Art teacher candidates are evaluated on their dispositions for teaching at various programmatic intervals through the use of checklists and rubrics. Current methods do not fully consider the relationship between an art teacher candidate's inner life (hopes, dreams, beliefs, emotions, feelings, and values) and their practice. Further scrutiny of the criteria and methods used to evaluate art teacher candidates is necessary. Metaphor and a focus on dispositions associated with the heart are proposed strategies for art teacher candidates to connect their inner life with their practice, and to advance the notion of teaching art as complex, transformative, and even ar tful.

In recent years “an enormous amount of public attention [has been] focused on teacher quality and teacher preparation” (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 22) and the effectiveness of teacher education programs (Labaree, 2004). The teacher accountability movement in education launched in the 1980s with publications such as A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century by The Carnegie Task Force on Teaching (1986) and What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do by The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (1989). Federal mandates continued with the Title II-Higher Education Act (HEA) (2001) that required the ranking of teacher education programs by test scores, followed by Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994), and the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). These initiatives have listed teacher quality as a major factor in improving student achievement (Brewer, 2006, p. 270) and have focused national attention on teacher preparation. These external mandates fueled public concern at the state level and resulted in increased national teacher testing, new content standards, and changes in university curricula and state licensure requirements. In art education, Standards for Art Teacher Preparation (1999) emerged with revised professional standards for art teacher preparation. With these reforms came increased emphases upon the assessment of teacher candidates’ dispositions.

Dispositions have been defined in teacher education as a desirable characteristic, quality, or demeanor (Weiner & Cohen, 2003), personality, attitudes and beliefs, perceptions and expectations (Knopp & Smith, 2005), and even social and emotional behaviors (Stronge, 1992). Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) identified numerous examples of research on teacher dispositions over the past 30 years and report that “Research findings on dispositions related to effective teaching were compelling to call for inclusion in new national standards” (p. 4). Dispositions have been articulated within art
education standards for teacher preparation as well as in state teacher education standards.

Typically, preservice art teachers are assessed on dispositions related to attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning. Common preservice teacher dispositions include being cooperative, reflective, respectful, and open to new ideas (Davison-Jenkins & Koeppen, 2004). Current methods of assessing preservice art teachers’ dispositions include the use of rubrics and checklists. There is no compelling evidence, however, that disposition evaluations actually create a better quality art teacher.1 Current methods of evaluating teacher dispositions also do not fully consider the relationship between a preservice teacher’s inner life (hopes, dreams, beliefs, emotions, feelings, and values) and practice.

Given the increased use and emphases of disposition evaluation in art teacher preparation, I believe further scrutiny of the criteria and methods that we use to evaluate art teacher candidates is necessary. As a teacher educator within a school of education, I have been involved in required formal evaluations of teacher candidates’ dispositions within the art education courses, and during benchmark reviews at my university. I have observed that criteria and methods of disposition evaluation are not particularly useful for preservice teachers, or art teacher educators, as they do not provide a window into their beliefs, but rather focus on their outward behaviors.

Disposition evaluation, as one of the outcomes of the hyper-assessment craze in teacher education, has also given way to an increase in anti-intellectualism in teacher education (Johnson, Johnson, Farenga, & Ness, 2005; Pinar, 2005; Block, 2004), where preservice teachers often seek recipes and answers, rather than ask questions. The standardization of teacher evaluation has eroded a climate for inquiry. I agree with Pinar (2005) that using checklists is “institutional (mis)conduct,” and that the “standardization of teaching undermines the cultivation of professional authority” (p. 5), resulting in a notion of teaching as technical.

While rubrics and checklists may appeal to accrediting bodies, they do not in any sense capture a picture of teaching as complex and nuanced. How can we meet the demands of accreditation while engaging in preservice art teacher evaluation that is authentic to our profession and discipline, and that can capture teaching art as complex and nuanced? The quantification of teaching performance and competencies has made it very challenging for art teacher educators to advance the notion of teaching as complex, transformative, and even artful. Current practices in teacher assessment have placed emphasis on micro-analyzing teacher personalities, rather than assisting teacher candidates to understand connections between their inner life and their teaching practices, as well as connections to community, society, and the planet (Gallegos-Nava, 2001; Glazer, 1999; Halpin, 2003; Krishnamurti, 1953/1981; Miller, 2000). This second kind of educator, Gallegos-Nava (2001) has described as an “artist” (p. 46).

1Within the field of art education, there is limited research about art teacher dispositions. Existing research focuses on the dispositions of teachers of the artistically talented (Wölfe, 1997; Zimmerman, 1992).
The concept of teaching as art, acknowledged by Eisner (1983) among others, can be extended to preservice art teacher evaluation. For example, using visual and/or literary metaphors, preservice art teachers could describe and interpret the aesthetics of practice, or the kinds of shapes, patterns, textures, openings, and shadows that are present in their beliefs about art, teaching, and learning, or within their classroom practices. Paying particular attention to where the shadows lie, or the aspects of ourselves and our practices that we cannot readily see, and that are mirrored back to us through, and with, our relationships is key to self-growth and to awareness of integrating the unconscious. The processes used in art criticism, such as description and interpretation (Barrett, 2000), can be applied to also understand the aesthetics of practice with interpretations about practice that are individual, collaborative, literary, artistic, and arts-based.

Although preservice art teachers certainly have expressed the need to know about practical matters (Kowalchuk, 1999), there is also compelling evidence of teacher burnout and turnover within the first 3 years of practice. This suggests that the inner life of a teacher does matter, and that teaching requires attention to the affective and the intellectual domains (Eisner & Powell, 2002).

Although I agree with the importance of teacher credibility, which is often defined by knowledge of subject and students (Bain, 2004; Brookfield, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Short, 1995), it is not enough. We should not dismiss the importance of assisting preservice art teachers in attaining self-knowledge (Knight, Keifer-Boyd, & Amburgy, 2005) and making connections to their personal histories, stories, memories, beliefs, feelings, values, and passions in the context of art education coursework and artmaking experiences. This is not easy work, and art educators Gradle (2007) and Grauer (1998) have acknowledged that changes to preservice teachers’ beliefs and dispositions may not always be apparent, or even possible. However, I do believe that it is the obligation of art teacher educators to challenge students to examine their beliefs and inner life in relation to teaching art. Having preservice students make connections between artistic practices and teaching practices, Gradle (2007) has suggested focusing on dispositions associated with artists (risk-taking, ambiguity, and open-endedness) that can allow students to see teaching as artful. Furthermore, focusing dispositions associated with the heart—such as, joy, passion, fortitude, courage, generosity, integrity, hope, justice, kindness, and love—may assist preservice art teachers to be far better prepared to deal with the complexity and range of issues, that include social issues (Milbrandt, 2002), related to teaching and professional practices.

In our field, there is a lot of talk about how important it is for art teachers to be leaders (Zimmerman & Thurber, 1997). Yet, if we look closely at disposition evaluation criteria, there is little evidence to support that having agency and leadership is valued. However, dispositions that may be associated with leaders, such as working together, being “cooperative,” “collaborative,” and “fostering relationships with colleagues, parents, and agencies” (Wisconsin Education Disposition Form, 2006), are valued.

2In a review of teacher education disposition forms from numerous public and private universities across the country, I have found that disposition criteria tends to be highly generalized and represent the following categories: communication skills, use of instructional media, classroom management skills, student assessment and evaluation, instructional design, attitudes about learning, diversity, community, and professional development. These disposition criteria categories are aligned to state standards.
State Standards for Teacher Development and Licensure, pp. 13-14) have been emphasized with the aim of improving overall student learning rather than fostering teachers as leaders or activists who work towards classroom and school reforms. Johnson et al. (2005) suggested that terms and dispositions, such as, “collaborates with colleagues” “may even mask a desire for faculty [teacher] conformity” (p. 88). If developing teachers/leaders is important to our profession, then disposition criteria needs to reflect this.

Moreover, few criteria, if any, have suggested that teaching art requires the qualities associated with artists, designers, or activists who are imaginative, socially responsive, connected to self and community, and committed to social justice. Disposition criteria for preservice art teachers has not embraced the development of an integrated individual (cognitive with emotional) as critical to teaching, nor does it support the idea of teaching art as complex (Burton, 2004), artistic (Eisner, 2002; Gradle, 2007), or socially transformative (Darts, 2006).

If we are to develop art teachers who are integrated, then greater attention needs to be paid to developing dispositions that reflect the inner life. Evaluation processes that embrace metaphor as a strategy to reveal and interpret the aesthetics of practice offer possibilities for preservice art teachers to view teaching through an aesthetic lens, not just a technical lens. Although these methods of assessing may require an investment of time on the part of preservice art teachers and university art education faculty, the results may offer a richer and far more complex picture of art teaching than is currently available.

References


COMMENTARY: The Use of Dispositions in Preservice Art Teacher Evaluation


