

Shifting Paradigms in Teacher Education and Evaluation: A Transition from Dispositions to Ethical Frameworks

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Traditionally, teacher education and evaluation have focused upon aspects of teaching that can be externally observed: namely, a teacher’s knowledge and skills related to content and pedagogy.¹ In the last twenty years—exhibited in the development of standards in the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)—teacher education has attempted the development of tools to evaluate internal aspects of teaching. To this end, evaluation bodies have attempted to identify how internal aspects of teaching might be evaluated. One example of this attempt is NCATE’s inclusion of “dispositions” as an object of teacher evaluation.

While dispositions are a recent addition to teacher evaluation, they are not a new research topic in education and have a history of questionable outcomes.² Current scholarship questions the reliability of assessing teacher dispositions compared to content knowledge and pedagogical skills due to the lack of observable evidence.³ Nevertheless, NCATE’s inclusion of dispositions reflects the recognition that teaching encompasses more than content knowledge and pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of addressing the internal aspects of teaching to establish quality education. Despite NCATE’s intention to evaluate teacher dispositions and internal teaching aspects, this essay highlights the unclear nature and limited effectiveness of “dispositions” as tools for teacher preparation and evaluation.

This essay proposes replacing individual-centered teacher dispositions with community-wide ethical frameworks, where all community members share responsibility. After summarizing critiques that generally question dispositions’ reliability for teacher education and evaluation, a philosophical foundation for “frameworks” will be presented to demonstrate its utility as a substitute for dispositions. Additionally, Claudia Ruitenberg’s argument for hospitality as a specific guiding ethical framework for education will be examined. The aim is to

illustrate that a well-defined and implemented framework can effectively address the issues posed by dispositions in teacher education and evaluation. Finally, I will discuss implications of applying an ethical framework of hospitality in a school setting, for teacher training and evaluation.

DISPOSITIONS IN TEACHER EDUCATION AND EVALUATION

The concept of “disposition” in the context of moral behavior has historical roots dating back to Plato and Aristotle. Plato’s *Meno* contains a debate on whether virtue can be taught or is inherent.⁴ Aristotle defines dispositions as “the nature of virtue or vice in relation to the agent and the possession of a particular frame of mind in any given ethical or moral situation.”⁵ John Dewey discusses “habits of mind” developed through “educative experiences” that lead to a convergence of what one thinks is right and what one does.⁶ Lilian Katz defines dispositions as “patterns of behavior” frequently observed in an individual’s actions, while Anna Richart characterizes dispositions as a collection of tendencies that bridge the gap between abilities and actions.⁷ Luke Robinson defines dispositions as powers, capacities, and tendencies in individuals responsible for explaining moral actions.⁸ A working definition emerges from this scholarship: dispositions are internal traits that manifest as external behavior, providing moral explanations for actions and establishing the necessary connection between cause and effect.⁹

This understanding of dispositions as explanations of moral action underpins the inclusion of dispositions in the evaluation of teacher effectiveness. Holly Thornton asserts that teachers must possess the necessary dispositions to go beyond acting as technical “cogs” and instead effectively engage students through relationships and discourse.¹⁰ Professional teacher measurements align with this definition, where dispositions are viewed as “values and commitments” explaining teacher performance. Standards established by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) since 2000 require teacher candidates to demonstrate “professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help students learn.”¹¹

However, over the two decades since dispositions became a category for

teacher evaluation, there has been a gradual shift away from explicitly defining necessary dispositions.¹² This shift, evident in the 2022 CAEP standards that only reference “professional dispositions,” raises doubts about the usefulness of dispositions as an evaluative metric for teacher effectiveness. Central concerns in the debate/shift include a lack of clear conceptual understanding, consensus on which specific dispositions to assess and teach, and an absence of clear, reliable evidence to establish the presence of a disposition.¹³ Sherman argues that these issues are insurmountable, as certain dispositions may not be sufficiently visible in current teacher assessment models, and the application of evaluation tools like rubrics to assess dispositions is challenging.¹⁴ Yet, while dispositions are flawed as a resource for teacher training and evaluation due to the lack of a specific definition, unclear criteria, and challenges in identifying observable manifestations, completely neglecting the internal aspects of teaching in both teacher education and evaluation is not a viable solution.

FRAMEWORK AS REPLACEMENT FOR DISPOSITIONS

To address the deficiency of current accounts of dispositions, I propose using ethical frameworks as tools for fostering and evaluating teaching’s internal aspects. These frameworks focus on the community, accommodating individual actions as observable phenomena. They allow evaluation through a combination of observing external actions and individual moral reflection, emphasizing teachers’ self-assessment over external judgments. In short, ethical frameworks offer a clear guiding concept for the community, facilitating evaluation through observable actions and reflection by committed community members.¹⁵

The concept of community in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre provides a helpful philosophical grounding for “framework” as a guiding concept. “Community” factors heavily in MacIntyre’s body of work most notably in his most influential work, *After Virtue*.¹⁶ MacIntyre’s “community” constitutes a different way of life in which people work together in genuinely political communities to acquire the virtues and fulfill their innately human purpose. The community is in this way “a group of practitioners” of a particular way of life. This way of life is characterized by commitment to specific virtues or internal goods, which are achieved through actions MacIntyre calls “practices.”

These internal goods can “only be achieved by subordinating ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners.”¹⁷ MacIntyre qualifies what he means by “practice” as “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.”¹⁸ In other words, for MacIntyre, community and practices are linked with the teleological purpose of achieving individual and communal virtues or internal goods.

While much more should (and has) been said about MacIntyre’s concept of community, for the purposes of this essay, it’s more important to consider how this concept might help clarify the function of a framework as a guiding concept for a school community.¹⁹ For MacIntyre, “community” is constructed through a commitment to a particular way of life characterized by observable, distinct practices. Members of the community develop virtues and internal goods through their commitment to and practice of the community’s “way of life.” The “particular way of life” in MacIntyre’s definition of school community is synonymous with my use of “ethical framework”; both guide and determine which actions and traits are desirable for a community and its members.

In his essay, “The Teacher as the Forlorn Hope of Modernity: MacIntyre on Education and Schooling,” James Murphy utilizes MacIntyre’s concept of community to consider how it might work in contemporary education.²⁰ Murphy argues that while such a view might not work as a general system applied to education in the abstract, in the particular (i.e., specific local schools) MacIntyre’s definition of community is an “opportunity” to view individual schools as committed to shared and local virtues or goods. He argues that in this way a community educational model has potential to help students, teachers, and staff develop moral traits and commitments that are absent in traditional education models.

Murphy and the work of other scholars seem to be the bridge be-

tween MacIntyre's philosophy of community and a practical application to actual schools.²¹ Yet, what is lacking in their work is the identification of a specific guiding framework and a description of an actual attempt at application of that framework in a school. Though there are several frameworks that could be explored including three of the most common frameworks utilized in education—autonomy, virtue, and care—Claudia Ruitenberg's proposal of hospitality as the most desirable ethical framework for education provides the best replacement for dispositions, as it is a clearly defined, community driven framework that sees internal traits as manifested in observable external actions.

HOSPITALITY AS ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

In her work, *Unlocking the World*, Claudia Ruitenberg draws on Derrida's philosophy of hospitality as a potential guiding framework for education.²² Ruitenberg sees Derrida's conception of hospitality as another example of a framework for education along with ethical frameworks of autonomy, virtue, and care.²³ Yet, when compared with other frameworks, Ruitenberg finds an ethical framework of hospitality "more workable" to "provide direction" and "guide educational situations."²⁴

Derrida's concept of hospitality is a foundational framework that shapes the relationship between self and others, described as "the ethic of hospitality."²⁵ Derrida distinguishes his form of hospitality from conditional, limited "ordinary" hospitality. His hospitality is unconditional, absolute, and unlimited.²⁶ In her reading of Derrida's *Of Hospitality*, Ruitenberg argues his conception has three ethical demands: addressing guests one cannot fully know, protecting the home while surrendering it to guests, and reciprocating beyond traditional reciprocity.²⁷ This form of hospitality involves creating spaces as an act of responsibility without expecting returns, making it "radically other-centered."²⁸ In her work, Ruitenberg draws out a clear conceptual summary of Derrida's hospitality and principles that might constitute what it means to act hospitably. While it might be fair to suggest that Ruitenberg comes dangerously close to describing hospitality as a set of rules—an anathema to Derrida's argument that ethics cannot be "moral calculus"—Ruitenberg explicitly identifies these ethical demands as "conceptualizing" hospitality rather than creating a set of rules for practicing

hospitality.²⁹ Hospitality is an ethical framework. For Derrida and Ruitenberg, “hospitality is not simply some region of ethics . . . it is ethicity itself.”³⁰

As ethicity itself, hospitality is not limited as an abstract concept but is “capable of informing concrete actions in particular concepts.”³¹ It is this quality of Derrida’s hospitality that Ruitenberg utilizes to explore how an ethical framework of hospitality might impact education. Principally, she argues, an ethical framework of hospitality comes through teachers. Throughout her analysis, Ruitenberg reiterates that hospitality is a “responsibility” for “those who take on the—paid or unpaid, formal or informal—role of educator.”³² Hospitality is “an expression of the educator’s responsibility” to “help the student imagine how [the] currently inhospitable world may become a more hospitable place.”³³ Understanding hospitality as the responsibility of the teacher, Ruitenberg argues, places a requirement on the teacher as host to place hospitality at the center of “each educational encounter” and to orientate their teaching through a framework of hospitality.³⁴

Whether or not a teacher practices an ethic of hospitality is, according to her, able to be determined through the observation of “gestures”—acts that “show how the teacher has thought about how students may find a place in the world.”³⁵ Ruitenberg offers several actions observable in Derrida’s lectures that might be considered as “gestures” of hospitality including, for example, his repurposing of the lecture to invite rather than to impart.³⁶ Yet, she offers no other examples of hospitable teachers in real classrooms: an admittedly disappointing absence.

In their essay, “Improving Educational Experiences for Children in Our Care,” Janzen, et al., share interviews with Canadian school leaders who aim to apply a hospitality framework in their schools.³⁷ Their primary goal is to show that education is deeply tied to ethical commitment and engagement, with hospitality serving as the guiding framework. They illustrate hospitality through Ruitenberg’s concept of “gestures,” defined as everyday actions carried out by educators without expecting recognition or reciprocity, grounded in a strong sense of responsibility to others.³⁸ These gestures include active listening, relationship building, and supporting student advocacy. One remarkable example

in their study is a back-to-school camp where “the purpose was to invite kids to take part in student-organized activities prior to the start of school.”³⁹ The back-to-school camp was developed with the specific intent for students to feel welcomed in their school with no geared outcome or moral development objective and no need for reciprocity on the part of the student for attending the camp. As a simple gesture, the back-to-school camp was an enactment of hospitality in the school community.

IMPLICATIONS

Several important questions remain if the framework of hospitality is a suitable for replacement for dispositions. First, how might a teacher education program train its students in the ability to offer hospitality—which Ruitenberg labels “hospitality.”⁴⁰ Second, what might the evaluation of gestures of hospitality look like in practice?

Training students in how to offer hospitality would require a focus on the cultivation of hospitality as a guiding framework for the individual. For Ruitenberg, hospitality is something to be cultivated in teachers in the same manner as a pedagogical skill.⁴¹ Because hospitality in Derrida and Ruitenberg’s terms is not a therapeutic tool but rather an ethic, the focus should be on the development of teachers who “conceive of themselves as hosts whose teaching is an unconditional gift.”⁴² This development can take place by the conscious connection of hospitality to areas like pedagogical practice and curriculum design. Ruitenberg describes this connection as utilizing “gestures” that can “animate hospitality.”⁴³ She identifies certain types of gestures including ways of encountering students, ways of inviting students into a conversation, and ways of conveying material. In other words, gestures provide ways to practice hospitality and thus, much in the same way other pedagogical skills are cultivated, can be a part of teacher education. Hospitality, then, is an ethic which should be enacted within teacher education programs and not isolated as another abstract theory to be studied. As Ruitenberg reminds us, hospitality cannot be taught through direct instruction, it can only be enacted and modeled.⁴⁴

Schussler, et. al. echoes Ruitenberg’s suggestion that candidates in

teacher education programs should not merely sit in passive observation of enacted hospitality but be given opportunities to put hospitality into practice. Yet, they go beyond Ruitenberg to highlight that the teacher candidates should not only be given opportunities to practice hospitality but also be guided in their ability to reflect on their thinking and their actions.⁴⁵ In so doing, a teacher might learn how to effectively be an educator who “honors the responsibility of welcoming others.”⁴⁶

In a community practicing hospitality, how can members be held accountable to the guiding framework? Ruitenberg emphasizes that hospitality isn’t a quantifiable measure; it’s an ethical concept.⁴⁷ It reveals itself in gestures that demonstrate a teacher’s consideration of how students find their place.⁴⁸ Thus, hospitality cannot be a concept measured by a traditional teacher evaluation where the evaluator sits in judgment determining whether a teacher puts into practice a specific skill or action. Instead, evaluators should identify these gestures of hospitality and encourage self-reflection by the teacher on their actions and underlying thoughts. Through reflection and evaluation, the evaluator also practices hospitality by allowing the teacher to analyze and critique their understanding and enactment of hospitality within the community. This community-centered evaluation seeks to manifest the community’s framework while connecting external actions to internal aspects.

While hospitality enhances teachers’ internal skills, it’s not outcome-oriented for the community or individuals, as Ruitenberg and Derrida emphasize.⁴⁹ By clarifying that hospitality is not about outcomes, Ruitenberg highlights Derrida’s argument that hospitality is a never-ending, impossible demand; that hospitality and attempts to enact it as a framework will always be inadequate for “one never gives enough.”⁵⁰ However, Ruitenberg offers some nuance of the unconditional nature of hospitality by considering its application in the context of teaching. She argues that “teaching cannot be based on the principle of unconditional hospitality” as it “always remains caught in the tension between this principle and the cultural and political conditions that limit its possibility.”⁵¹ Since this is the case, a framework of hospitality is “unreasonable” as an expectation on teachers if achievement is the objective. Ruitenberg notes that this is an observ-

able fact for teachers as “the current conditions of mass schooling in which demand after demand is piled on teachers make it difficult to practice an ethic of hospitality.”⁵² Yet, the impossibility of achieving hospitality or measuring it in terms of outcomes does not lead to hospitality’s rejection, Ruitenbergh argues, but rather justifies employing hospitality as a framework for schools as it “drives the aspiration” of practicing welcome and kindness toward students. However, Ruitenbergh never describes how teachers might learn to navigate the impossibility of achieving complete hospitality.

Christine Pohl in her work on hospitality, *Making Room*, observes that communities that practice hospitality are often overwhelmed by the sheer need of others. Under the pressure of needs all around us, those who practice hospitality are often, “not careful to nourish [their] own lives or put guidelines in place that [make] sure workers had adequate rest and renewal.”⁵³ Lacking these guidelines, communities of hospitality “give up hospitality or the community itself gradually disintegrates.”⁵⁴ If Ruitenbergh’s assertion is right that unconditional hospitality is unreasonable, yet something schools and teachers should aspire to, then Pohl’s suggestion that guidelines be set to prevent teachers and schools from being overwhelmed seems to be an important element of practicing hospitality as a framework.

Pohl uses the term “boundaries” to describe the limits of hospitality as a guiding framework. “Boundaries” seems antithetical to Derrida’s unconditional hospitality as boundaries are conditions or limits. Pohl seems to agree with Derrida when she notes that “boundaries are troublesome in the context of hospitality . . . [as] limiting hospitality seems to undermine what is fundamental to the practice.”⁵⁵ Yet, unlimited and unconditional hospitality is not practical as it fails to take seriously “concerns about limited resources and energy” and “the physical and emotional capacity of hosts.”⁵⁶ To protect those communities and the practice, boundaries must be in place to prevent communities from being overwhelmed and potentially growing heartless or cynical about the needs of strangers.⁵⁷

If hospitality was advocated as a guiding framework that fosters the internal aspect of teaching that leads to higher quality educators, and teachers

were expected to manifest hospitality in their teaching, then schools should heed Pohl's words to set boundaries and limits to support and ensure the flourishing of the hospitality in their community. In other words, Derrida's unconditional hospitality cannot be completely accepted completely in practice but must be accepted pragmatically within the real world of limits and human fatigue.

CONCLUSION

Critics have pointed out the limitations of using dispositions for evaluating and developing internal aspects of teaching due to the lack of clear definitions, specific examples, and observable manifestations. They emphasize the importance of recognizing that effective teaching extends beyond content knowledge and pedagogical skills, necessitating alternative evaluation methods. Frameworks, discussed earlier, provide a promising solution, particularly community-centered ones that rely on reflective assessment and observable gestures. Claudia Ruitenberg's ethical framework of hospitality, drawing from Jacques Derrida's philosophy, illustrates this transition from the abstract to the concrete. Ruitenberg's framework shifts the focus from individual teachers to the classroom or school as the operational center, highlighting the centrality of hospitality in education. This framework's enactment can be measured by observing gestures of hospitality, with researchers like Janzen et al. and Pohl exploring specific manifestations of hospitality. Implementing frameworks like hospitality as a community ethic can effectively replace the development and evaluation of teachers' internal aspects in both pre-service and in-service teacher education.

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