Leading Preservice Teachers to Water . . . and Helping Them Drink:
How Candidate Teachability Affects the Gatekeeping and Advocacy Roles of Teacher Educators

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> I feel I have grown up a lot this past year and I have become more of a professional. I have come to appreciate my fellow classmates and more so I have come to appreciate my professors. I came in with the attitude last year that this wouldn't be too hard and I don't need anybody's help. I somehow maintained that defiant attitude throughout the year and struggled through the methods courses (my grades reflect this). I came back this year with a new attitude, a humbled attitude, and this year has been very beneficial for me. . . . As far as professors go, I have a different attitude towards them and I have reaped the benefits of a successful year . . . I feel I have grown leaps and bounds, but I know there is so much more I need to learn.

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In these words, Paul, a graduating senior in teacher education, wrote about his professional development. He continued, "I have not yet mastered the art of being a grown up kid. But if you ask me today if I

am a professional I will tell you with a straight face, that I am a professional in every sense of the word." What did it take for Paul to make the leap from a "grown-up kid" to a teacher education graduate who stated, "I am a professional in every sense of the word?" How teachable was Paul? How much advocacy did he need? How did the gatekeepers — college professors, cooperating teachers, and university student teaching supervisors — help him grow "leaps and bounds" yet be aware that "there is so much more he needs to learn?"

Theoretical Perspectives

Paul's story begins to illustrate conceptions of teacher growth that suggest a pattern of development through which students become teachers. Early studies by Fuller (1960) and Fuller and Bown (1975) suggested that teachers progress through four stages of concern, beginning with identification with their students and ending with concerns about their instructional impact on students. Guillaume and Rudney (1993) found that preparation for the role of teacher was a progression toward independence and complex thinking in which preservice teachers move from thinking about educational matters in concrete, undifferentiated ways to thinking in ways that are more integrated, flexible, and holistic. Dona Kagan (1992) described three tasks that novice teachers accomplish during their preservice and first years of teaching. They acquire knowledge of pupils, develop procedural routines, and — like Paul — they reconstruct their image of themselves as teachers.

Paul's reflection, experiences, and interactions were part of his growth and change process and thus illustrate notions of constructivism. Cognitive constructivist theories proposed by Piaget (1954, 1963) and Ausubel's (1960) work with advance organizers suggest that knowledge is not static or fully known and that meaning is constructed through the interaction of prior knowledge and new learning events. In addition, social constructivist notions such as those of Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986; Holquist, 1990) impact teacher education programs. These concepts emphasize that learning is a social and cultural activity, mediated by social context. While constructivist notions propel teacher educators' decisions to work with preservice teachers in ways that scaffold their learning, they also reveal that one cannot assume that all preservice teachers bring the same knowledge, attitudes, and values to the classroom. It is necessary to meet teacher candidates "where they're at" and proceed to stretch them.

The realization that individuals bring multiple experiences and perspectives to the classroom in turn problematizes the expectation that all program graduates will leave with the same, normative understandings demanded by the increased empha- sis on professional standards for beginning teachers. For example, standards developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) outline the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed by beginning teachers. Across the nation, preservice teachers must meet such standards in order

to obtain teaching licensure or credentials. The constructivist teacher educator, then, must maintain a difficult balance. Standards of proficiency must be met but preservice teachers must also be allowed to construct their own knowledge. Within a constructivist scheme, teacher educators and other knowledgeable others most often serve as guides. This valuable role is acknowledged by constructivist theorists in the concepts of scaffolding and the zone of proximal development.[1]

Context

The institution where this study was conducted is a small, public, liberal arts university located in a rural area of the Midwest. The teacher education program reflects the institution's commitment to a well-rounded, liberal arts education. As part of our conceptual framework, we designed the program to be developmental, constructive, and standards-based. Course assignments and field experiences are integrated in order to engage students in reflective practice and promote their transformation into teachers. At the same time, our teacher candidates, in order to be licensed, must meet the state's Standards of Effective Practice, ten comprehensive standards drawn from those of INTASC.

Constructivist and developmental philosophies seemed to compel teacher education faculty to support and scaffold preservice teachers' learning — to be their advocates. In the advocacy role, we strove to meet candidates where they were and help them to move forward, explaining and defending the developmental process to others, and ultimately recommending them for licensure. Faculty members were also compelled to uphold standards — in other words, to serve as gatekeepers. In that role, we held candidates accountable for program and state requirements and had to decide whether or not each candidate had met the minimum requirements to be a teacher. In our work with preservice teachers, we worried that meeting the demands of constructivism, developmental growth, and high standards created a potential conflict. Therefore, we sought to understand the experiences of preservice teachers and faculty in this context.

The Study

This qualitative study is part of ongoing, systematic self-study examining preservice teachers' growth from student to teacher. In this phase, we specifically explored student teacher growth and development in the context of a constructivist, developmental, and standards-based program. We were particularly interested in how our preservice teachers conceptualized their roles, how they grew into teachers, and what they needed — emotionally, socially, and academically — in order for this growth to take place. Our research questions were: (1) How did a group of preservice teachers transition from being students to teachers? and (2) How did university faculty aid preservice teachers in their growth process? We chose to focus on the roles of faculty members for the purpose of this study and for our own

continuing program evaluation. Clearly, we recognize and believe that many factors enhance preservice teachers' growth, including their own background knowledge, skills, and attitudes; their interaction with particular groups of students and cooperating teachers; and their own deep reflection. However, our decision to focus on faculty role allowed us to utilize the data available and to examine carefully our practices.

Participants

To answer our research questions, we sought to understand as fully as possible the program experiences of six preservice teachers enrolled in our teacher preparation program. The six participants, three elementary and three secondary, were chosen after completion of the program because of the richness of each of their individual cases. They varied in gender, race, and academic achievement (as measured by GPA and recommendations by university faculty). All six participants had met program admissions, program continuation, and graduation requirements. Two of the participants, Noelle and Ron, were perceived as especially strong candidates upon entrance to and throughout the program. They responded openly to new ideas and suggestions, and they mastered each increasingly demanding task as they moved through the developmental program. In fact, upon graduation, both were finalists for a prestigious teaching award that Noelle ultimately received.

Noelle. Noelle, an elementary education major, had the highest GPA of her cohort and held a student-leadership role in a university women's organization. She came from a suburban area and had participated in activities in urban settings. Her recommendations and evaluations were uniformly excellent. She was consistently described in the superlative. One evaluator wrote that she was "perhaps the most responsible and compassionate young adult" he knew.

Ron. Ron, a science major with a high GPA, was described as an "ideal" secondary education candidate. Reviewers commented on his excellence in academics and the personal qualities associated with teaching excellence. He was "friendly, knowledgeable, confident (not cocky), outgoing, and responsible." Ron was from a small town close to a metropolitan area. He had participated in many youth activities, including classroom volunteer work and coaching. Ron was the first of his cohort to be hired for a teaching position at the end of the program.

The other four participants initially struggled upon entrance. Two of these, Marie and Paul, displayed a variety of strengths and weaknesses that made them interesting cases for this study. Despite their difficult beginnings, Paul and Marie displayed remarkable growth in the transition from student to teacher.

Marie. Marie, a self-identified American Indian, was a secondary education student with a major in one of the sciences. She had a marginal GPA, but had a variety of experiences with children in educational settings. Her recommendations from college professors in the science discipline noted that she had a "sense of

commitment required of educators" and "a great deal of wisdom and thoughtful responses to tough questions." Marie had a deep commitment to her native culture.

Paul. Paul was from a suburban area with a major in elementary education. He had a higher than average GPA and was involved in volunteer work with children. He participated in a campus youth mentorship program and in a reading service-learning project with a local elementary school. A college professor who interviewed him prior to entrance into the program noted that he had a "flat interview" and appeared "nervous and shy". Interestingly, Paul was one of the most popular students in the cohort and ultimately displayed positive leadership.

The final two participants, Allison and James, exhibited marginal achievement at the end of their program. Though they met minimum standards, the program for them was a continual struggle from admission to completion.

James. James was from a conservative, rural community. He was an elementary education major who entered the program with a low GPA (as compared to others entering the program) and average recommendations from references. One person said, "I think he could do better if he applied himself more." James pursued a coaching license as well as a teaching license and excelled in his coaching coursework. Upon entering the program, he began to struggle with completing coursework in a satisfactory manner and interacting with university faculty.

Allison. Allison, who attended a large, urban high school, entered the program with a marginal GPA, but with good recommendations from faculty and high standardized test scores. One reference wrote, "I sincerely believe that Allison would be an extremely strong secondary teacher. She would genuinely care for her students." Another wrote, "She has a candor that might be abrasive to some, but I find it refreshing." All references noted her enthusiasm for teaching. After entering the program, Allison's work was inconsistent. While she sometimes did exemplary written work, her performance in schools was lackluster and uneven. When asked to improve upon some aspect of her practice or given suggestions, she often did not follow through on making the needed improvements.

Though chosen for the richness of their data, the six participants generally reflected the demographics of the university's teacher education program. Marie was the sole participant of color. The other participants, like 90% of their cohort, were White. All participants were traditional college-aged students. Their home-towns represented the full range represented in the cohort: urban, suburban, and rural. Our sample is not representative in terms of gender. In the elementary education program, approximately 30% of the cohort was male. In the secondary education program, approximately 50% of the cohort was male.

Method and Data Sources

Three types of data comprised the data set for this study: clinical documentation, interactional/anecdotal data, and participant-generated data. Clinical docu-

mentation included formative and summative evaluations by cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Interactional data included anecdotal data derived from conversations with participants, classroom interactions, advising sessions, and supervision conferences. Participant-generated data included concept maps, reflective essays on various topics, professional portfolios, written comments on student teaching experiences and professional relationships, and lesson plans and other teaching products. The use of these multiple sources of data, as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (1990), helped establish trustworthiness. Investigators included faculty from both elementary and secondary education. Thus, no investigator knew all participants. This allowed us to have both personal knowledge of each participant along with a more objective, external view — that is, "emic," or insider, and "etic," or outsider, perspectives (Schwandt, 1994). Data were triangulated by investigator, as each of the co-investigators studied all data and verified the others' analyses (Denzin, 1978).

We employed standard inductive methods of analysis (see, for example, Miles & Huberman, 1994, or Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). First, we independently read documents and other data to summarize the ideas present. Interrater validity checks were performed to establish consistency. Then we sought to identify and interpret patterns revealed in the data. Data were coded and categorized inductively to aid in this process. Themes were extracted and analyzed in terms of the research questions, and new questions were analyzed as they emerged.

Results

Each participant's data set revealed an individual story of growth and offered unique perspectives. Still, the data revealed differences and commonalities that provided interesting themes in answer to our questions. In particular, candidate disposition emerged from the data as a compelling domain to examine.

How Did a Group of Preservice Teachers Transition from Being Students to Teachers?

All six of the participants met minimum standards for licensure. As we examined their growth and achievement, however, we found that the disposition of teachability emerged as a key factor in differentiating students who progressed more rapidly from those who continued to struggle. The Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psychoanalytical Terms (English & English, 1958) defines disposition as "a general term for any {hypothesized} organized and enduring part of the total psychological of psychophysiological organization in virtue of which a person is likely to respond to certain statable conditions with a certain kind of behavior: his disposition is to think before acting . . . 4. a relatively lasting emotional attitude; or the relative predominance in the total personality of a certain emotional attitude; a stubborn disposition . . . 5. the sum of all innate tendencies or propensi-

ties" (p. 158, cited in Katz, 1995, p. 50). Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) discuss disposition more simply, stating "Dispositions are often defined as the personal qualities or characteristics that are possessed by individuals, including attitudes, beliefs, interests, appreciations, values, and modes of adjustment" (p. 2). Within this framework, we consider teachability to be a disposition that encompasses a variety of values and actions: consideration and action upon suggestions from knowledgeable others, reflection on teaching practice, and commitment to continuous learning. Similar to teacher self-efficacy, in which teachers believe that all students can learn and they see themselves as responsible agents in that learning (Ashton, 1985, cited in Glatthorn, 1993, p. 175), candidate teachability is manifested in a desire and willingness to accept and enact what knowledgeable others have to offer that candidate in regard to his or her own growth and learning as a professional. By this we mean that candidates construct their own knowledge of teaching through reflection and experience, but also that we as teacher educators scaffold that process by providing feedback, establishing clear expectations, and creating opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect upon their own practices. In addition, when necessary (as in cases where candidates are not meeting minimum standards), we require candidates to enact specific changes to improve practice.

Teachability: Struggle and Success

For Allison and James, the two participants who struggled the most, data revealed a pattern of response that suggested a lack of teachability — a difficulty or unwillingness to engage in the essential tasks of learning to teach. Such tasks outlined in standards include (but are not limited to) planning and preparation, professionalism, and self-evaluation — all with a primary focus on student learning. Allison and James often found it difficult to embrace a teacher identity. In other words, these students thought of their work in terms of completing assignments and being evaluated rather than focusing on their own students' learning and needs. For example, Allison wrote: "I would like information on discipline in class. If I can't do that well, I don't think my cooperating teacher or supervisor will rate me very highly." In this case, she was more concerned about her own "performance" and grade than her students' needs. She displayed a student, rather than teacher, mentality.

Struggling teacher candidates also were hesitant to consider suggestions and integrate them into their teaching. This was evidenced in the concerns of Allison's cooperating teacher: "I often have to set a deadline as to when things need to be completed even when students have been asking for days about when things will be returned.…We went over her [test] rough drafts and discussed improvements, but the final tests looked much similar to the rough drafts, and, of course, Allison had an excuse for this."

Though deep self-reflection is challenging for all, James and Allison seemed reluctant to engage in such reflection and often were hesitant to investigate their own teacher role and agency. They consistently placed responsibility on students

alone rather than exploring their own role in student learning and behavior. For example, James consistently wrote of his classroom management challenges, saying: "There are a few 'rotten apples' that aren't focusing their attention where it should be," and "I've found that sometimes you'll have days where students will be little stinkers and there is nothing you can really do about it." When the time for parent-teacher conferences arrived, he wrote: "I am looking forward to meeting the parents and discussing [the students'] classes and behavior. This will be a good chance for the parents to learn about…how they can assist their child at home so they can be better students in the classroom." James did not describe any changes to his own behaviors in his reflections.

Refusing to reflect on their own agency in the classroom and resisting appropriate suggestions, James and Allison demonstrated their lack of teachability. An additional characteristic of those who struggled with teachability was their fragile self-esteem. For example, supervision conference records showed that those who struggled, like Allison and James, rarely implemented suggestions given by supervisors and cooperating teachers and also were more likely to become angry, threatened, or hostile when weaknesses were discussed. The cooperating teacher recognized Allison's tendency to be sensitive to criticism when she said, "I've been as honest as I can with Allison without hurting her spirit or confidence…although I do shower her with praise when things go well." James demonstrated this quality as well when discussing his cooperating teacher. The things he found the most helpful were her positive nature and encouragement. He wrote: "She didn't put me down; she was always very positive and that built my confidence. She shared experiences from her teaching and it helped me see that everyone makes mistakes and you learn and grow from them." Allison and James's reluctance to accept criticism can be contrasted with the preservice teachers who did not appear to be threatened by constructive critique.

Both Paul and Marie developed into self-reflective practitioners, accepting of critique, in spite of the individual struggles both experienced. Marie faced many personal and professional obstacles throughout the program, struggling with parenting several young children and with the illness of a family member. She also struggled professionally at first. Prior to entrance into the program, her subject matter professors expressed strong concerns about knowledge gaps and failure to complete course requirements. During the early portions of the program, assign-ments were turned in late and were sometimes incomplete. As she progressed in the program, however, Marie began to earn high grades on course assignments. Marie also experienced success in student teaching. During this field experience, Marie taught all of her required classes, devoted extra time to keeping her students in school, and coached and went on field trips with students. Her conversations with her supervisor and cooperating teacher consistently centered on the academic and emotional needs of her students and how she as a teacher could meet these needs. For example, one project Marie was considering was a program to increase the

school attendance of her students. Marie was very open to constructive critique and feedback. When her supervisor suggested beginning a "lunch club" for students needing extra support, Marie tried it out. When her cooperating teacher suggested infusing more cultural content into her science lessons, Marie was willing and eager to act upon this feedback.

Paul, whose story was recounted at the beginning of this paper, struggled at the beginning of the program. The cooperating teacher in his first practicum placement said he was "lacking initiative at this time. This teaching experience didn't seem to be one of his higher priorities." Data revealed what seemed to be a formative event after which Paul became teachable. Paul participated in an intensive, cross-cultural experience that gave him confidence and increased his motivation and dedication to teaching. In the experience, he was challenged to meet the needs of young students and felt supported by his university supervisors, his peers, and his cooperating teacher. He described his success and growing confidence, saying, "It wasn't until I was able to fully apply myself in a teaching setting where I received positive results that I began to build confidence." Paul and his university supervisors all pointed to this field experience as a pivotal moment in his development. By the end of student teaching, his cooperating teacher stated: "Paul continually conducted himself in a professional manner. . . . He was open to hints, suggestions, and any ideas to improve his teaching." While these students did not unquestioningly follow all suggestions by university supervisors or cooperating teachers, they were eager to receive feedback on their practice and to reflect upon it to improve student learning. Whereas James and Allison often rejected suggestions immediately, Paul and Marie were willing to try new ideas. For both Paul and Marie, their teachability was a powerful factor in their ultimate success.

Teachability: The Strong Get Stronger

Data indicated somewhat predictably that strong participants were able to make the transition from student to teacher much more quickly than the others. This was evidenced by their focus on student learning in coursework and field placements, as well as by their understandings of themselves as professionals with agency and responsibility. For example, near the beginning of the program, Ron wrote: "I think I tend to teach predominantly to auditory learners. I need to continually assess what methods I use…so that I can reach the visual, tactual, and kinesthetic learners. I am interested in asking my practicum students to assess me at some point…I must be able to reach my students where they are at." Here, Ron was interested in discovering and meeting the needs of the students. Noelle focused on student learning as well. She said, "If I am weaker in a specific area, it is my duty as the teacher and my duty to my students to research that area until I have gained the knowledge to do it well."

As they moved through our developmental program, Ron and Noelle, like other students, encountered increasingly sophisticated and difficult tasks. Stan-

dards and expectations were increased. Ron and Noelle consistently met or exceeded standards, typically receiving superior grades on their course assignments. Likewise, their performance in the field was excellent. For example, one observer wrote of Ron: "He is a joy to watch teach a lesson. His enthusiastic manner, his humor, his contagious smile, coupled with a splendid knowledge of science make him an outstanding candidate for the teaching profession." Noelle's evaluations were equally consistent in their praise. Her final cooperating teacher said, "After ten years as a classroom teacher, I can honestly say I have never seen a better student teacher."

Though excellent, Ron and Noelle were not yet teachers and had many things to learn about student development, management, instructional strategies, diverse learners, and the myriad of other facets of successful teaching. Cooperating teachers consistently described their openness to suggestions from others and their ability to reflect upon and improve their practice. In one lesson observation, the supervisor suggested that Noelle work to eliminate slang and informal language during her lesson. In the next observation, she was commended for her immediate improvement in this area. In an early observation, a cooperating teacher wrote that Ron had a tendency to move too quickly through material in the lesson. Later, the cooperating teacher wrote, "Ron realized [he was moving too quickly] . . . and took steps to adjust." Although Noelle and Ron entered the program as strong candidates, their teachability enabled them to grow even stronger. They never believed that they had "arrived," but rather sought further growth and instruction from cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and other mentors.

In summary, participants (including both the initially strong and the initially struggling) who displayed the disposition of teachability — that is, candidates who were open to suggestions, engaged in active reflection, and evidenced a commitment to continuous learning — were able to grow into a teacher role more quickly and effectively than the two who did not acquire these dispositions until near the end of their experience.

How Did University Faculty Aid Preservice Teachers in Reaching the Standards?

As stated previously, the actions of university faculty are but one factor in a candidate's growth and development. We did, however, want to explore what might be the salient features of our role in the process. Therefore, we carefully examined the interactional and clinical data related to our work in supporting candidates' growth. The analysis suggested that faculty provided three different types of support: time spent with candidates, critical feedback, and encouragement. The categories of support were the same, but the nature and degree of aid varied, depending on individual needs. Though all categories of support were present throughout the program, we focus on the student teaching experience in this paper. All six participants student taught during the same semester, and their experiences were consistent in terms of expectations and structure.

Time

University supervisors formally observed each participant a minimum of four times during their ten- to eleven-week student teaching experiences. Data revealed that supervisors spent little extra time meeting with Noelle, Ron, Marie, or Paul. James and Allison required significantly more time and attention from university faculty and cooperating teachers. In fact, university supervisors visited James and Allison twice as often as the other participants. Supervisory visits tended to be longer in duration, involve more in-depth discussions, and often took place at the cooperating teacher's request.

Critical Feedback

Data showed that university faculty and cooperating teachers delivered specific and concrete feedback to all participants. Feedback to Ron, Noelle, Paul, and Marie was consistently positive, with minor suggestions for improvement. There is also evidence of discussion of professional and social issues. At times, the feedback seemed to explore issues beyond the confines of the classroom itself. For example, Marie and her supervisor frequently discussed issues such as student attendance and cultural factors in her students' and her own communication, teaching, and learning styles.

University supervisor feedback to Allison and James necessarily encompassed basic instructional practices such as planning and classroom management. Feedback to Allison was concrete and suggested particular activity ideas and instructional techniques like using the board to help clarify her explanations. James was often given specific feedback on classroom management and discipline. Suggested strategies included clapping to get students' attention and rewarding appropriate classroom behavior. In addition, feedback to James and Allison incorporated more instances of deadlines, ultimatums, and checkpoints. For example, Allison's cooperating teacher consistently gave her deadlines for returning homework to students and completing tasks needed to prepare for classes.

Encouragement

All participants naturally desired encouragement from their university supervisors. Because of their levels of competence in the classroom, Noelle and Ron consistently received encouragement in their efforts. Supervisors and cooperating teachers acknowledged their skill and their success. Noelle and Ron displayed a heightened level of professionalism and a strong self-esteem when they sought out genuine feedback from supervisors and teachers rather than empty praise. Likewise, Marie expressed her gratitude to the university supervisor for both the encouragement and criticism she received during post observation conferences. Paul also appreciated the balance of guidance and encouragement provided by his supervisor.

James and Allison, as they struggled to achieve competency, expressed a need for more encouragement. Allison sought constant reassurance and seemed insecure

in her own identity as a teacher. In conferences, the university supervisor was careful always to include discussions of Allison's strengths and her progress as well as her struggles. Allison's fragility was evidenced on the occasions when she felt she was not being adequately supported or encouraged; her eyes would well with tears. James's university supervisor carefully spoke in terms of his progress — even when minimal — in order to give honest encouragement about his work.

Gate-Keeping and Advocacy: Complementary Roles

As we examined the elements of time, feedback, and encouragement, we discovered aspects of both gatekeeping and advocacy. During data analysis, we found that gatekeeping took place with all six participants, as evidenced by suggestions made in formative and summative evaluations, discussions of instructional goals, and ongoing conferences. University supervisors advocated for the students by providing "active support" (Berube et al, 1985, p. 82). They gave instructional support, encouraged them to meet high standards, helped them clarify instructional goals, and assisted them in interpreting classroom events.
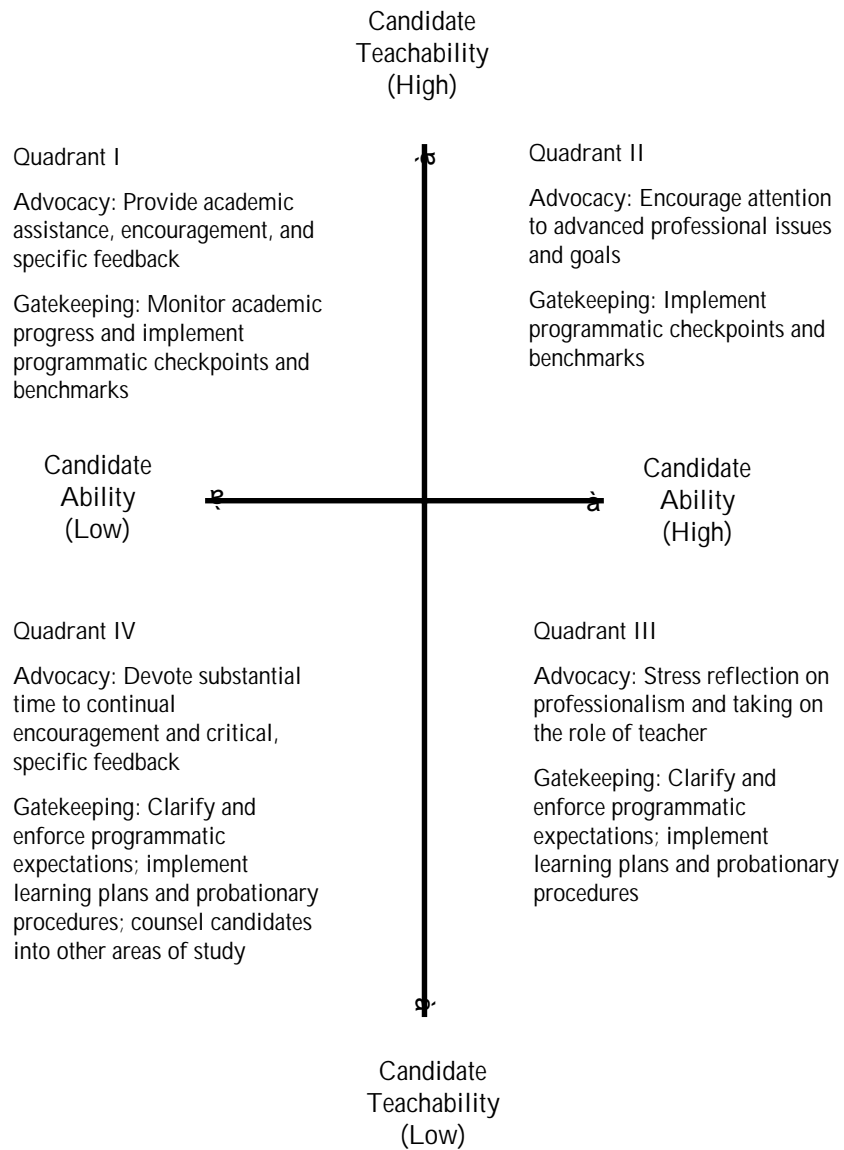
Our investigation of university faculty members' roles in aiding teacher growth was propelled by our belief that there was a potential conflict between the important roles demanded by standards and constructivism. We found, however, that the roles of gatekeeper and advocate were compatible, complementary, and of equal value. Noelle and Ron, who were strong upon entering the program, responded positively to faculty and cooperating teachers in both of these roles. Paul and Marie needed consistent and clear feedback that was not always positive, but also needed to be supported and encouraged. Allison and James, the participants who struggled the most, also needed both advocacy and gatekeeping the most. Interestingly, the advocacy and gate-keeping roles were most effective when embodied in the same individual. The participants seemed most receptive to constructive criticism, especially of a serious nature, when the critic was also their advocate. They needed to believe that their critic had their best interests at heart.

A New Question

As we analyzed the data and thought about the disposition of teachability, another important question emerged: we began to wonder how or if teachability was related to the academic ability of our preservice teachers, as determined by traditional measures like GPA, course examinations, and performance tasks. We conceptualized these two factors in Figure 1, wherein the four quadrants indicate high or low levels of teachability and ability (see Figure 1). By placing our candidates within this scheme, we recognized that teachability was probably separate from ability. Figure 1 indicates how a student's placement in the quadrant pointed toward different supervisory actions.

Quadrant I: Low ability/high teachability. We placed Marie in this quadrant. For preservice teachers like her, gatekeeping is embodied in university faculty's

Figure 1
Supervisory Actions Related to Candidate Ability and Teachability

Candidate
Teachability
(High)

Quadrant I

Advocacy: Provide academic
assistance, encouragement, and
specific feedback

Gatekeeping: Monitor academic
progress and implement
programmatic checkpoints and
benchmarks

Quadrant II

Advocacy: Encourage attention
to advanced professional issues
and goals

Gatekeeping: Implement
programmatic checkpoints and
benchmarks

Candidate
Ability
(Low)

Candidate
Ability
(High)

Quadrant IV

Advocacy: Devote substantial
time to continual
encouragement and critical,
specific feedback

Gatekeeping: Clarify and
enforce programmatic
expectations; implement
learning plans and probationary
procedures; counsel candidates
into other areas of study

Quadrant III

Advocacy: Stress reflection on
professionalism and taking on
the role of teacher

Gatekeeping: Clarify and
enforce programmatic
expectations; implement
learning plans and probationary
procedures

Candidate
Teachability
(Low)

careful attention to checkpoints and academic progress. Advocacy includes providing time, encouragement, and academic assistance to help candidates become more successful in coursework, assignments, and field placements.

Quadrant II: High ability/high teachability. Both Noelle and Ron belong in this quadrant. For those in this category, minimal gatekeeping is needed and is manifested in standard, programmatic checkpoints and observation time. Advocacy may include pushing candidates to think about issues beyond the basic instructional competencies and pointing them toward leadership opportunities.

Quadrant III: High ability/low teachability. Allison is an example of someone who falls into Quadrant III. Candidates like her need extensive encouragement and firm, serious gatekeeping efforts. University supervisors and cooperating teachers may need to provide extra benchmarks and deadlines, extra time in discussing instructional techniques, and more guidance in classroom routines and processes. These candidates may need their confidence built so that they can become responsible agents of their own professional development.

Quadrant IV: Low ability/low teachability. Candidates in this quadrant are like James, in that they display lower levels of ability and teachability but still meet minimum standards. Supervisors need to clarify and enforce programmatic expectations. With careful attention and encouragement, some candidates will continue to grow. Others may select out of the program; others may fail. Gatekeeping and advocacy may include counseling candidates into other areas of study where they might experience more success.

Thinking about our candidates in terms of ability and teachability was useful to us as we explored gatekeeping and advocacy. Clearly, these categories are not static and immutable. People should not and cannot be placed in boxes. Paul demonstrates the fluidity of the categories as he moved from a "low teachability" to a "high teachability" category during his program. One could even say that the quadrants would work better as a cube that adds the dimension of classroom skill and performance. Academic ability, teaching ability, and the disposition of teachability are difficult elements to pry apart and distinguish from one another. In fact, we began to wonder which came first — the chicken or the egg! Still, the quadrants provide a useful way to conceptualize candidate needs at a particular point in time.

Discussion and Implications

Our data suggest, and we believe, that teachability is a key factor in the ease of a student's growth and development. Our findings provide support for the increased attention given disposition in recent years. For example, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) emphasizes disposition in its accreditation standards (NCATE, 2000). However, relying on dispositions such as teachability in evaluating and assisting students is problematic. Currently, there is

little agreement on standards for assessing disposition (Taylor & Wasicsko, 2000, p. 4). In addition, how students display dispositions varies according to context, as do the ways in which faculty interpret student behavior. On the other hand, like others, we have found that disposition is key to becoming an excellent teacher (see, for example, Combs, 1974 and Haberman, 1991, 1998). Teachability becomes not only a gauge by which we judge how candidates will progress, but also a goal to which candidates should aspire. Despite the questions that remain about teachability as a factor in teacher success, our research points to the utility of such a notion in working with preservice teachers.

The unique combinations of candidate teachability and ability demand different responses from university faculty in their roles as gatekeepers and advocates. In considering the multiple types of preservice teachers with whom we worked, we began to understand advocacy as giving them our time, critical feedback, and encouragement. Also, advocacy was not simply stroking candidates' egos or constantly encouraging them. True advocacy entailed nurturing candidates in their development as well as being a gatekeeper by asking candidates to take on increasing responsibility for their own growth. No matter what the teachability and ability of the candidate, the roles of advocate and gatekeeper could not be pried apart. We found that to neglect either role would lead to the licensing of inadequate teachers (i.e., not enough gatekeeping, too much advocacy) or dismissing individuals from programs prematurely who had the potential to become effective teachers (i.e., not enough advocacy, too much gatekeeping). Roles that initially appeared conflicted actually worked in consonance to produce competent teacher candidates.

Conclusion

This research illuminated several themes that helped us understand how preservice teachers developed. We found that the disposition of teachability was key in students' development into successful candidates. For those who lacked teachability or did not acquire this disposition until later on, success was more elusive and the transition from identifying as a student to taking on a teacher role was slower. We also discovered that teachability was not dependent upon academic ability. In fact, levels of both characteristics pointed toward different supervisory behaviors. Gatekeeping and advocacy worked in synthesis but took on different characteristics, depending on the needs of the student.

Our study raises some questions for future exploration. For example, how can teacher educators systematically identify and evaluate dispositions such as teachability? The personal and professional context of a preservice teacher plays a large role in how, when, and whether a candidate evidences teachability. For example, a candidate may display a greater measure of teachability when working with a cooperating teacher than when working with university faculty. We wonder, too, if the nature of field placement settings may prompt different levels of

openness. How do we judge candidate disposition when we know their openness might have been different in a different setting, working with someone else, being somewhere else? How much can we rely on disposition for high stakes decision-making, given its fluidity? What are the ethical and legal implications for using disposition in such decisions?

Finally, the study raises questions for us about the future of those who struggled. Our findings suggest that preservice teachers who struggle the most are able to attain standards with the nurturing, guidance, feedback, and challenges of knowledgeable others such as university faculty and cooperating teachers. What will be the future of these individuals as they become inservice teachers? Will they still need the same structure to help them maximize their effectiveness? How will various models of in-service teacher education affect them, their instruction, and, in turn, their P-12 students? Will the effects of these in-service educational models influence the strong and the struggling differently? These questions should be examined by teacher educators, especially as we are increasingly held accountable for the performance of our program graduates.

Note

[1] Vygotsky (1978) discusses the zone of proximal development, which is the span between what an individual can attain on his or her own and what he or she can attain with the guidance of teachers and/or peer collaboration. Knowledge is not constructed on a completely independent level. Likewise, Bruner's (1990) notion of scaffolding acknowledges the role of the teacher in organizing learning events and guiding student exploration and discovery.

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