they work with children who are victims in the

achievement gap, and that educators not unwittingly make underachieving students feel responsible for their failing schools. That is why this research is so necessary.

It is the responsibility of educators to fully embrace who their children of diversity are, to understand and accept their culture, race, ethnicity, and to support these students as they are challenged to learn with their peers. The persistence of the achievement gap, Gaynor (2012) explains, threatens the economic stability of the United States as well as the stability of the country's social structure (p. 28). In the end, a teacher's ability to connect and work with all students, regardless of their needs or challenges, is necessary to provide children with a rich and appropriate learning experience. Teachers must be disposed to reach all learners. At the same time, practicing teacher disposition must be shaped, assessed, and guided in their work with diverse populations of students.

The findings represented here mold together several pieces of the research work. The research questions, the framework of the Five Pillars of Disposition (Fischetti et al., 2010), the three themes of Connection to Families, Empathy, and Systems and Supports are all significant pieces of this chapter. They all prepare the researcher to draw conclusion based on the data presented.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Conclusions

### Purpose of the Study

More than a decade ago, Lisa Delpit (2003) stated, “We in education often allow politicians to push us to act as if the most important goal of our work is to raise test scores” (p. 14). The same can be said today, because only recently did we see a shift in the political focus on American education, specifically when President Barack Obama signed the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (Davis, 2015). Eliminating the punitive consequences for poorly performing school districts and preventing the federal government from mandating academic requirements, the Every Student Succeeds Act (Davis, 2015) puts responsibility back in the hands of states and local governments to shape their curriculum and assess their students. The question that remains, is what will the state and local governments focus on to help their students find success? One critical step that Delpit (2003) believed needed to be taken more than a decade ago, is just as important today:

We must incorporate into our educational system if we are to truly educate poor, African-American children is that we must learn who the children are, and not focus on what we assume them to be-at risk, learning disabled, behavior disordered, etc. This means developing relationships with our students, and understanding their political, cultural, and intellectual legacy. (p. 18)

While this is true for our African-American children, it is true for all children. In addition, the act of developing relationships and understanding the legacy of our students are certainly qualities that outline what we hope to see in teachers’ dispositions. Disposition, while not necessarily on the recent forefront of the educational political

agenda has been on the forefront of the educational agenda nonetheless. Shively and Misco (2010) state, “Only since the revised National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Standards of 2002 has the debate over dispositions heated up” (p. 9). With this heating up of the discussion, disposition has become a topic of controversy and debate, and organizations that train and develop future teachers have had to incorporate some level of disposition in their programming and assessment of pre-service teachers; albeit, the depth of dispositional focus fluctuates from school to school, and university to university.

Beyond the schools that train teachers to impact American students; however, there is little research and a lack of real focus on disposition. This problem, in and of itself, leaves researchers to wonder how practicing teachers and their principals perceive teacher disposition? In addition, as Colleges and Universities answer NCATE’s call to include disposition in their programs of teacher training, do public schools demonstrate a parallel of interest in the same? The purpose of this research study is to explore this question, reframed with more specificity in the research questions that follow.

## **Conclusions**

With respect to teacher disposition, this research study specifically considers teachers who teach within diverse classrooms. Diverse classrooms, as defined in Chapter 1, are made up of diverse learners, students who make up the classroom population and vary in their socio-economic backgrounds, race, religion, gender, and ethnicity.

**Research Question 1: How do teachers define and practice dispositions as they relate to diverse learners?**

Teacher participants varied in their personal definitions of teacher disposition. Some teachers offered definitions that scratched the surface of what Kleinfield (1975) called “Warm Demanders.” Teacher 4, for example, begins with the concept of teachers being accepting of their students but falls short of reaching beneath the surface beyond that:

**Teacher 4:** Disposition [is] being accepting and open and kind of fan the flames of the fact that this is a cool thing to be, from a different country because they are growing up in such a global world.

In the same respect, Teacher 6 also offers a definition that lacks the depth required by teachers who are socially just and reflective enough to make powerful connections with their students. Teacher 6 notes:

**Teacher 6:** Meaning how I act towards, well my attitude towards it is like welcoming because I feel like I don’t know, so I feel like I kind of want to be able to learn.

Understanding what disposition is marks the first step in being able to reflect on one’s own teaching and relationship with students. Bondy and Ross (2008) state the following:

These teachers become students of their students' cultures, learning about the music they listen to, the television shows they watch, and their after-school activities. Warm demanders also recognize that their own cultural backgrounds guide their values, beliefs, and behaviors. Although it can be difficult to perceive one's own culture, culture consistently shapes an individual's behavior and reactions to the behavior of others. (p. 56)

The concept that a warm demander, or a teacher who demonstrates effective and positive disposition, not only understand their students’ culture deeply, but are also reflective

about their own culture, motivations, and individual behaviors, can be extracted from some of the teachers' definitions of disposition. For example, Teacher 1 reaches beneath the surface in her definition of disposition:

I would say that it is a teacher's attitude towards their job. Of course, it isn't a simple thing is it? It can change year to year and class to class. On top of that, it evolves with experience. Everything that you bring to your work (your background, your education, your family situation, your professional development, your work with students, your readings, world events like Columbine or Sandy Hook) affects your disposition.

Finally, like anything, you can impose your will over yourself and change your disposition. Wake up each day and decide that you will be excited about teaching, come into the class each day ready to show that difficult student more patience, or that quiet student more attention. Or, take what you've learned from a workshop or colleague and work to incorporate it into your disposition/attitude.

Teacher 2 echoes some of the same points as Teacher 1. Understanding that how she "looks at" people is important and it shapes her perceptions about herself and how she teaches.

Disposition is, how you would react in a certain situation in your classroom, how you perceive the children and how you react, how you deal with the things that come up, whether you judge people or not. Disposition is how I look at people.

Teacher 3 points out that disposition is grounded in one's perspective, and how a teacher reacts and what she "brings to the table" in terms of diversity:



Disposition is just the way you act, the way you are, the different qualities you have, the different experiences you have, different knowledge of different areas and things and the world. Just how you view things and see things in your perspective.

I see it as your experiences, like what do you bring to the table? How do you handle yourself? How do you react? How are your actions towards diversity, towards teaching?

Finally, Teacher 5 really focuses in on empathy as a critical piece of a teacher's disposition. She also coins the term "outside disposition" as being as important as what we could call "internal disposition." Her idea is that disposition needs to be visible, or "outside" in order for a teacher to get student investment. Outside disposition, she suggests, is equally important.

It's really important to have empathy all the time. If students don't see you as someone they can relate to, they are not going to invest in that relationship. It's important to be as positive as you can, even in situations that can be hard. You need to be aware of what your outside disposition looks like and then deal with it emotionally.

In looking at how the teacher participants practice disposition, the researcher analyzed both the teacher interview data and the teacher observation data. Teacher 5's term "outside disposition" is what the researcher looked for as teachers were observed teaching their diverse groups of students. Outside disposition was seen at different levels in different teachers' classrooms. For example a rich outward disposition was observed in Teacher 1's classroom as she attempted to engage with a child who was disengaged,

tired, and not at all connected to the students around him. Her outward disposition was demonstrated in her actions of setting the work aside to find a way in which to connect with him, if only to build a better bond and/or relationship, one that he might call on in the future. Her outward disposition was also seen in her words when she said, “If you put your name on it, I’ll save it and put it on my cabinet.” She said this to the boy as he became engaged in building a model at the end of class. The message that she was sending him was that she cares about the model he was building and would care for it for him until next time.

Teacher 1 celebrated the idea that her school is rich with the diversity of her students and their families. She understands that 95% of the children have free and reduced lunch and that is acceptable and understood. Empathy and an understanding of family dynamics is an important piece of her message. She said:

So we have had to do things in the past like change bus times, get on the bus company because our busses were coming in last or something like that. And then the children are missing breakfast with a parent who just got a job. So, the older brother is in charge of bringing the child to school and they keep getting here late, so that child picks up a special breakfast from the nurse and kind of sneaks it upstairs ... it’s different for every individual child but you try to work something out for that child.

Outside disposition could be observed in Teacher 2 who had built an extensive lesson to connect the students and their many languages to the concept of mammals. Music started the class off and the students gathered on the rug together to sing. The researcher wrote “Rambunctious, wonderful, smiling, engaging, excited, student

centered” in the observation notes to describe the children. The teacher taught with many nonverbal shows of support like a smile and a hand on the back. Teacher 2 was also emotionally connected to her students as noted in her interviews. One child naturally asked to explain in Spanish which was clearly acceptable in this classroom. The theme of empathy was richly threaded through her words. For example, when she said:

Yes, we want our kids to be able to function in the real world but when they first get here, we can't treat them like somebody who is in the mainstream classroom. Because we don't know, well for some of them we don't know what they saw... you know they might be having PTSD you know so a tantrum isn't necessarily a tantrum because they didn't get their way, a tantrum might be because something triggered a memory or whatever so you have to be a little bit... softer I guess with kids.

Teacher 2 demonstrates this empathy throughout her interviews. She becomes so closely connected to her students' lives that it is sometimes difficult to sleep because she thinks about their situations. At the same time, she challenges them. She wants them ready to transition to the regular classrooms, so she discusses her process of preparing them for that. She also discusses her connections to the families, working with them to help their children find success. She offers the example of attending the birthday of two of her students, the exposure to their family and culture, and the want to understand them fully. She explains that she loves her students and that they love her too.

Teacher 3's outside disposition is demonstrated more in what she says than what she showed during the observation. Perhaps the strongest dispositional theme she demonstrates is empathy. She talks about understanding the world of her students. She

refers to one student in particular who lies to a guidance counselor and her when she states, “I don’t think it’s because he wants to have the wrong intentions...[consider my] example of [him] walking down the hall and getting a snack when it is not snack time. And he is probably not eating at home...” She continues that it’s not worth disciplining a hungry child, so she makes an exception. Teacher 3 also makes a point of expressing her desire to keep parents connected to what is going on in their school. She says:

We are all a family here and we all care for each other and we all try to help one another so having that support system and being part of that support system and being involved with the community for different events I think is huge because trying to get parents involved is very challenging in the diverse community.

Teacher 3 also adds that this sense of family in the schools comes directly from the principal. She recalls that when she was first interviewed, the principal said that they are all family and that the community and parents are part of that.

Teacher 4, while she states that she doesn’t like to be privy to the socioeconomic diversity of her students, demonstrates a deep understanding of the students in her classroom. What stood out in her words and observation in regards to practicing disposition was that she demonstrates proximity as a critical strategy in working with her students. Proximity, to her, relays to the children that she is working with them, side-by-side. Additionally, the researcher observed her conversations with the students as she sat with them on the floor, tackling math problems. It was a light but important exchange between the students and the teacher, talking about the math problem, joking as they did.

Teacher 4's disposition was demonstrated quietly, but it was there, and recognized by the students.

Teacher 5's practice of her disposition was demonstrated in both her observation and her interviews. Remember that she was the participant who coined the concept of outside disposition. She practiced outside disposition well. When she worked with her group of math students, it was evident that protocols were in place that promoted supporting each other, being kind, and working hard. This was demonstrated not only in the way she makes her students feel comfortable and important, but also in what her students said. For example, when one of her students is challenged to solve a problem out loud, another student says, "If you need help, we'll help you." This was said with such sincerity, it was difficult to miss. In addition, Teacher 5 had some powerful things to say about disposition, especially in terms of the work she is doing as a special education teacher:

I think it is really important to have empathy all the time. Even if you see someone walk into a chair, you say oh I am so sorry that happened to you... to I hear that your grandma is really sick how can I help you? Because if students don't see you as someone that they can relate to... they are not going to invest in that relationship, which will only makes your job harder. I also think it is important to be as positive as you can even in situations that are hard. And I am guilty of this as much as the next person. Special ed. is like its own island and so sometimes, we spew negativity all the time. Because everything we do is hard. There isn't a lot of support necessarily you know... So it is really important to

just feel the passion outwardly that you have for this job or you wouldn't be in the career to begin with.

Teacher 6's practice of disposition was seen in both what she said in her interviews, as well as the observation of her teaching. During the observation of her teaching her second grade classroom, it was evident that the students were accustomed to a classroom in which treating each other kindly and sharing in the learning was expected. Each day, they start with the class song, "Our Class is Awesome". The song was written by their teacher. As the students prepare to take a quiz later in the morning, Teacher 6 touches each of their heads as she places the quiz on each desk. During her first interview, Teacher 6 said:

I feel like that if you don't take a step back and breathe and look at who is in front of you, then I think that you start to lose perspective so I don't know if this is really my philosophy but meeting each child where they are at, whether that is socially, they need something taken care of first before they can get to math that day. Or at home they didn't sleep and so they have to eat breakfast and take a little rest before they can go to do their reader's workshop or meeting those immediate needs first especially socially in first grade...

Teacher 6 understands how important it is to know her students, even on a daily basis. In addition, her connection to the children, through a touch on the head before a quiz, or in writing a song that they sing each morning, she demonstrated her disposition to teach with a full commitment to who her students are.

When considering how these teachers practice disposition with diverse learners, we must look back at the definition of disposition. The researcher defines disposition as:

A teacher's ability to:

- Behave in a way that embraces all learners within the classroom;
- Behave in a way that supports and demonstrates social justice for all students;
- Behave in a way that demonstrates caring within all contexts of the teaching and learning process;
- Behave in a way that fully embraces diverse learners and the lives they live;
- Behave in a way that rigorously challenges all learners. (Amos, 2011; Delpit, 2012; NCATE, 2006; Helm, 2011; Katz, 2007; Lazar, 2013; Murrell and Diez, 2010; Nieto, 2012; Noddings, 2012)

Each teacher has her own way of demonstrating that her disposition supports her diverse learners as they meet the challenges of school each day. Of the six teachers, three demonstrate a deeper level of understanding of effective dispositional behaviors and thinking. In their words and actions, Teachers 1, 2, and 5 demonstrate the strongest dispositions to support diverse learners. Teachers 1 and 2 teach the most diverse groups of students, and poverty is a challenge in the majority of their students' lives. They revealed to the researcher that teachers who could not meet the needs of their students have chosen to leave, through either transferring to another school in the district or seeking employment outside of the district. The teachers who have remained, have personally chosen to work with the children and families in their school. It was a conscious decision and not one that was forced upon them. They understand their students and the students' families at a depth like no other teacher. They choose to embrace this knowledge so that they can better inform their teaching and fully welcome the children into a classroom that is tailored to their needs.

Teacher 5 also demonstrated a deep level of understanding of effective dispositional behaviors. In particular, her no-nonsense belief about demonstrating outside disposition spoke to her knowledge of her students as well as their expectations. Teacher 5 claimed that if students do not see you as an honest person who understands and cares about them as human beings, there will be no investment on their part in the work you do as a teacher. Relationships that can be seen and demonstrated are non-negotiable.

In considering how principals define disposition, it is important to remember that the principals are defining teacher disposition and not principal disposition.

**Research Question 2: How do principals define teacher disposition as teachers relate to diverse learners?**

Principal 1 viewed disposition and dispositional qualities as being different for different people:

One disposition doesn't work for all people, so that's what makes education wonderful. Because then we get to see all different types of...behaviors and beliefs, values, together.

Perhaps, Principal 1 sees the strength of effective disposition in the many teachers that work in her school, rather in the disposition isolated to one model teacher, such as Danielson's. This is suggestive of disposition being viewed through the lens of the larger school. Principal 1 presents an idea that is better formed into the question: Can a school have dispositional qualities that are built and supported by the teachers' dispositions? How can a school's climate and culture shape effective disposition?



Principal 2's definition of disposition is about believing that every child is capable and that every teacher must present a positive view of every child.

Disposition would have to be that you view 100% that you feel every child can learn and that's what your disposition would be and so it's that positive view that every person can learn.

What we need to be able to do is to view every child as having unique needs and we need to be able to figure out what they are, and so if our appreciation of them is anything less than that they have great potential, then we are viewing a child as a negative opportunity.

This definition is consistent with Principal 2's work in leading her teachers. Both of Principal 2's teachers demonstrated this same view and one echoed similar words, crediting the principal with initiating the belief.

Principal 3's definition was about supporting all children and helping them to understand who they are and that what they are doing is important:

Engage to let a student know that they are valued, that they are being heard...that their work is important even though they are not a top student...You also bring a student down a little bit who thinks they are the end all, be all. And help them recognize what their strengths are and weaknesses are, and then support them and grow.

Helping students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses is an important statement because it is about preparing students to know themselves so that they are better prepared for the challenges ahead. Principal 3's definition is supported by the expectation of

teaching students to be reflective about their lives- to see the strengths and weaknesses in order to adjust and focus in on one's needs.

**Research Question 3: How do principals support the practice and development of teacher disposition?**

Research Question 3 was answered through the interview statements that supported the theme of systems. While it was clear from all of the participants, that there were many supports in place, some designed by the principals and others already built into the program, it was clear from the interviews that principals were empowered to support the dispositions of their teachers by taking advantage of these systems.

Principal 1 relied heavily on professional development that helped her teachers to work with the anxieties of their children, many of whom have endured tragic experiences on their way to this country. The support system in place to plan and react to difficult situations related to student needs and behavior was an intricate network of trained people who understood their roles and could assist the team. Principal 1 has worked to create a change in how the teachers and staff respond to children to promote support and eliminate judgment or negative tone in their reactions.

Principal 2 relied heavily on the system of educational teams to gauge academic, behavioral, and emotional growth within the school. Many of these teams are led by teachers, demonstrating a shared leadership approach to promoting student success. Additionally, Principal 2 was involved with the development of the adult English as a Second Language program which brings families, specifically parents, into the school during the school day. This program has not only given parents free English classes, but

it has also brought families closer to the school and they have become more involved as a result.

Principal 3 spent the past five years rebuilding her school to develop a teaching philosophy that has a strong Montessori element. More importantly, she and her staff have developed a strong parent network that the principal contends is the backbone of the school. Principal 3 also works closely with staff, especially in professional development that supports students learning and teaching and behavioral strategies. Principal 3's strongest system is her parent group that are in and out of the school throughout the day. They support teachers and students, and are part of the decision making process.

#### **Research Question 4: How do principals assess teacher dispositions?**

All three schools use the assessment tool Teachscape which houses Charlotte Danielson's (2013) A Framework for Teaching. Within the framework, are specific areas in three of the domains that isolate certain aspects of teacher disposition like connections to families and knowing your learners. The question remains whether or not the assessment goes deep enough to examine the social justice aspect of disposition, or whether or not all aspects of disposition are assessed.

#### **Five Pillars of the New Framework**

Fischetti et al.'s (2010) The Five Pillars of the New Framework allowed the researcher to view teacher dispositions from a lens that considered diversity in students from several aspects including, cultural awareness and sensitivity, leadership, and family. This framework also shined light on the concept of social justice as the researcher looked for what Garmon (2005) called, "a deep concern for achieving equity and equality for all people." He said, "Preparing teachers for diversity must go beyond developing

multicultural awareness and sensitivity; it must also prepare teachers to be agents for change in our schools.” Being an agent of change requires teachers to lead within and outside of school, to transcend the role of teacher to one of advocate and activist. Murrell and Diez, (2010) state:

Cultivating or developing dispositions requires making the process of growth explicit, both in terms of the kinds of ethical and moral action expected of a professional and in terms of how teacher candidates begin to make connections between principles of action and [their] own choices of action in an ongoing way.  
(p. 15)

The study revealed that same must be true for practicing teachers. They too must cultivate their ability to grow in both ethical and moral action. They too must make connections, “between principles of action and [their] own choices of action in an ongoing way” (p. 15)

## **Recommendations**

### **Practicing Teachers**

A focus on teacher disposition, regardless of its depth, has been a goal of our universities and colleges’ over the last couple of decades. This focus had brought about full scale programmatic changes in teacher education and has caused the faculty and administrators alike to build programs that require teacher candidates to develop dispositions that embrace all children. For example, Salazar, Lowenstein, and Brill (2010) present the five core humanizing dispositions that they developed as part of the Boettcher Teachers Program at the University of Denver. They are:

- Commitment to being a learner of diversity and its impact on teaching and learning
- Relentless belief in the potential of culturally and linguistically diverse youth
- Conviction to co-construct knowledge with students and their families
- Willingness to accept, embrace, and navigate the complexity of teaching and learning in collaboration with others
- Persistence in advocating for students and their families

(p. 29-30)

While changes of this nature cause the higher education communities to become more reflective about their work in preparing new teachers, it does not do enough for practicing teachers who are long out of their preparatory programs. Many of these teachers have already adopted ways of thinking based on the practices of the public schools for which they teach. It is recommended that public school districts reflect on the work that has already been done in rewriting teacher preparatory programs and build disposition models that will cause practicing teachers to reflect on who they are as teachers and how they can continually grow to be teachers with powerful dispositions.

Danielson's (2013) *A Framework for Teaching* serves as a teacher assessment tool that reaches all aspects of teaching but does not focus in on teacher disposition deeply enough to reach all aspects of disposition. It is important for educators to build a practicing teacher disposition tool that can be utilized by public school principals to evaluate practicing teachers. Part of the work in building dispositional assessments for practicing teachers includes developing a language of disposition so that it becomes intrinsic to practicing educators and administrators. The assessment tool must be more

than a summative tool, but a formative tool as well in which teachers are able to reflect on who they are as teachers and how they might improve; it must inform teachers so that they may also be reflective about their dispositional qualities and in what they are rooted.

### **Social Justice**

We cannot ignore that while the concept of social justice has caused controversy among many groups involved with teacher education and specifically teacher disposition, it is an important piece of understanding what teacher disposition is. Murrell et al. (2010) reminds us:

... Varied conceptions of the notion of dispositions led to political controversy, as attested to both in popular media and in the professional literature. When the use of the term social justice as an example in NCATE's glossary definition of professional dispositions became the object of controversy, the accreditation body eliminated it as an example. That action became controversial as well, as groups committed to addressing issues of diversity saw it as a backing-down of an important stance with regard to social justice... In any event, the point is that the development of dispositions in teacher education programs is taking place in a politically contested terrain. (p. 3-4)

With that in mind, we must insist that social justice become a core indicator of a teacher's effective disposition both in and outside of the classroom. The research by Baroody, Rimm-Kaufman, Larsen, and Curby (2014) suggest that there is a strong connection between teachers' relationships with students and the students' academic and social success. While Baroody et al.'s (2014) work was focused on Responsive Classroom Training, the construct of student-teacher relationship resonates with

NCATE's (2006) belief that the values or dispositions of teachers should positively impact their behavior toward all of their students, supporting the idea that a teacher's disposition is a critical element of their work in teaching all students well. More importantly, teachers' relationships with students must reveal strong ties to social justice, especially in their ability to teach diverse groups of students.

Social justice must be extended to not only the way teachers treat and think about their students, but also about their parents, families, and greater community. Social justice drives teacher thinking, in terms of disposition, to greater levels of depth. Teachers must become leaders of social justice.

### **Outside Disposition**

As part of the language of disposition, teachers must understand the power of outside disposition, a concept that surfaced through this research, a side of disposition that promotes students' connection to their teachers as well as their willingness to invest in what the teacher has to offer as a committed educator. Outside disposition calls for teachers to be purposeful and visible in their work to understand their students and embrace who they are.

### **Methodological Implications**

Although the Five Pillars of New Framework (Fischetti, Imig, Ndoeye, Smith, 2010) is designed for teachers in training and/or pre-service teachers, it was used to assess practicing teachers' dispositions through interviews and observations. The topics within the New Framework were easily applicable to practicing teachers. In analyzing the data, the New Framework for Disposition was coupled with the natural themes that emerged from the coding process of the data. The three lenses, the research questions,

The New Framework, and the coding themes worked well together to uncover important information about practicing teachers' dispositions, as well as the principals' perceptions of teacher disposition. Ultimately, the New Framework of Disposition is a good model on which to reflect in developing a practicing teacher dispositional assessment. It reaches beneath the surface by including social justice within the prevue of its pillars and looks for teachers to be leaders within the classroom, school, and greater community. It expects that teachers will extend powerful disposition beyond their immediate world so that they can lead from a more global perspective.

### **Future Studies**

There is a need to continue research in the area of teacher disposition, particularly as it develops in classrooms and schools. Specifically, research related to the recommendations that this study presents would offer critical information on the topic. For example, conducting research with a specific assessment tool that adds a qualitative and quantitative measure to the data and would generate baseline information on how effective practicing teachers are in the field would be useful. More importantly, a future qualitative study that measures practicing teacher disposition on a larger scale is recommended. Such a study would expand and strengthen the research on practicing teacher disposition by providing a larger group of participants. In addition, a qualitative study that allows practicing teachers to reflect on their own dispositions would allow interesting insights about how teacher disposition is defined and practiced.

The principal participants in this study had made important contributions in answering the research questions. Their roles may have an impact on their teachers. Future researchers could promote the principal's role in the development of teacher



disposition by considering whether or not practicing teacher dispositions are impacted by principal dispositions.

The concept of outside disposition emerged as a data point from one of the six teacher participants. Outside disposition was developed through the following comments from one of the teachers:

If students don't see you as someone that they can relate to... they are not going to invest in that relationship, which will only makes your job harder. I also think it is important to be as positive as you can even in situations that are hard... kids can read you like an open book so if you look angry... they are going to go through the roof! If you look sad, they might ask you what's wrong. So you need to be aware of what your outside disposition looks like. What does your body look like? And then deal with it emotionally... because kids, especially my kids, who we are teaching to read body language, it's all they do. They will sit like this close to you and figure out, oh so and so is upset and now I am going to go throw this chair because they are making me feel upset.

While the concept of outside disposition is certainly an element of what we expect to see in a teacher with effective disposition, it could be better isolated in the literature as it is worthy of examination.

Social Justice developed as an important term throughout this research study. It served as an indicator of depth of disposition and teachers who demonstrated social justice, specifically the Teachers 1 and 2, demonstrate social justice in their words and actions. In terms of both higher education and P-K public school education, a social justice indicator would strengthen any evaluative tool about teacher disposition.

Finally, future research should include qualitative studies on the observations and evaluations of practicing teachers. How do practicing teachers' evaluations reflect their dispositional qualities? Do practicing teachers' evaluations include the language of disposition? Is there an expectation that positive disposition will be demonstrated by practicing teachers?

### **Discussion**

All six teachers demonstrated positive disposition in what they said and in how they interacted with their students. The two teachers that were teaching in the most diverse school demonstrated long held beliefs about socially just treatment of children and their families. The concept was ingrained in their communication and it was also part of their interactions with the students even in the short time they were observed. While this may not be true for all teachers that teach highly diverse populations of students, it was true for these two teachers. In addition, both teachers carried with them the heavy weight of their students' struggles. Many students were deep in poverty and families were doing the best they could to keep their families fed and healthy, but it was not without a daily struggle. Those struggles were not set aside by the teachers, but instead motivated them to advocate for their children. They appeared resolute in this decision.

### **Closing Summary**

This qualitative research study considered practicing teacher disposition. The lack of research in the area of practicing teacher disposition is a gap in the research and presented the researcher with an opportunity to explore the perceptions of principals and teachers of three different elementary schools. The New Framework of Disposition

(Fischetti, Imig, Ndoeye, Smith, 2010) provided the researcher with a solid guide from which to base the research and examine disposition as it related to diverse learners. The information that was generated from the research provided the researcher with important data to analyze and develop into findings that adds to the research on disposition. More importantly, the findings present several new doors from which new research can be developed.

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### **Appendix A: Invitation to participate for Principal**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Southern New Hampshire University Educational Leadership Doctoral program. I am currently in the process of starting my dissertation under the guidance of Dr. Margaret Ford. I am writing to ask if you and two members of your school faculty would be willing to participate in my research study.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore teacher and administrative disposition toward diverse learners within a public elementary school.

During our first meeting, I will present all of the details about the types of interviews I would like to conduct, including the questions I will ask. I will also present my assurances to you. There is a list of these assurances at the end of this email. I hope that this will be a useful piece of research which will inform not only my work as a researcher but also research educator disposition as a whole. I would very much appreciate your help.

Regards  
Ronald Pedro  
r.pedro@snhu.edu

Assurances to interviewees:

If you agree to an individual interview, anything you tell me will be treated in confidence.

In all instances:

- \* I will respect your right to decide not to answer any questions which I may ask you, and without explanation.
- \* I respect your right to withdraw from the interview at any time.
- \* I may wish to use quotes, but would only quote you under a pseudonym and with your express permission.

### **Appendix A: Invitation to participate for Teacher**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Southern New Hampshire University Educational Leadership Doctoral program. I am currently in the process of starting my dissertation under the guidance of Dr. Margaret Ford. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in my research study.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore teacher and administrative disposition toward diverse learners within a public elementary school.

During our first meeting, I will present all of the details about the types of interviews I would like to conduct, including the questions I will ask. I will also present my assurances to you. There is a list of these assurances at the end of this email. I hope that this will be a useful piece of research which will inform not only my work as a researcher but also research educator disposition as a whole. I would very much appreciate your help.

Regards  
Ronald Pedro  
r.pedro@snhu.edu

Assurances to interviewees:

If you agree to an individual interview, anything you tell me will be treated in confidence.

In all instances:

- \* I will respect your right to decide not to answer any questions which I may ask you, and without explanation.
- \* I respect your right to withdraw from the interview at any time.
- \* I may wish to use quotes, but would only quote you under a pseudonym and with your express permission.

### Appendix C: Informed Consent Agreement

Project Title: Exploring teacher dispositions toward diverse learners within a public elementary school

**Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the study.**

**Purpose of the research study:** This study seeks to explore the phenomenon of teacher disposition toward diverse learners within a public elementary school. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how the construct of disposition, from several participants' views, is defined, practiced, and assessed within the school. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will add to research on disposition, specifically towards diverse learners.

**What you will do in the study:** As a participant in the study, you will be given details regarding the research and an opportunity to consent. You will be interviewed by a researcher in regards to your involvement and experience with disposition as it relates to diverse learners. You will also be observed for one class period. The observer will be focused on teacher disposition as it relates to a diverse group of students.

**Time required:** Each of the two interviews will last no more than 90 minutes. The observation will run the extent of one class period.

**Risks:** There are no anticipated risks in this study.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The report from this study will be made available to you.

**Confidentiality:** Participant's information will be kept private and confidential. The data will be collected consisting of recorded text and shared documents only. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

IRB-SBS Office Use Only	
Protocol #	
Approved	
SBS Staff	from: _____ to: _____

**Right to withdraw from the study:** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**How to withdraw from the study:** To withdraw from the study, simply notify Ronald Pedro at r.pedro@snhu.edu or call the office at (603) 625-4679 Ext. 2284.

If you have questions about the study or your rights in the study, please contact Ronald Pedro at r.pedro@snhu.edu.

Ronald Pedro  
Southern New Hampshire University  
2500 North River Road  
Manchester, NH 03106  
Phone (603) 625-4679 Ext. 2284

Agreement:

I agree to participate in this study (please check one): YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

IRB-SBS Office Use Only	
Protocol #	_____
Approved by	_____
SBS Staff	from: _____ to: _____

**Appendix D: Interview Protocol****INTERVIEW PROTOCOL- Teachers and Principals****Date of Interview**\_\_\_\_\_**Name of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_**Organization**\_\_\_\_\_**Date Interviewed**\_\_\_\_\_**Interviewed by** Ronald Pedro\_\_\_\_\_

I am interviewing school teachers and principals in three different elementary schools. My focus is to find out more information about teacher disposition and how it is defined, practiced, supported, and assessed. I hope to learn from your experiences and about teacher disposition within your school.

The information you provide in this interview will be used in the research I am conducting at Southern New Hampshire University. The collected comments, experience, and suggestions from all of the participants interviewed will be reviewed and saved by the supervising faculty member.

Following Seidman's (2006) structure for phenomenological based in-depth interviewing, this research study's interviews will be conducted with open-ended questions that allow the participants some latitude in exploring the topic from their points of view. Seidman's (2006) Three Interviews Series will be conducted with all nine participants, giving the researcher and the participants, time to build a rapport and an accurate picture of the



participants' lived experiences. Following Seidman's (2006) advice to honor the structure of the series, the researcher will focus on the participants' life histories, present life experience, and the meaning of the experiences, specifically how they relate to disposition toward a diverse student population.

#### Teacher Interview 1:

1. Why did you choose to go into teaching? What were the motivators in your life?
2. What were your experiences in schools and with teachers? What has stayed with you as you work with students today?
3. What was the process of becoming a teacher like for you?
4. What was the most valuable experience in the course of your education to be a teacher? What has stayed with you as you work with students today?
5. What is your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe is most important about teaching students?
6. You said that \_\_\_\_\_ was the main tenet of your philosophy. What does that look like in practice? How does it play out in your classroom?
7. What feedback do you get from students about your teaching? Can you give an example? How do you react to that?
8. Can you talk about the students you teach? Are your classes diverse in any way? Can you explain?
9. What do you know about your students' lives outside of school? Can you give an example of a few students?
10. How does the diversity or lack of diversity in your classroom impact your teaching?

#### Teacher Interview 2:

We closed our last interview with our conversation about diversity in your classroom and its impact on your teaching. We'll continue to focus on that.

1. You said that diversity impacts your classroom by \_\_\_\_\_. Do you believe that teachers must have certain qualities to teach a diverse student group? Explain.
2. What kinds of cultural differences exist in your classroom? Please give examples.
3. How do you appeal to these cultural differences?
4. Are you able to connect to all students' families throughout the year? In what way? How does it differ from child to child?
5. How do you support diverse learners in the classroom?
6. How do you support diverse learners in the school?
7. How do you support diverse learners in the community?

## Principal Interview 1:

1. Why did you choose to go into teaching/administration? What were the motivators in your life?
2. What were your experiences in schools and with teachers and administrators? What has stayed with you as you work with students today?
3. What was the process of becoming a teacher and administrator like for you? What was your undergraduate experience like?
4. What was the most valuable experience in the course of your education to be a teacher and then an administrator? What has stayed with you as you work with students today?
5. What is your philosophy of teaching? What is your philosophy about leading? What do you believe is most important about teaching students? What is most important about leading a school and/or district?
6. You said that \_\_\_\_\_ was the main tenet of your philosophy. What does that look like in practice? How does it play out in your classroom, your school, your district?
7. What feedback do you get from teachers about your leading? Can you give an example? How do you react to that?
8. Can you talk about the community in which you lead? Is it diverse in any way? Can you explain?
9. What do you know about your students' lives outside of school? Can you give an example of a few students?
10. How does the diversity or lack of diversity in your school/district impact your leading?

## Principal Interview 2:

We closed our last interview with our conversation about diversity in your classroom and its impact on your teaching. We'll continue to focus on that.

1. You said that diversity impacts your school/district by \_\_\_\_\_. Do you believe that teachers must have certain qualities to teach a diverse student group?
2. Do you believe that leaders must have certain qualities to lead within a diverse community? Explain.
3. Do you have these qualities?
4. Have you always had these qualities?
5. Can these qualities be learned?
6. In what ways do you support teachers as they teach diverse learners?

## Appendix E: Parent Consent Letter

December, 2014

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

This year I will be conducting research in your child's classroom. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Southern New Hampshire University. My study is focused uniquely on teacher disposition and how it is practiced in the classroom. If you agree to your child's participation in this study his/her involvement will include:

- Being present in the classroom as I observe the teacher instructing the students
- Being present in the classroom as I take notes on the teacher's instruction and classroom conversations and dialogue

The potential risks for participating in this study are minimal. All participants' confidentiality will be kept by using pseudonyms in all published or shared materials.

While your child will not receive any monetary compensation, there will be no monetary cost to you. The practical aims of this study directly impact the educational community. These aims include: helping to build/guide policy in the professional education of teachers, those both in the field and entering the field and improving teachers' classroom practices and relationships with students and students' families.

Participation is strictly voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which your child would otherwise be entitled. If you agree to allow your child to participate and then change your mind, you may withdraw your child at any time during the study without penalty. If you decide not to allow your child to participate or decide to withdraw your child's participation, the researcher will not use any information about your child's participation in class.

I will seek to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your child's participation in this research. Data (printed transcripts) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and on my private computer. Data will be saved for later possible research purposes. Any and all publications or reports from this study will use pseudonyms for participants. You should understand however, there are rare instances when the research is required to share personally-identifiable information ( e.g., according to policy, contract, regulation). For example, in response to a complaint about the research, officials at Southern New Hampshire University, designees of the sponsor(s), and/or regulatory and oversight government agencies

may access research data. You also should understand that the researcher is required by law to report certain information to government and/or law enforcement officials (e.g., child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, communicable diseases).

All data analysis and work for this study will be conducted by me with guidance from my doctoral advisor, Dr. Margaret Ford, the Associate Dean for the School of Education.

If you have questions about this study, you can contact:

Ron Pedro  
Lead Researcher  
Phone: (603) 717-1375  
Email: r.pedro@snhu.edu

Dr. Margaret Ford  
Associate Dean, Committee Chair  
Phone: (603) 629-4675 x2277  
Email: m.ford1@snhu.edu

Sincerely,

Ronald Pedro  
Lead Researcher  
Southern New Hampshire University

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### Parent Content Form

*Please fill out the form below and keep the above letter for your records.*

Doctoral Dissertation Research Project  
Ronald Pedro – Lead Researcher  
School of Education  
Southern New Hampshire University

By signing below, you certify that you have read and fully understand the purpose of this research project and the risks and benefits it presents to your child as stated above.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, CONSENT/AGREE to allow my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participation in this research project.

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*Signature of Parent / Guardian*

---

*Date*

**Appendix F: Child Assent Letter**

December, 2014

Dear Student:

I am studying teacher disposition or how teachers relate to their students as they teach. I will be observing your classroom no more than two times. I will be taking notes about what is being taught and about the conversations and dialogue during the teaching. Whenever I talk about you to people outside of your class I will make sure to use a fake name. I may write about something you have said, but I will make sure to use a fake name in all my writings. If at any point you feel like you do not want me to talk or write about your participation in any of the classroom activities, that is totally fine and you just need to let me know. You will not be asked to do anything differently than you would already be doing in class. If you have any questions please feel free to ask me before or after your class period.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to have Ronald Pedro discuss and write about my participation in classroom discussion and activities.

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you,

Ronald Pedro

Doctoral Candidate  
School of Education  
Southern New Hampshire University