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A Proposed Foundation for a Theory of Leadership Disposition Development

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About CASTL

The Center for Advancing the Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) was established in 1998 in the Department of Foundations and Leadership at Duquesne University School of Education. CASTL engages in research programs dedicated to understanding, advancing and disseminating evidence-based study of the teaching-learning process.

Mission and Goals

The Center for Advancing the Study of Teaching and Learning promotes systematic and intentional inquiry into the teaching-learning process and, through careful and collegial study of learning-centered environments, seeks to advance the understanding and dissemination of evidence-based study of the teaching-learning process in service of all learners.

To promote its mission, CASTL intentionally pursues the following goals:

- Promote socially just, learning-centered environments that bring excellence and equity to all learners;
- Foster systematic and intentional inquiry into the beliefs that educators hold about educational theory and research and effective practice;
- Honor research, theory, and practice as legitimate and complementary sources of knowledge regarding the teaching-learning process;
- Elevate professional learning and educational practice to the level of scholarship;
- Advance the conceptual framework of leadership as learning;
- Develop a knowledge network fueled by researchers, theorists and practitioners who contribute to advancing the study of the teaching-learning process;
- Establish and perpetuate an international community of teacher-scholars representing a variety of teaching and learning environments;
- Promote and coordinate communication within a network of educational institutions and organizations that collaborate in the recruitment and education of teacher-scholars;
- Create a culture of professional learning based on research situated in schools and in other learning environments;
- Examine and develop methodologies by which the teaching-learning process is studied;
- Advocate for the enhancement of the teaching-learning process in service of all learners; and
- Share what is learned about the teaching-learning process.
This report is one of a series from our ongoing research effort to advance the study of teaching and learning. If you have any questions or comments on this report, or if you would like to find out more about the activities of CASTL, contact:

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Abstract

There are a number of significant problems relative to developing an explanatory theory of how leadership dispositions are defined, how they develop, and how they can be put in service of leadership development and renewal. *Disposition* is a ubiquitous term that has been defined in numerous ways across diverse fields. This paper draws on diverse fields to develop a theory of disposition development within educational leadership. The paper suggests that in order to fully understand the meaning of dispositions and their relationship to effective leadership, the field needs a theoretical framework that explores, among other things, the relationships among beliefs, knowledge, intellectual development, hot and cold cognition, and intentional conceptual change through systematic and intentional inquiry. The paper is part of a larger design-based research project of the Center for Advancing the Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at Duquesne University. The study is taking place in CASTL’s principal development program known as the Principal Network.
Introduction

Much harm in the world is done by people who believe that they are doing good. Each controversy has believers on all sides and their beliefs affect the daily climate of our schools—schools that are fundamentally built on the beliefs that we hold and the actions that we take based on our beliefs. As educational leaders we strive to do our best while doing no harm. Yet, without constant and critical excavation of the beliefs that we hold, we can often have an impact that is at serious odds with our intent.

We are not the first to struggle with our hidden beliefs. History reminds us too well that almost anything that we now deplore in our personal and social lives was somewhere, and at some time, acceptable. Many of those who we now consider as the world’s greatest leaders embodied customs and cultures, that by today’s standards are discriminatory, prejudicial, and socially unjust. Our beliefs—right or wrong—drive decisions. In other words, leaders do not do what is right, they do what they believe is right or just. (Moss, 2004).

While disparity can exist for all humans between just intentions and the impact of actions intended to promote justice, the disparity is especially prevalent for those who lead. Leaders enjoy levels of privilege and have the luxury of referring and responding only to what they intended to do, say, or promote, regardless of the impact they may have on people, policies or other outcomes. Because of these levels of privilege, leaders can be blinded to the realities of their perspectives, remain satisfied with the status quo, and become increasingly unable to see the flaws in their own thinking and actions. In fact, we can safely conclude that most individual-level oppression is probably unintentional, but we can just as firmly conclude that unintentional oppression hurts just as much as intentional oppression. Undoubtedly, then, beliefs matter in matters of leadership, democracy, ethics, and social justice.

Current educational leadership literature reminds us that “educational leaders must address issues of power, control and inequity…engage in dialogue, examine current practice, and create pedagogical conversations and communities that critically build on, and do not devalue, students’ lived experiences” (Shields, 2004). In order to prepare future educational leaders to address these issues, we are challenged to design leadership programs that actively engage candidates in issues of power and privilege by making social justice experiences integral to leadership development (e.g., Brown, 2004). Creating programs that graduate leaders who are disposed toward ethical leadership is not only a tall order, but also a unique opportunity. As we recreate our leadership programs we can simultaneously investigate ways to gauge the effectiveness of our efforts. Simply put, perhaps our tallest order should be to design and employ sound research methods that provide multiple and longitudinal measures to highlight rigorous, programmatic research and provide empirical evidence for our claims that holding a specific set of beliefs and dispositions is essential (Tatto, 2001; Tattoo & Coupland, 2003).
To focus on matters of democracy, ethics and social justice without examining the impact of our interventions and the roles that beliefs play in the decisions that we make is decidedly wrong-headed; and, to do so without gathering empirical evidence that validates our decisions, is fool-hardy at best. In order to produce educational leaders who can create and foster learning environments that dignify human rights and uphold principles of social justice for all students, teachers, administrators, and staff, principal preparation programs must engage candidates in experiences that promote change at a belief altering level. To do so, these programs must develop systematic and intentional forms of inquiry that compel candidates to excavate and challenge the beliefs that they hold and weigh those beliefs against evidence from theory, research, and effective practice to validate beliefs that promote effective leadership and transform those beliefs that do not.

In this paper, I attempt to build a foundation for a theory of leadership disposition. Theory has been condemned and celebrated in educational practice. Those who champion constructing theoretical foundations for our practice remind us that sound theory enables us—and perhaps even compels us—to see our practice in light of perspective that is much broader than our view from the crucible of practice. During practice we are often subjected to forces that test us and cause us to question our direction. Theoretical frameworks help us to see the connections between our practice and the work of others, provide useful lenses through which we can examine our intentions versus our impact, and allow us to transfer our learning from one experience or context to another with coherence.

The foundations of the theory that I advance rest on the roles that beliefs play in every facet of our lives as educators. The paper explores belief formation and transformation within educational contexts to examine the beliefs that leadership candidates bring with them to their principal development program and ways that those beliefs either change or emerge unchanged depending on several factors. As part of that exploration, the paper illustrates the reciprocal relationships among belief, knowledge and disposition and focuses on those attributes of each that might contribute to effective methods of fostering dispositional growth and gathering empirical evidence to document it.

**Are We Painting the Roses Red?**

For the past decade, schools of education have faced a growing consensus that our leadership preparation programs do not adequately prepare our graduates to meet current leadership challenges or the demands of the future (e.g., Edwards, 2000; Elmore, 2000; Levine, 2005; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996; Peterson, 2002; Richardson, 1997). What’s more, our attempts to improve our programs in light of that criticism are falling decidedly short.

In her introduction to a major research study of current educational leadership literature, research, and programs, Wallace Foundation President M. Christine DeVita characterized the status of leadership preparation programs this way: “…it is disconnected from real-world complexities… curricula often fail to provide grounding in effective teaching and learning…mentorships often lack depth or opportunities to test leadership in real situations…[and] admission standards lack rigor”. As a result, she concludes “…too many graduates will eventually be ‘certified’ but not truly ‘qualified’ to effectively lead school-wide change” (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005, p.1).

After nearly a decade dedicated to improving leadership preparation, we are learning an all too simple truth—“not all changes are created equal, and cosmetic change is really no change at all” (Moss, 2001). One reason for our present state is that many studies claiming increased effectiveness in developing quality
principals warrant their claims by using their candidates’ self-reports of experiences and perceptions. As a result we find ourselves with a weak and incoherent research base for developing principal knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005).

A famous scene from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* provides an apt metaphor for our current situation. In the scene, we find Alice in the rose garden of the Queen of Hearts. There, Alice watches a group of playing cards feverishly painting white rose blossoms with red paint to answer the Queen’s call for red roses. The Queen, however, is not fooled by their cosmetic changes. Angered by their failure to plant bushes that actually produce red roses, she dispatches the cards to their doom crying, “Off with their heads!”.

Are we, in our efforts to equip our principal candidates with desirable leadership dispositions merely tinkering on the surface? Are we painting the roses red, rather than promoting deeply-rooted, transformational change, that lasts beyond our university campuses and our leadership programs? Unless we look beyond the red paint of cosmetic change and the thin research base that we cite to “verify” those changes, we may lose more than our heads in the bargain.

**Avoiding The Pentimento Effect in Leadership Development Programs**

A particularly insidious cosmetic change occurs as the “pentimento effect” (Moss, 2001). In the art world, pentimento describes the growing transparency of the top layer of a painting that with age can cause the underlying elements of the previous painting to show through. This can happen when someone attempts to alter, change, or paint a completely different image over an original. The pentimento effect can be caused by the quality of the paint, the technique used by the painter, or the ravages of time under certain conditions that weaken the bond between the new paint and the old paint causing the top layer to disintegrate, lose its opaque properties, or partially or entirely flake off. The overall effect is that the under painting emerges relatively unchanged.

The pentimento effect provides a useful lens for examining the structures, processes, and methods that we use to prepare administrators; along with what we count as evidence that meaningful learning and growth has occurred. And, unless we are mindful of the characteristics of deep-rooted change, many of our well-intentioned efforts may do little more than mask our candidates’ original behaviors for the short time that they are enrolled in our programs. New beliefs cannot simply be layered over existing beliefs in effective and lasting ways.

Current research is helping us replace a view of learning as cold cognitive science with the recognition that “hot cognition” (Abelson, 1963; Kunda, 1999), or cognitions influenced by motivation, are at the heart of meaningful learning. Therefore, avoiding the pentimento effect depends on our understanding of the influences that belief and emotion have on learning, and specific to this discussion, on learning to lead. Leadership embodies the whole person and represents a “harmony of the mind, heart, and spirit, within the moment of action” (Moss, 2004, p. 4). And considering the insights of “hot cognition” a phrase like “the heat of the moment” begins to take on new meaning.

Our cognitive processes are heated by our commitments to those we serve, our reactions to leadership challenges, the belief-laden and emotional perspectives that arise in the “heat of the moment” and determine both our leadership strategies (e.g. persuasion; stereotyping) and our decisions (Hamill, & Lodge, 1985; Janis, 1982; Kowert, 2001; Thagard, 2003). Leaders are not less “emotional than other people. They
intentionally employ a different suite of emotions in their work from what is appropriate both in personal life and in other vocational settings” (Posner, 1999, p.325). Effective leaders are aware of how their motivations, directional goals, mindsets (views of what is “right”), outcome dependency, arousal, and self-affirmation affect their reasoning and judgments. These are the kinds of leaders that we must produce. It follows then that we must develop principals who “in the heat of the moment” can remain committed to central principles of democracy.

Deep commitments develop when leaders become keenly aware of their own beliefs, all of their beliefs—those that are positive and those that yield a toxic influence on their best intended decisions. This keen awareness helps them “learn how to project a clear and grounded human presence, become aware of limiting behaviors and beliefs, and make just and ethical choices” (Moss, 2004, pg. 8). Principled leaders are not forged in leadership programs that do not require excavation of personal and professional beliefs or in programs that provide the kind of comfortable experiences that lead to simplistic certainties. Committed and principled leaders are forged through challenging learning experiences that intentionally promote dissonance, skepticism, and uncertainty. The precursor of deep conceptual change is an emotional state that involves finding ourselves in a situation where we become aware of the inconsistency or incompatibility between our actions or beliefs, and where we are compelled to resolve the discrepancy to reach consonance. This state, known as the state of genuine doubt (Peirce, 1931-1938) is where belief transformation begins. Our sense of uncertainty and discomfort actually initiates the process of cognitive change (belief transformation), and without being led into uncomfortable uncertainty; no significant change in thinking can result (Ashton & Gregoire-Gill, 2003).

Once we are in a state of genuine doubt, we begin to employ a specific type of meaning-making known as abductive reasoning—a process that consists of uncovering and studying essential elements of a perspective, issue, or event and devising a theory to explain those elements (Cunningham, Schreiber, & Moss, 2005; Shank & Cunningham, 1996; Schreiber & Moss, 2002). One way to promote this type of reasoning in our leadership programs is to engage candidates in coordinated and programmatically congruent learning experiences that lead them into doubt, cause them to reveal and challenge the beliefs that they hold, weigh those beliefs against relevant educational theory, research, and effective practice, and alter or replace those beliefs that keep them from reaching consonance.

The Distinction and Relationship between Beliefs and Knowledge

Beliefs have become central to examinations of leaders who can positively influence student achievement (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Yet while we recognize the important role that beliefs play, we commonly interchange the term beliefs with terms like attitudes, values, perceptions, theories, and assumptions, all of which Pajares (1992) argues are beliefs in disguise. This carelessness has us talking at cross-purposes and clouds our ability to define the concept of “belief” and distinguish it from “knowledge”.

Beliefs form the base state of cognition through which we make sense of the world (Cunningham, 1998) and as such beliefs are the best gauges of the decisions that we make in our lives (Bandura, 1986; Dewey, 1933; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Pajares, 1992). While there are many definitions for “belief” that exist across contexts, educational researchers share the opinion that “beliefs are psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions that are felt to be true” by the individual embracing them (Richardson, 2003, pg. 2). In other words, beliefs are not certainties outside the individual, their truth lies...
in the conviction of the individual and that conviction does not require evidence or warrants from any external source. And there lies the important distinction between beliefs and knowledge. Beliefs are premises that an individual assumes to be true. As such, beliefs do not require the same epistemic warrants or truth conditions—evidence to back up a claim—that merit the label knowledge (Green, 1971; Leher, 1990; Feiman-Nemser & Flodin, 1986). The term “knowledge”, on the other hand, describes a set of warranted claims that a group of experts agrees are true (Green, 1971; Richardson, 2003). Knowing something and believing something, then are not one in the same. Yet, since beliefs are the base of all cognition (Cunningham, 1998), we can have no knowledge that is not somehow connected to our belief system. This relationship can play havoc in the life of a leader. The 19th century author and humorist Artemis Ward put it this way, "It ain't so much the things we don't know that gets us in trouble. It's the things that we know that ain't so." In other words, it is not what leaders know or do not know that can hurt them and those they serve, but rather, it is what leaders BELIEVE they know (that is actually false) that does significant damage. Clearly then, we must develop ways to engage principal candidates in learning experiences that promote belief excavation and exploration so that their leadership impact is not at odds with their intent. Creating and gauging those experiences, though, is not an easy task and rests squarely on our understandings of how our candidates think, learn, reflect upon, and judge their own actions in light of a lifetime of learning and experience.

Leadership: A Journey of Intellectual and Ethical Development

Most college educators readily agree that aspiring principals arrive at the university equipped with “common sense” beliefs and theories formed and changed through lived experiences in schools (Kitchener, 2002). While there is little dispute that beliefs exist and change, there are differing perspectives about how those beliefs form and transform and the role that leadership development programs play in that process. Many university educators mistakenly assume that once principal candidates come to class, hear the truth, and restate the truth in their assignments and reflective exercises, their prior beliefs (if they had any) will be changed. This assumption disregards the tenacity and the influence of the beliefs that principal candidates bring with them and creates an environment where the “pentimento effect” will thrive.

An important factor, not commonly discussed in learning-to-lead literature, is the role that cognitive processes play in new learning and decision-making. One model for considering their role is Perry’s Taxonomy of Adult Intellectual and Ethical Development in College Years (1970, 1999). Perry’s model can be mapped onto other models for intellectual and moral growth (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; Goleman, 1995; King & Kitchener, 2002; Kohlberg, 1981) and is discussed here as an example rather than as an exemplar. While not a perfect model (Perry gathered his research at Harvard on a mostly male population) it has been used to gauge learning and thinking (Finster, 1989, 1991; Nilson, 2003) in university programs and provides a lens through which we can examine the cognitive forces that are at work. This lens can help us recognize the degree of intellectual sophistication that our candidates must develop in order to meaningfully grapple with matters of ethics, social justice, and democracy.

According to Perry, most undergraduates move through five cognitive stages. Beginning with the stage of dualism, characterized by a certainty that right and wrong answers exist for every problem; they progress through three stages of multiplicity—early, mid, and late multiplicity—where they begin to realize the legitimacy of uncertainty, come to understand that uncertainty and ambiguity are part of the nature of knowledge itself, and decrease their reliance on authority. By the time they get to late multiplicity, they realize what it means to construct and master their own knowledge and recognize the importance of outside
and credible evidence. At the fifth stage, relativism, they understand that multiple ways of thinking about an issue are available to them as choices among thought processes and that each thought process has a value depending on the issue, the context, and the desired outcome.

Undoubtedly, to prosper from principal development programs, aspiring principals must be able to use relativist thinking in order to be able to discern relative values of competing arguments and develop conceptual frameworks that support their judgments about educational issues. Yet, researchers note that most bachelor degree graduates, and therefore most candidates in principal preparation programs, rarely use relativist thinking, and routinely employ multiplicity as their most sophisticated mode of reasoning when addressing real-world problems. This is true whether they hold bachelors degrees in liberal arts or professional education (King & Kitchener, 1994; Nelson, 1997).

The remaining stages of Perry’s model—those stages beyond relativism—are of particular importance to principal preparation programs. These stages explain how intellectual development affects the ways a person lives his or her life by illustrating the relationship between knowing something and acting on it. At the upper stages of the model, an individual understands that a career choice requires clarification of moral values by which to live one’s life and progresses through deeper and deeper levels of commitment, and meld the moral, the affective and the intellectual—the bond we find in an effective principal. A person who reaches the highest levels of intellectual development also makes a commitment to continual growth, searching, and the ever-present possibility of change. Helping individuals become more capable at sophisticated thinking and ethical commitment requires expert scaffolding from more capable individuals who intentionally pull cognitive development and moral maturity. Perry says that this scaffolding must be situated in significant experiences coupled with reflective thought—it cannot occur by requiring reflective thought alone. It requires what Cunningham (1992) refers to as “reflexivity”. Reflexive individuals examine their experiences in order to turn their new learning back on itself to change their understandings, concepts, and beliefs, if warranted.

Clearly there is a fusion that exists between the ability to reason in more sophisticated ways and the capacity to reach a higher stage of commitment to ethics, democracy, and social justice. These sophisticated modes of reasoning and bone-deep commitments to ethical leadership require that we graduate leaders who can deal with the ambiguities and ill-defined natures of the real problems that will face them in schools. To accomplish this goal, principal development programs must provide the rigor and challenge that lead candidates into states of genuine doubt, that require them to reason in increasingly sophisticated ways and that fuse the intellectual and ethical/moral plane. That fusion requires that we recognize how beliefs influence the sophistication of the thinking processes that leaders choose and the commitments that they make to moral principles of conduct.

Beliefs and Learning to Lead

The beliefs that educational leaders hold shape their visions of their school as well as their actions and decisions of practice (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Glasman, 1984; Greenfield, 1991; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1990; Lezotte, 1990; Purkey & Aspy, 1998). Yet, while we agree that we must foster certain beliefs within our principal candidates, little has been written about the nature of the beliefs they bring with them and the role those beliefs play in both learning to lead and the evolutions of their leadership careers. The process of becoming a leading educator is intimately related to an individual’s personal beliefs and experiences about education (Ashton, 1990; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992;
Buchmann, 1984; Richardson, 1996; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998; Wilson, 1990; Wubbels & Korthagen, 1990). In fact, personal experiences with schooling and instruction are perhaps the most important source of the beliefs that educators hold (Richardson, 2003).

Compared to graduate students in other professions, educators enter their principal program with an extensive experiential base; a base that began when they entered pre-school, continued throughout their elementary and high school years, and that can remain unchanged even through their teacher development programs. Because of that profoundly internalized base, these “early experiences strongly influence final judgments, which become theories (beliefs) highly resistant to change” (Pajares, 1992, p. 317). Lortie (1975) refers to this phenomenon as the “apprenticeship of experience”. Because of this lifelong apprenticeship, educators’ beliefs about teaching, learning, and schooling are particularly deeply rooted, densely entangled and more tacit than explicit (Moss, 2002a, 2003; Moss & Schreiber, 2004; Richardson, 2003; Schreiber & Moss, 2002). In fact, their personal beliefs can be so engrained that whether they are right or whether they are wrong, educators will continue to cling to them even when the beliefs no longer accurately represent reality or logic (Moss, 2002a; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Because of this acute tenacity of beliefs, even in the face of counter arguments and evidence, researchers agree that the beliefs that educators hold are the most effective predictors of the decisions that they will make in their professional lives (Bandura, 1986; Dewey, 1933; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Pajares, 1992).

While all individuals approach new situations armed with deeply etched belief structures, we can logically conclude that principal candidates, like pre-service teachers, enter their education programs with beliefs that are particularly unyielding (Buchmann, 1987; Moss, 2002a, 2003; Moss & Schreiber, 2004; Schreiber & Moss 2002; Richardson, 2003; Wilson, 1990). Deeply entrenched, these belief systems hold particular peril because they can also be fairly inaccurate and misleading. Formed first as K-12 students and then for some, as K-12 teachers, beliefs that principal candidates hold about the principalship are set in frameworks of “studenting” or “teaching” and therefore may be “narcissistic, idiosyncratic, and somewhat simplistic” (Richardson, 2003, p. 6). Moreover, research on pre-service teachers (Book & Freeman, 1986; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Weinstein, 1989) and my own anecdotal experience with principal candidates, shows that due to the simplistic nature and personal strength of their beliefs about good and bad teaching and good and bad educational administration, they often express confidence in their own knowledge of educational leadership that is overly optimistic.

Unfortunately, many principal candidates encounter little in their leadership preparation programs that quell their optimism by leading them into genuine doubt. When they arrive at the university they enter a world that is essentially the same as the one they experienced during their K-12 schooling, and in their undergraduate programs. Unlike graduate students who enter medical or law schools to find unfamiliar contexts and practices, principal candidates find little that is puzzling or that requires them to challenge their existing perceptions or beliefs. This makes it particularly difficult for principal preparation programs to have an impact on beliefs within the very short time that principal candidates participate in them. Drenched in familiar surroundings—university classrooms differ little from K-12 classrooms and field sites can differ little from schools where candidates teach—it is very easy for aspiring principals to maintain a belief in status quo rather than state-of-the-art practice in spite of exposure to new educational theories and innovative strategies. Their belief structures, forged over a lifetime of their own K-12 schooling and molded by years of observation of the principals that led them as children and finally, for some, as practicing teachers, far outweigh new information and perspectives provided by principal development programs.
The bottom line is this: educators’ beliefs form a particularly provocative form of personal knowledge that rarely changes even after extensive professional education (Kagan, 1992). And, the beliefs that educators hold when they graduate are most likely the same beliefs that they held when they entered their professional program. This phenomenon is further exacerbated when principal candidates lack intellectual sophistication required to critically examine the validity of the beliefs that they hold. Beliefs and belief formation lie at the core of the ways that leaders think, feel, and act; and as such, determine their leadership dispositions.

Defining Dispositions and Their Relationship to Beliefs

Although the concept of dispositions occupies a great deal of current leadership rhetoric, definitions of the term remain erratic, arbitrary, ambiguous and inconsistent. Over the years, dispositions have been described as motives, beliefs, traits, attitudes, values, commitments, perceptual characteristics and/or professional ethics (e.g., Erickson, Hyndman, & Wirtz, 2005; Katz, 1993; Katz & Raths, 1985; Ryle, 1949). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), for example, developed a definition of dispositions that they published in a glossary of terms in their 2002 manual:

**Dispositions.** The values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator’s own professional growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice. For example, they might include a belief that all students can learn, a vision of high and challenging standards, or a commitment to a safe and supportive learning environment. (NCATE, 2002, p. 53).

While researchers, professional organizations, and accrediting bodies agree that developing certain leadership dispositions is critical to producing effective leaders, there is little agreement about how to:

- define the term,
- distinguish dispositions from beliefs or attitudes,
- effectively incorporate dispositions into leadership development programs,
- credibly gauge the ways that dispositions develop in leadership candidates, and,
- document their existence beyond the short lives of leadership development programs.

As Freeman (2003) reminds us, “The notion of dispositions inherently involves situational contingency and action or patterns of actions. Therefore, the paradigm shifts from social science to moral science. And this shift calls for a new way of talking and making judgments based on something other than counting and scaling behaviors”. We can never be quite sure if someone is “engaging in these patterns of behavior simply to get a pass” (p. 9).

The term disposition is often interchanged with the term trait and used this way it describes the stability of behavior patterns. Wakefield (1988), for instance, combines the concept of habit and motivation when he emphasizes the role of intentionality in stable dispositions or traits. He proposes “proper explanation[s] of behavior must make some reference to the specific meanings and experiences in the form of mental
representations—generally known as intentionality—that cause an individual’s behavior” (p. 333). In other words, dispositions are traits that must have a motivational and intentional component.

Katz and Raths (1985) disagree. They find two important distinctions between dispositions and traits. First, a disposition is a trend of action rather than the management of a person’s emotions or a person’s character. This distinction means that terms like honesty and courage do not qualify as dispositions. Second, a disposition requires a person to behave with a level of intensity over an extended period of time. This distinction means that one action, one statement, one written reflection, or one context for an action, does not warrant that the behavior be classified as a disposition. To offer an analogy, if a person chooses to eat a salad for lunch he or she would not classified as a vegetarian on the basis of that act alone; nor would we describe the person who chooses to walk to work to save money on gas as someone who is disposed toward a healthy lifestyle.

Others distinguish a disposition from an inherited trait by describing a disposition as a “habit of thought, one that can be learned and therefore, taught” (Resnick, 1987, p.4; original italics). Perkins, Jay, and Tishman (1993) fleshed out this distinction noting that dispositions are “people’s tendencies to put their capabilities into action”. They illustrate that point by saying that when encountering a complex issue “people can easily generate reasons on the side of an issue opposite their own when prompted to do so (they have the capability) yet generally tend not to do so (they lack the disposition)” (p.75). In other words, there is a distinction between being able and being “willing” (Moss, 2002b). Dispositions require intentionality on the part of the individual in a particular context, across contexts, at particular times, and over time. They are “summaries of act frequencies” (Buss & Craik, 1983, p. 105) that demonstrate behavior trends or regular occurrences of acts in the absence of coercion or rewards. According to this definition, a leader who over the years and in a variety of situations maintains an open mind, restrains impulsivity of thinking, takes a defendable position when a particular situation warrants it, and seeks to be accurate and clear, could be described as having a strong disposition toward critical thinking. Dispositional language allows us to predict how a person might behave under a certain range of conditions at some future time—even though that future is essentially unknowable (Arnstine, 1967; 1990).

In an effort to distinguish dispositions from terms that are often used as synonyms, Katz (1993) proposed a definition that appears to have utility for discussions of leadership and leadership development. She says, “A disposition is a pattern of behavior exhibited frequently and in the absence of coercion, and constituting a habit of mind under some conscious and voluntary control, and that is intentional and oriented to broad goals”.

Developing a clear definition of leadership dispositions is crucial to those of us who prepare educational leaders. As we continue to discuss which dispositions are likely to contribute to the effectiveness of present and future leaders, we also discuss ways to effectively gauge dispositional growth in our principal candidates, and verify the stability of those dispositions in our graduates.

**Leadership Dispositions: Where are we?**

Recently, increasing numbers of universities have moved to align their leadership development programs and their efforts to develop leadership dispositions with the standards for the professional practice of school leaders established in 1996 by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) (CCS0, 1996). When a meta-analysis of educational research (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003; Waters & Grubbs, 2004) used the lens of student achievement to examine leadership standards, the ISLLC standards were
found lacking in three key areas: direct involvement in designing and implementing curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices; affirming and rewarding individual, group, and school accomplishments; and, aligning leadership to unique needs of students, teachers, and members of the community while being comfortable with opposing points of view. Even with the realization that the standards that many programs use are not perfect, there is increasing certainty that we can describe a definable set of knowledge, skills and dispositions that characterize effective principals (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Yet, there is equal certainty on the part of many educational leaders that we presently know precious little about how to develop that set of characteristics in principal candidates or practicing principals (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004). Part of our problem lies in our inability to reliably gauge the dispositions that we propose to develop.

The concern over our inability to effectively define and gauge dispositional growth is not new. In the closing paragraph of a letter he wrote to the chair of AACTE referencing the October 16, 1999 draft of the NCATE 2000 Standards James Raths (1999) put it this way:

I have worked hard to carry out research using "dispositions of candidates" as a variable. I have been unable to scale dispositions reliably—and my research program is essentially a failure. I have searched the literature and appealed to measurement specialists on a national scale for help, but there is little out there. So much of what is written in these standards calls on our colleagues to measure dispositions and their strengths. Can it be done? I consider it a strategic and grave error to include this language, and a violation of my Principle 2. This language requires units to do something that cannot be done. Please take this technical problem into account when considering a revision of the document. Indeed, if any member of the NCATE standards-writing team knows how to measure dispositions reliably, I would consider it a personal favor if I could be informed of the procedures.

The “Principle 2” that Raths refers to in his comments is included in the letter as: “Avoid writing standards that are almost impossible to document or assess”. Six years later, arguably, little has changed.

**Design-Based Research for Intentional Conceptual Change**

Dispositions are functionally bonded to belief, cognitive processes, and motivational influences. As such they are difficult to define and perhaps even more difficult to reliably assess. Recognizing these characteristics, the Center for Advancing the Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at Duquesne University’s School of Education began a design-based research study focused on three reciprocal goals: defining and gauging principal dispositions, promoting intentional conceptual change, and strengthening the program coherence of our principal development program, The Principal Network.

We chose a design-based research perspective for three important reasons. First, it has particularly unique potential to “bridge theoretical research and educational practice” (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003, p. 8). Second, the “strengths of design studies lie in testing the theories in the crucible of practice” through processes that are iterative and “involve tightly linked design-analysis-redesign cycles” and that trace individual and group learning through investigations of “successive patterns in the reasoning and thinking displayed and the impact of instructional artifacts on that reasoning and learning” (Shavelson, Phillips, Towne & Feuer, 2003, p. 25-26). Finally, design-based research methods are “interventionist;
that is they are implicitly and explicitly directed at creating products and processes” that improve learning, teaching, and institutional and systemic reform (Zaritsky, Kelly, Flowers, Rogers, & O’Neill, 2003, p. 32). (For a further discussion of CASTL’s commitment to evidence-based practice in the context of design research refer to McCown & Schreiber, 2005).

Building on our theoretical framework of the mind, heart, and spirit of leadership (Moss, 2004; Moss, Furman, & Goldbach, 2004), we approached dispositions as representing the harmony of that trinity of factors within the moment of action (Moss, 2004). We adopted a perspective of intentional conceptual change (Dole & Sinatra, 1988; Sinatra & Pintrich, 2003) since it recognizes that the impetus for transformation is within the learner’s control (Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993) and requires mindfulness on the part of the learner. As such, intentional conceptual change “reflects a voluntary state of mind, [that] connects…motivation, cognition, and learning” (Salomon, & Globerson, 1987). It requires the fusion of the mind, heart, and spirit of leadership, and we believe it can transform both the learning of an individual and the community of learners in which that learning is situated.

**Intentional Conceptual Change and Leadership Dispositions**

The concept of a disposition signifies enacting one’s beliefs across contexts and overtime without the promise of reward or the threat of reprisal (Freeman, 2003; Katz, 1993; Murrell & Foster, 2003; Ryle, 1949; Wasienski, 1997). The impacts that leaders have, the combination of what leaders actually do in their practice and the resulting outcomes of those actions—are best gauged across performances and can often be found to diverge from a leaders’ “intent”.

One tenet of CASTL’s Principal Network is that candidates will lead learning-centered environments driven by the belief that all children can learn. That tenet subsumes positive beliefs about diversity and learning potential. Yet, conceptualizing beliefs as discrete and simplistic attitudes that promote action without the influence—both toxic and affirming—of other densely intertwined personal and professional beliefs is both naive and dangerous (Moss, 2002a, 2003; Moss & Schreiber, 2004; Schreiber & Moss, 2004). That is because leaders can hold positive beliefs about the learning potential of all students on one hand, and still

“degrade the quality of learning for their students of color or perpetuate structural inequality in their practice and pedagogy. For example, a [principal] might enact as a disposition the stereotypical belief that Black children come from disorganized and undisciplined homes by [suggesting to a teacher that he or she observes that she require] the Black children in her classroom to do comparatively more individual seatwork, perhaps pedagogically justifying the practice as an effort to provide discipline through more focused individual effort for those children. In this example the disposition is the regular and consistent [feedback for differentiated requirements for Black students that the principal gives overtime]”…based on a belief concerning the home lives Black students experience. (Murrell & Foster, 2003, p. 47).

Clearly, a leader’s beliefs exist within a dense network of other beliefs in ways that make them difficult to separate or use in isolation (Moss, 2003). Tacit beliefs—those that remain unspoken and even unconscious—influence other tacit beliefs, and through infinite configurations and combinations, drive behavior in schools. It follows then that any program intent on developing certain dispositions must first and foremost develop within their candidates the critical disposition of systematic and intentional inquiry
to reveal—make explicit—and examine the beliefs that they hold in order to intentionally change those beliefs that do not align with characteristics of effective leaders.

Truly effective principals lead by modeling and articulating moral maturity and entering into a shared covenant that unmistakably articulates the school’s core principles and provides a standard by which all members of the school community judge actions. Leadership always involves the use of power both within the school and in relation to the surrounding environment. Principals, then, must be aware of the beliefs that they hold and the dispositions that they display, so that they intentionally lead efforts to define and promote principles of democracy, equity, and social justice. And when the impact of an action is that a vital standard is ignored, regardless of the intent, principals should "lead by outrage" (Sergiovanni, 1992). To do that though, principals must have the moral courage that comes from bone-deep commitment to an explicit set of principles that they derive and commit to through systematic and intentional inquiry into the beliefs that they hold and the dispositions that they display. In other words, binding a leader to beliefs and dispositions that promote democracy requires intentional conceptual change on the part of both the candidates in our programs and in ourselves.

Intentional conceptual change, however, does not happen naturally in leadership preparation programs or within individuals. Intentional learning is “an achievement, not an automatic consequence of human intelligence” (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989, p. 366) and is only possible in a person who intends to change his or her conceptual understanding (Ferrari & Elik, 2003).

It is imperative, therefore, to explore ways that intentionally lead principal candidates into situations designed to foster genuine doubt and equip them with explicit processes and structures that can pull their ability to excavate, challenge, and weigh their beliefs, assumptions, and dispositions, in order to verify their validity and utility for ethical and democratic leadership. Thus, intentional conceptual change at a belief and disposition altering level requires individuals to “make a considerable effort to change…pay deliberate attention to change and consider it as a personal goal to be achieved” (Limon Luque, 2003, p. 138).

**Investigating the Influence of Leadership Preparation on Beliefs and Dispositions**

Developing programmatic research on leadership development effects is complex and difficult. The intent of the CASTL’s design research project is to find empirical evidence for program assertions that hold a specific set of beliefs and dispositions essential to effective leadership. The descriptions of the continuing iterations of our investigation are not intended to serve as examples of what others should do, but are shared here to describe our design process along with preliminary insights as contributions to the larger leadership development community for contemplation and reaction.

The preliminary stage of the design study, and the one that is discussed and illustrated here, focuses on exploring whether our candidates’ views group themselves around the program’s 12 outcomes. This phase is shaped by three design goals. We intend to:

- design a program that has coherence across courses, instructors, candidate outcomes, and learning experiences across time and contexts.

- examine and understand the dispositions and reasoning processes that our candidates use before, during and after our program to better shape and strengthen both the sophistication of their reasoning and the stability of their dispositions.
• gather empirical evidence of growth and development as we assess candidates’ beliefs and dispositions throughout the program to learn how they are developed as part of the program’s intended efforts, processes, and outcomes.

Specifically our design goals converge on two broad research questions: Can we effectively gauge disposition development in our candidates? Can increased program congruence influence and be influenced by what we learn about leadership dispositions?

Our first step was to design program outcomes that aligned with our program standards—derived from both the ISLLC standards, the work of the National Policy Board, and the standards of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). In addition, we took pains to ensure that the dispositions designed to help our candidates lead in ways that were congruent with those outcomes were grounded in CASTL’s leadership framework of the mind, heart, and spirit of leadership (Moss, 2004; Moss, Furman, & Goldbach, 2004) and aligned with our signature pedagogy of systematic and intentional inquiry (Moss, 2004). Driven by those theoretical perspectives, we entered into a design effort to define and gauge leadership dispositions, the influence of our program on those dispositions, and the influence of an emerging theory of dispositions on our program (For a detailed description of the preliminary stages of the study, refer to Moss, Furman, Barber, & Protos, 2005).

Because of our desire to use sound research tactics, our approach has an intentional multi-perspective nature, it searches for confirming and disconfirming instances and provides for induction from the corpus of the data as well as from specific data points. We developed a measurement plan that includes a variety of measurements over time and across contexts to allow for triangulation and help us better determine the validity and reliability of any results that we would obtain as our design-based research efforts continued.

We modeled our efforts in part on a proposed range of belief measurements described by Tatto & Coupland, (2003, p. 158) for measuring the influence of teacher education on beliefs and Stiggins’ framework (2005) for choosing measures that are a direct function of the intended measurement purpose and the achievement target. Adapting characteristics of these models to our specific purposes, we hypothesized that indicators of the greatest strength would come from the most robust measurements such as direct observations of leadership, performance assessments, and portfolio-based assessments. The next level of strength would include responses to simulated leadership challenges, responses to leadership vignettes, weekly reflexive logs, and situated descriptions of leadership. Indicators at the mid-level of strength would come from measurements like interviews, questionnaires, and surveys. The measures that would yield weaker indicators would be things like self-reports of ability, philosophy, or program affects, with the weakest indicators coming from analyses of other leaders’ leadership styles and leadership artifacts (like budgets, block schedules, and mission statements). We agreed that measures must represent all facets of our program and be taken across contexts, programmatic structures like courses, classroom activities and program outcomes, and provide evidence of both group and individual candidate growth. Finally we agreed that our efforts must be intentionally longitudinal and that we must continue to explore and build ways to document the effects of our program as our candidates graduate and assume leadership positions. Figure 1 represents our measurement plan barometer noting the relative evidentiary strength of each category of indicators. We intend for this plan, also part of our design-based study, to change and be informed by successive iterations of data analyses.
Leadership Vignettes

Part of our measurement plan included gauging candidate dispositions before, during, and after their formal involvement in our program. One way to do that with relatively robust evidentiary strength was to design a series of vignettes—one vignette for each outcome. Vignettes are simple descriptions that sketch hypothetical situations representing real-life challenges. Respondents are asked to imagine how they would solve the dilemma that is depicted in the vignette. Vignettes are commonly used for three main purposes in social research: to allow exploration of actions in contexts, to clarify individual judgments, and to provide a relatively threat free way to explore sensitive topics (Barter & Renhold, 1999). Vignettes are widely used as a complementary technique in concert with other data collection methods (Hughes, 1998). They can be used to either enhance existing data or to generate data that is not readily tapped by other research methods such as observations or interviews. Vignettes are more robust when they engage the person in responding to what he or she would do rather than “asking what a third party ‘ought’ to do in a given situation [which] is not the same as asking respondents what they themselves think they ought to do” (Finch, 1987, p. 113). And, data derived from vignettes, in order to contribute to research outcomes, must be used alongside other techniques (Finch, 1987). Detailed descriptions of the vignettes, their development, and preliminary data from pilots of the vignette interviews can be found in CASTL’s Technical Report Series (see Moss, Furman, Barber & Protos, 2005).

Moreover, dilemma laden vignettes have particular utility for helping candidates become more aware of social justice perspectives and sophisticated moral reasoning (Marshall & Parker, 2005). There is certainly more to be learned from them about the role of genuine doubt in raising consciousness about a candidate’s tendency to act in ways that are socially unjust, or perhaps even worse, to not act at all.
Final Thoughts

Our challenge as educational leaders and theory builders is to define the frameworks through which we will make sense of our practice. The discussion presented in this paper does not yet constitute a theory, but I hope that it will contribute to discussions that can deepen our understanding of a complex construct and lead us to collegial, systematic, and intentional inquiry into the purpose and potential of leadership dispositions.

Principals who lead in ways that promote democracy and social justice are not “trained” or “developed” or “taught”. In a very real way they are forged in intense, belief altering experiences over time and across contexts. Dispositional language helps us to describe these leaders and predict their behavior in an unknowable future. Clarifying that language and gathering evidence that helps us gauge dispositional growth is a not only a worthwhile goal, but at this moment in our history an essential professional commitment.
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