Epic Limitations: Homeric Depictions of Teacher Dispositions

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Abstract: This paper proposes an interdisciplinary use of literary texts in informing contemporary pedagogical thought. Though "soft skills" have always been a part of teachers' expected repertoire, only fairly recently have these skills, now almost exclusively referred to as "dispositions," become a major focus in university teacher preparation programs. As teacher preparation programs wrestle with the complexities of defining and assessing teacher dispositions, we propose that it is helpful to look to the humanities to assist with this navigation, in particular, literary texts. As an example of this process, we analyze Homer's *Iliad* for dispositional insights. In the epic, Homer depicts various teacher dispositions, commenting upon both their effectiveness and their limitations in ways that can further elucidate contemporary discussions and concerns regarding their utility.

Résumé: Cet article propose une utilisation interdisciplinaire des textes littéraires pour éclairer la pensée pédagogique contemporaine. Bien que les « compétences générales » aient toujours fait partie des répertoires attendus des enseignants, ce n'est que très récemment que ces compétences, maintenant presque exclusivement appelées « dispositions », sont devenues un objectif majeur dans les programmes de préparation des enseignants universitaires. Alors que les programmes de préparation des enseignants lutte à définir et évaluer les dispositions des enseignants, nous proposons qu'il soit utile de se tourner vers les sciences humaines pour faciliter cette navigation, en particulier les textes littéraires. À titre d'exemple, nous analysons *l'Iliade* d'Homère puisque, dans l'épopée, Homère dépeint diverses dispositions de l'enseignant, commentant à la fois leur efficacité et

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leurs limites de manière à élucider davantage les discussions et les préoccupations contemporaines concernant leur utilité.

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the importance of P-12 teachers in schools across the globe. As schools have had to transition between online, hybrid, and face-to-face course delivery formats, teachers have had to be flexible and innovative in delivering academic content to their students. Beyond instruction, even, teachers have had to conjure ways to engage, assess, and build and foster relationships with students in virtual formats and in physical classrooms with social distancing, mask-wearing, and consistent interruptions due to mandated quarantining. As many parents also remained at home during the pandemic, they were often able to witness firsthand the innovations and work put in by teachers in this unprecedented time; maintaining this consistent, daily interaction with classroom instruction is nearly impossible for parents during "normal" times. As such, many parents and other members of society expressed a newfound level of appreciation and respect for teachers. For many, teachers have been "taken for granted until we were forced to confront the essential role they play in our children's lives" (Queen's, 2021).

Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has demanded that teachers exhibit innovation, persistence, and attention to detail. These "soft skills" have always been part of teachers' expected repertoire, but it has only been fairly recently that these skills, now almost-exclusively referred to as "dispositions," have gained more attention in college and university teacher preparation programs. As Ana María Villegas (2007) explains, "the term dispositions gained currency in the teacher education discourse during the 1990s" (p. 372). Up to this point, students in teacher preparation programs were engaged in coursework and field experiences centered on "knowledge, skills, and attitudes," but the term "dispositions" has since replaced "attitudes." Professional organizations and accreditation bodies in the United States, such as the Interstate New Teacher Assessment Support Consortium (InTASC) and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), utilized this change in their language, meaning that teacher education programs followed suit. As a result of this change, teacher education programs have been forced to grapple with the meaning of dispositions, particularly regarding desirable dispositions for effective teachers to embrace and demonstrate. Once these desirable dispositions are defined and

selected, teacher educator programs must then find ways in which to foster these dispositions with their students and assess how well their students demonstrate them before becoming certified and entering the teaching profession.

As teacher education programs on college and university campuses continue to contend with these important and complex components of dispositions, it might be helpful to look to other academic disciplines to assist with this navigation. In particular, different ideas, philosophical frameworks, and texts within the humanities continue to embark on questions and discourse on the meaning of dispositions, how they come into being, and what they mean for individuals as they progress through their lives. One fruitful avenue to pursue within the humanities are literary texts, as many characters are depicted possessing various dispositions, which have bearing on their abilities to navigate different components of their lives. The *Iliad*, though it seems so far removed from contemporary pedagogical viewpoints and concerns, is just such a text. In the poem, Homer depicts various teacher dispositions, commenting upon both their effectiveness and their limitations in ways that can further elucidate contemporary discussions and concerns regarding their utility.[1]

Current Conceptions of Teacher Dispositions

In developing a definition of teacher dispositions, Villegas (2007) proposes that dispositions "are tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs. A tendency implies a pattern of behavior that is predictive of future actions" (p. 373). This predictive component of dispositions, for Villegas, means that teacher educator programs can foster dispositions with their students with "some assurance that once program completers who have developed the dispositions (or tendencies) promoted by the program assume the formal role of teachers, their practices will be in keeping with those dispositions" (p. 373). The hope, then, is for teacher education programs to be able to identify dispositions that are critical for teachers to exhibit in P-12 classrooms, and then direct coursework and assessments to foster these dispositions within their students. The identification of dispositions that benefit teachers in working with P-12 students

[1] For an intriguing, and somewhat analogous, case for the continued relevancy of Book 9 of the *Iliad*, though in regard to communication skills in the medical field, see Marshall and Bleakley (2008).

provides its own challenges. As Barbara R. Peterson (2016) explains, "While skills and knowledge in the field of education are fairly easy to define, cultivate, and assess, dispositions have consistently been difficult to define" (p. 3). In moving the focus from "attitudes" to "dispositions," the national accrediting body NCATE defined dispositions as "the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities that affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own professional growth" (Peterson, 2016, p. 3). While NCATE's definition had to be followed by teacher educator programs seeking this national accreditation, the definition itself is vague enough for programs to create their own list of desirable dispositions for teachers. As M. M. Wasicsko (2007) laments, "there are almost as many different definitions of dispositions as there are institutions preparing teachers. However, most institutions have discovered that, while crucial and essential elements to teacher effectiveness, dispositions are difficult to define and operationalize in programs to prepare teachers" (p. 54). Wasicsko notes that most definitions of dispositions created by teacher educator programs under NCATE's rubric include teacher behaviors, characteristics, and perceptions.

Within InTASC's Model Core Teaching Standards (2013), standards that are prominent in teacher educator licensure programs, ideal teacher dispositions include "problem solving, curiosity, creativity, innovation, communication, interpersonal skills, the ability to synthesize across disciplines, global awareness, ethics, and technological expertise" (p. 4). While each disposition listed can be interpreted and assessed in multiple ways, they are ultimately "habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie the performances [that] play a key role in how teachers do, in fact, act in practice" (p. 6). State education departments and teacher educator programs create their own assessments regarding the evaluation of dispositions. In the state of Missouri, for example, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) offers a 192-question assessment to teacher education students called the Missouri Educator Profile (MEP). The MEP assesses "work style preferences used to support the development of effective educator work habits" (Missouri Educator, 2021). The results of the MEP, as DESE explains to students, are compiled in a "Development Report so that you can better understand how your current work habits compare to those of effective educators and what you can do to develop your work

habits further" (Missouri Educator, 2021). Students are encouraged to meet with their advisors to create a professional development plan to better cultivate these work preferences into work habits. The MEP assesses 16 different dispositions that translate into effective work habits for teachers, including persistence, innovation, adaptability, and cooperation. Students are to take this assessment early in their coursework in teacher educator programs, so that students can work on these preferred dispositions in courses and field experiences as they progress towards graduation and certification. Students ideally then enter their own classrooms with these effective work habits and practices already set in place.

Concerns about the assessment of teacher dispositions continue to hold the attention of scholars in the teacher education field (Bradley et al., 2020; Johnston et al., 2018; Strom et al., 2019). Fostering future teachers' skills in creativity (Ayyildiz & Yilmaz, 2021), self-efficacy (Evans-Palmer, 2016), and inquiry (Dunn, 2021) remains a primary focus too. Alongside such pursuits, theorists are considering teacher dispositions in new and innovative ways and frameworks. Teacher dispositions are currently being examined through the lenses of social justice practices (Saultz et al., 2021) and multiculturalism and culturally-responsive teaching (Jensen et al., 2018; Warren, 2018). Scholars are exploring which dispositions are best suited to various environments and students, such as teaching in urban schools (Truscott & Obiwo, 2020) and working with gifted students (Stephens, 2019). As research delves into the implications of teacher dispositions in an ever-growing number of contexts, instilling and assessing dispositions is becoming both more crucial and complex. As is argued below, amidst such growing interest further reflection is needed, including the recognition of the potential limitations of the utility of even the most commonly endorsed dispositions.

While no one set of desired teacher dispositions is universally agreed upon within teacher educator programs, state education departments, or national accreditation agencies, scholars have pointed out that cultivating teacher dispositions, no matter the specific list, requires teacher education students to reflect upon their own behaviors and perceptions. The first step in engaging in teacher dispositions is this critical reflection. In fact, for some scholars, teacher education students need to practice reflection before analyzing and honing their dispositions. Peterson (2016), for example, explains that "Having a disposition for effective teaching requires mindfulness of the complexity of teaching," as teacher

education students need "to have the temperament or disposition necessary to step back and analyze the effect of context on their practice in order to improve the quality of his or her practice" (p. 3). This reflection is particularly vital in engaging with dispositions within teacher education programs. Teacher education students are consistently evaluated and assessed on their professional knowledge and skills, particularly through coursework and state-mandated standardized tests. Dispositions are much more difficult to assess, as they are less objective and as they often manifest in direct contact with students. Shelley Sherman (2006) makes this point in her "Moral Dispositions in Teacher Education: Making Them Matter." She argues that "Dispositions 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). While these interactions can be observed by university supervisors or cooperating teachers in field or practicum experiences, such interactions are often quick, informal, and can be difficult to capture. This ephemeral nature of dispositions makes objective assessments of them challenging. They must be assessed differently than teacher education students' professional knowledge and skills. As Sherman (2006) explains, dispositions "cannot be divorced from instructional skill, but must be recognized as having a distinct quality; they should be discussed in terms of their discrete potential to have an influence on a student at a particular time" (p. 47). Capturing and cultivating this "distinct quality" requires a teacher to engage in reflective practices, such as journaling or recording class sessions to observe these interactions with students and how certain dispositions are utilized effectively.

Homeric Depictions of Teacher Dispositions

While reflective practices are not as clean and neat as more objective assessments, they are vital to cultivating and practicing effective teacher dispositions. For both teacher educator programs and their students, another form of reflection can be utilized too. Future teachers reading literary texts in humanities courses and/or in their teacher education preparation courses can provide another rich means of reflection regarding dispositions.

In particular, Book 9 of Homer's *Iliad* is fertile ground for examining teachers' dispositions. This section of the epic poem has long been utilized as a primary source for the study of rhetoric, with

Homer often being considered the originator of the art.[2] As teaching is highly rhetorical, Homer's portrayal of such skills remains applicable to contemporary pedagogical principles. Depicted in Book 9 are three distinctive teachers, Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax, attempting to instruct a single student, Achilles. Their subject is a single topic: the necessity of Achilles rejoining the Greek forces in battle outside the walls of Troy. Earlier in the poem, Achilles was offended by the unjust words and actions of the Greek commander Agamemnon and had vowed that he and his contingent of soldiers (the Myrmidons) would no longer aid his fellow Greeks in their war to regain Helen. The three teachers are all suited to this task. In today's parlance, they all possess the knowledge and soft skills to instruct Achilles on what he owes his comrades. Though they all possess apt dispositions (like those listed by InTASC) for accomplishing their pedagogical aim, their dispositions differ significantly from one another. Homer, by providing constants of student and subject, allows the reader to explore the ramifications of variable teacher dispositions, to consider their respective merits as well as their limitations.

Before depicting the "classroom" of Book 9, Homer sets the scene on Agamemnon, the de facto Greek leader who has insulted Achilles. Agamemnon has convened a council and, despite nine years of war, is now ready to concede victory and return to Greece. Without Achilles, he knows that his forces have no hope of victory. His pessimism is immediately countered by Diomedes, one of the preeminent Greek warriors. Diomedes disparages Agamemnon's cowardice, contemptuously suggesting that he go home with his own forces and boasting that the rest of the Greeks will remain and defeat the Trojans. Diomedes' fellow leaders approve of his response, and Nestor, an old warrior esteemed for his wisdom, encourages the leaders to feast and, thereafter, further debate what should be done. Nestor reminds Agamemnon and the other leaders about the chief's offence against Achilles and makes this recommendation to encourage Achilles to return to battle: "Let us / even now think how we can make this good and persuade him / with words of supplication and with gifts of friendship" (9.111-3).[3] Agamemnon thereupon acknowledges his fault: "Since I was mad, in the persuasion of my heart's evil, / I am willing to make all good,

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[2] For discussions of Book 9's influence on the history of rhetorical thought, see Kennedy (1963) and Knudsen (2014).

[3] All quotations from *The Iliad* are from Richmond Lattimore's translation (1951) with references to book and line numbers cited in text.

and give back gifts in abundance" (9.119-20). His list of gifts is extravagant, encompassing everything from gold, horses, female slaves, one of his own daughters, seven cities, and, most relevant, Briseis, the woman he had earlier stolen from Achilles, thus offending the hero and causing the rift between him and the other Greeks. Nestor is confident that such gifts will appease Achilles and suggests that Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax be sent with Agamemnon's proposal. As the three leave, "Nestor gave them much instruction, / looking eagerly at each, and most of all at Odysseus, / to try hard, so that they might win over the blameless [Achilles]" (9.179-81).

The three teachers immediately set forth to their classroom, Achilles' encampment. There they find what must surely seem a receptive student. Achilles, sitting with his friend Patroclus, is playing a lyre, which Homer tells us he won in battle. He is "pleasing his heart" by "singing of men's fame" (9.189). That is, Achilles appears to be contemplating prowess in war and the honors gained thereby. No doubt he desires such honors for himself, yet he is unable to do so since he is absenting himself from war. As such, it seems that the teachers have a receptive student, given that their task is to persuade him to return to battle. What is more, upon seeing Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax, Achilles "rose to his feet in amazement" (9.193) and welcomes them, calling them his "friends" (9.197). Quickly, he orders a feast, and, after eating, the teachers begin their instruction.

As suggested above, all three teachers possess beneficial dispositions for their task. Especially, all three share dispositions outlined by InTASC as being effective in the areas of Learning Differences, Learning Environments, Content Knowledge, Application of Content, and Planning for Instruction. Odysseus is the first teacher. His dispositions are particularly strong in the areas of Learner Development and Learner Differences. Odysseus knows his particular audience and adapts the delivery of his information to that audience. First and foremost, Odysseus makes Achilles "feel valued" with "respectful communication" (InTASC, 2013, pp. 17 and 21). His initial words are a compliment of Achilles' feast: "You have no lack of your equal portion / either within the shelter of Atreus' son, Agamemnon, / nor here now in your own" (9.225-7). Knowing that his student feels undervalued and dishonored by Agamemnon, Odysseus begins his instruction by assuring Achilles that he is Agamemnon's equal, at least in his ability to be hospitable. After this ingratiating opening, Odysseus

gets right to the point: Achilles' fellow Greeks need Achilles or they will be destroyed. Clearly, Odysseus is astute with what we today would call content knowledge, but his application of it is equally astute. That is, besides accurately depicting the dire straits the Greeks find themselves in, he is able not only to appeal to Achilles' pity for his comrades but also to his sense of shame and honor. Odysseus explains that most threatening to the Greeks is the onslaught of Hector. That is, Odysseus teaches Achilles that he can at once be a savior to the Greeks and prevent Hector from receiving honor in battle and, consequently, gain those honors himself by reentering the battle.

Odysseus' next tactic shows his disposition to value "the input and contributions of families…in understanding and supporting [a] learner's development" as well as his respect for "families' beliefs, norms, and expectations" and his desire "to work collaboratively with learners and families in setting and meeting challenging goals" (InTASC, 2013, pp. 16 and 45). Namely, he reminds his student of the admonishment Achilles' father, Peleus, gave him as he set off for Troy:

> My child, for the matter of strength, Athene and Hera will give it
> if it be their will, but be it yours to hold fast in your bosom
> the anger of the proud heart, for consideration is better.
> Keep from the bad complication of quarrel, and all the more for this
> the Argives will honour your, both their younger men and their elders. (9.254-8)

Reminding Achilles of this pertinent advice appeals at once to Achilles' clearly-displayed desire for honor as well as family loyalty.

Lastly, Odysseus instructs Achilles regarding the gifts Agamemnon has promised upon the hero's return to battle. In reciting, nearly verbatim, the catalogue of gifts, Odysseus displays beyond any shadow of a doubt his Content Knowledge. He does, however, alter the very end of the list, showing further his dispositions suited to Learner Development and Learner Differences. Agamemnon concluded his list of gifts with this ultimatum: "Let [Achilles] give way.…And let him yield place to me, inasmuch as I am the kinglier / and inasmuch as I can call myself born the elder" (9.158-61). Odysseus, however, after faithfully reciting the list of gifts, concludes thusly: "Now you might kill

Hektor, since he would come very close to you / with the wicked fury upon him, since he thinks there is not his equal / among the rest of the Danaans the ships carried hither" (9.304-6). Odysseus has recognized the potential of Agamemnon's conclusion to lend further weight to Achilles' claim that he has been dishonored by the leader. Known throughout both of Homer's epics as possessing extreme prudence and cleverness, Odysseus adapts his material, omitting this section and replacing it with a final appeal to the honor Achilles would gain by defeating Hector.

Despite Odysseus' promising dispositions and a student seemingly receptive to his instruction, Odysseus is far from achieving success. Indeed, Odysseus' very reputation for adaptability seems to rouse suspicions in his student, as he asserts early in his reply, "as I detest the doorways of Death, I detest that man, who / hides one thing in the depths of his heart, and speaks forth another" (9.312-3). The subject matter, also, prevents Odysseus from being effective. That is, the extravagance of the gifts seems to be insulting to Achilles, as if they are an attempt to buy him off. He argues that he would not yield even for the sake of twenty times the amount. These considerations render him adamant about not returning to battle: "neither / do I think the son of Atreus, Agamemnon, will persuade me, / nor the rest of the Danaans" (9.314-6). In fact, he tells Odysseus that he plans to set sail for home with his fellow Myrmidons on the following morning.

In this first instance of instruction, then, Homer suggests some limitations of seemingly fruitful teacher dispositions. Excessive adaptability, apparently, can be perceived as insincerity. What is more, even with a largely receptive student, some subject matter seems difficult to teach despite productive teacher dispositions. That is, Agamemnon's list of gifts, even with Odysseus' alteration, is too insulting for Achilles to consider seriously.

After the hero's adamantly negative response to Odysseus, Phoenix begins his instruction. In his threat to leave for home on the next morning, Achilles has invited Phoenix to join him. It is with this invitation that Phoenix begins, reminding Achilles of their close ties and acknowledging that he could not bear to be separated from him.[4] As Phoenix reminds Achilles in a lengthy autobiographical digression, he owes his life to Achilles' father, Peleus, and, indeed, had long served as a father figure to Achilles:

[4] For the further ramifications of Phoenix's autobiographical discussion, see Scodel (1982).

> I made you all that you are now
> And loved you out of my heart, for you would not go with another
> Out of any feast, nor taste any food in your own halls
> Until I had set you on my knees, and cut little pieces
> from the meat, and given you all you wished, and held the wine for you.
> And many times you soaked the shirt that was on my body
> with wine you would spit up in the troublesomeness of your childhood.
> So I have suffered much through you, and have had much trouble,
> Thinking always how the gods would not bring to birth any children
> Of my own; so that it was you, godlike Achilleus, I made
> My own child, so that some day you might keep hard affliction from me. (9.485-95)

Such a relation is clearly sanctioned by Peleus, for he sent Phoenix to Troy to accompany the young Achilles, inexperienced in battle, "to teach [Achilles] all these matters, / to make [him] a speaker of words and one who accomplished in action" (9.443-4). Necessarily, then, more than the other teachers, Phoenix recognizes and utilizes Achilles' particular personal and family background as well as familial expectations.

In fact, Phoenix couples the piety Achilles owes toward his father and himself as a reason to rejoin battle to the piety the hero owes to the gods, which offers the same lesson. After the autobiographical section of his instruction, the teacher moves to a theological example. Again in line with familial expectations, Phoenix warns Achilles about the dangers of impiety toward the gods with a theological exemplum. The story indicates that one who is offended by another but thereafter offered recompense can respond in two ways: rejecting or accepting the supplication (9.497-512). The moral of the story is that Zeus punishes the former and rewards the latter, and Phoenix explicitly applies this lesson to Achilles, indicating that he should accept the supplication of Agamemnon in recompense of his offense.

Phoenix bolsters this argument with a historical exemplum, fitted to both Achilles' situation and his temperament. The long story he tells is of Meleager, the greatest warrior of the Calydonians,

who, due to his anger, withdraws himself from defense of his city during an enemy attack (9.529-99). Even while the enemy is pressing at the gates and he has been offered many gifts, he continues to refuse. Only after his wife's pleas does he rejoin the battle and beat back the enemy, but by that time it is too late to receive the promised gifts. As with the theological exemplum, Phoenix makes it clear how this story's moral applies to Achilles, ending his lesson with a final plea to return to battle now with the assurance of gifts and the honors that come with them.

With Phoenix, even more than with Odysseus, Homer has depicted a teacher to whom a student is surely receptive. Nonetheless, Phoenix does not accomplish his goal: Achilles still has not learned that it is necessary for him to return. The hero even retorts that he no longer desires the honors given by fellow mortals; instead, he is content with the honors Zeus bestows upon him (9.607-10). Still declining to fight, Achilles does, however, budge from his intention to sail away from Troy the next morning. Now, he says, Phoenix will remain with him overnight, and the two of them will decide whether to leave in the morning (9.616-9). Nonetheless, Phoenix's particular adaptability (his use of exempla), his unique ability to invoke familial concerns, or the combination of both may make him a more, at least slightly, effective teacher than Odysseus. Or it may be the accumulation of both Odysseus' and Phoenix's teaching that has swayed Achilles to decide what to do in the morning.

As preparation for Phoenix's accommodations immediately begins, Ajax, the last of the three teachers of Book 9 commences his lesson. Though lacking the cunning of Odysseus and the wisdom, authority, and ties of kinship of Phoenix, Ajax may perhaps know best the "strengths and needs" of Achilles (InTASC, 2013, p. 16). He is a foremost warrior of the Greeks, honored greatly by his friends. Indeed, he seems to read the character of his student so well as to almost despair of persuading him. He begins his lesson indirectly, by addressing Odysseus instead of Achilles. Indeed, the majority of his short lesson is spoken to Odysseus, though clearly with the intention of Achilles overhearing it. To Odysseus he communicates his hopelessness of swaying the hero, how Achilles is "hard, and does not remember that friends' affection / wherein we honoured him by the ships, far beyond others" (9.630-1). Able to recognize the bonds that tie battlefield comrades together more than either Odysseus or Phoenix, Ajax has the knowledge of Achilles and the credibility to stir up shame in him, knowing how to use his

"misconceptions as opportunities for learning" (InTASC, 2013, p. 16). Ajax then briefly confronts the hero, reminding him once more how unreasonable he is not to accept Agamemnon's gifts and closing with a final appeal to the honor he will receive by returning to battle.

The very shortness of his lesson relative to those of the preceding teachers fits well the warrior disposition of Ajax; so too his heavy reliance on appealing to Achilles' sense of shame and his desire for honor. This kinship of disposition between teacher and student may best explain why his lesson is most effective (though still falling short of its ultimate goal). Achilles even gives him this compliment: "all that you have said seems spoken after my own mind" (9.645). Though he still cannot forego his anger at Agamemnon, Achilles now says that he will remain at Troy and even goes so far as to say that he will fight Hector and the Trojans, though not before they attack his own Myrmidon encampment.

At the end of the school day, Phoenix remains with Achilles, and Odysseus and Ajax return to report to Agamemnon and the other Greek leaders. Upon hearing of their failure, Diomedes once again speaks up. Through him, Homer gives one indication of why they have failed: "I wish you had not supplicated the blameless son of Peleus / with innumerable gifts offered. He is a proud man without this / and now you have driven him deeper into his pride" (9.698-700). That is, not even the comrades most suited to sway Achilles had much of a chance due to the insulting nature of Agamemnon's proposal. Likewise, even teachers with effective dispositions, such as problem solving, creativity, innovation, communication, and interpersonal skills, have little chance of surmounting the obstacle of subject matter that is unpalatable to their students. As it turns out, it takes the death of Achilles' beloved friend, Patroclus, at the hands of Hector, to persuade Achilles to fight once more. Homer is certainly pessimistic about the effectiveness of seemingly well-disposed teachers. However, Achilles' progressive intentions, from leaving the next day to a willingness to fight in self-defense, shows that well-suited teachers can be successful, albeit in a limited manner. And it may be that Homer intends us to view Phoenix as more effective than Odysseus, and Ajax more effective than Phoenix. If so, Homer implies that some dispositions may be more valuable than others. Homer's three teachers have but a single student, to whom they seem able to adapt their teaching skillfully, though ultimately unsuccessfully. Homer, therefore, appears pessimistic about teachers' abilities to overcome

the challenges of adapting to multiple students in a classroom, all of whom differ in respect to worldviews, familial expectations, and prior knowledge and experiences.

Implications for Today

Within teacher preparation programs dispositions are crucial. The major accreditation body for teacher education preparation programs in the United States, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), having replaced NCATE, still relies on InTASC's Model Core Teaching Standards and the dispositions found within them. Dispositions carry importance for these programs, and they carry importance for students within these programs as well. Considerations of these dispositions are intersecting in more and more diverse psychological, economic, social, and political contexts. Students' dispositions are continually evaluated through their coursework and field experiences, and failure to meet expectations on effectively practicing these dispositions can lead to probation or even removal from programs. Because of the high-stakes nature of dispositions within teacher educator programs, it is crucial to think deeply on how these dispositions are chosen, promoted, and evaluated. To help buttress this effort, looking outside the field of teacher preparation can help clarify some of these considerations of teacher dispositions. Following Ellen Condliffe Lagemann (2005), who has called for the use of "the humanities in education to illuminate our dilemmas and uncertainties" (p. 23), we suggest that Book 9 of Homer's *Iliad* is one text to help scholars and future teachers more clearly articulate and reflect upon the nature, benefits, and limitations of teacher dispositions.

Homer seems to imply that adaptability as a teacher disposition supersedes all other dispositions. His characters all must adapt to both the content and the student in their interactions with Achilles. In examining InTASC's list of ideal teacher dispositions, adaptability arguably plays a role in each. Teachers need to show some flexibility in working with students, families, and colleagues, while utilizing skills such as problem solving, innovation, and communication. Homer shows clearly how adaptability is essential in the various ways his "teachers" engage with Achilles. More importantly, perhaps, is Homer's recognition that teacher dispositions ultimately face certain limits in their utility. Even if ideal teacher dispositions are honed and practiced effectively, content and audience can overwhelm these dispositions.

Even if teachers possess ideal dispositions, these attributes by themselves may not be enough to overcome teaching content that students do not find engaging or relevant. Students, for myriad reasons, may be disengaged from learning and participating in teaching and learning. As teacher educator preparation programs continue to focus on dispositions and their assessment through accreditation and state licensure agencies, we must, at the same time, acknowledge the limits of ideal teacher dispositions. Though so distant from us chronologically, geographically, and culturally, Homer recognized these limitations, and as teacher education programs continue to engage in high-stakes accountability measures for teachers, we would do well in bringing this acknowledgement to education policy and practice today. As educators' soft skills remain paramount due to the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, similar examinations of other literary texts can likewise yield additional insights into the definitions and effectiveness of teacher dispositions.

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