Elevated Dispositions for Teacher Leadership

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Abstract

Dispositions for teaching are the hard to measure skills or the intangible qualities integral to understanding the larger framework and long-term trajectory needed in teaching and educational leadership. In addition to developing content and pedagogy in teacher preparation, modeling can and should occur in a variety of contexts. This paper shines a lens on multiple practice contexts for dispositional development specific to aspiring teachers. The developing teacher is invited to observe, practice, dialogue, and reflect to cultivate dispositional awareness in contexts with students, contexts with colleagues, and contexts outside of the classroom. Hence, developing dispositional awareness in professionals through multiple practice opportunities, alongside faculty and classroom mentors, is recommended for long-term impact. This recommendation elevates the teaching profession and can be considered in other fields and by other service professionals.

Keywords: Dispositions, Contexts, Classroom, Teacher Preparation

We are what we repeatedly do. --- Aristotle

In 2016, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) defined dispositions for teaching as the "habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie an educator's performance." Past and current research affirms that cultivating dispositions in developing teachers reaps rewards for the teacher and students, both academically and personally. These rewards often transfer between students, colleagues, the classroom culture, and the school ethos (Costa & Kallick, 2013; Pigford, 2001; Watson, Benson, Daly, & Pelton, 2013). Strong agreement in K-12 educational circles reveals that teaching remains a complex and multi-layered profession, and because of this, pre-service programs are expected to develop candidates' content knowledge, pedagogy, and skills, in conjunction with dispositions or the intangible skills for teaching (Costa & Kallick, 2013; Cummings, Harlow, & Maddux, 2007; Fenstermacher, Osguthorpe, & Sanger, 2009; Harrison, Smithey, & McAffee, 2006; Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, & Schussler, 2010; Schussler & Knarr, 2013; Wilkerson & Lang, 2007).

To avoid isolation early in a teacher's career, researchers have suggested the need for ongoing active learning experiences that develop teachers beyond a pre-service program (McCaughtry, Cothran, Kulinna, Martin, & Faust, 2005); this recommendation encouraged strong mentoring programs for new teachers. Current research extends this thinking and highlights learning to teach as an ongoing developmental process needed throughout an individual's career (Meidl & Baumann, 2015). Phi Delta Kappa's new Educators Rising Standards for aspiring educators provides recent evidence that promotes the journey of professionalism in teacher development. These standards prioritize ideals such as cultural competence, fairness, equity, diversity, reflection, ethics, collaboration, social justice, advocacy, and self-efficacy (Brown, 2016). Such a focus can be linked to a similar recommendation for teachers to tell their own stories to model persistence and determination to students. Similarly, professional opportunities are recommended for developing teacher leaders to practice risk taking and foster trust for long-term classroom success (Hayward, 2015). This approach affirms the idea of connecting professional teaching dispositions with teacher productivity, quality, and success.

In the breadth of the research, associations are noted between professional dispositions and a service-oriented philosophy. Characteristics such as empathy, self-awareness, and commitment are needed to invest in people's growth (Costa & Kallick, 2013; Northouse, 2010; Spears, 2010; Spears, 2004), promote character development, and professionalism, and align with Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership that emphasizes identifying core values for service, professionalism, and the greater good of a business, organization, or school community (Greenleaf, 1998). Such a focus strengthens the challenge to support developing teachers and educational leaders both professionally and personally (Tomlinson, 2015; Wake & Bunn, 2016). Recently, one study highlighted the importance of developing the ethical decision-making skills of teacher leaders through strong teacher mentoring programs (Augustine-Shaw & Hachiya, 2017).

It is important to note that there is steady momentum to shift K-12 education from the focus of the past few decades where heavy emphasis was placed on data driven assessments, test scores, and the right answer (Ravitch, 2016). This shift can be attributed to changing educational standards, a national teacher shortage, and even teacher retention issues in the United States; the current educational climate provides ripe timing to strengthen teacher professionalism and pre-service preparation.

For the purpose of this paper, the researcher sought to explore modeling contexts for dispositional development in pre-service training. The researcher hoped to add to the body of research and the larger conversation in teacher preparation. To frame this paper, dispositions for teaching are defined as "the habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie an educator's performance" (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, CAEP, 2016). Two other terms used frequently herein are: 1) dispositional awareness or the conscious perception or self-awareness to name, define, and understand professional teaching dispositions, and 2) dispositional development or the ongoing process of cultivating and applying professional teaching dispositions in practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of teacher preparation, developing educators are encouraged to engage in informal, formal, and communal professional development activities, such as coaching and mentoring (Day, 2004). Teacher mentors are encouraged to demonstrate their effectiveness by modeling a strong professional practice (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Fluckiger, McGlamery, & Edick, 2006). One author recommended that mentors not strictly tell mentees what to do, but demonstrate and show them (Talbert, 2006). Similarly, through the years, many claimed that teacher development should not occur in isolation, arguing for the integration of modeling and mentoring as essential components in teacher development (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Hobson, et al., 2009). Most recently, adding specific expectations to CAEP accreditation requirements demonstrated that dispositions remain an essential priority in teacher preparation (2016).

In addition to content and pedagogy, the reviewed literature revealed the expectation for mentors to possess strong listening and communication skills to support and empower new teachers (McCaughtry et al., 2005). Educational activist and author, Parker Palmer repeatedly endorsed this idea encouraging mentors to ask probing questions to uncover self-awareness and deeper professional understanding. Palmer suggested that investing in sharing experiences and naming the good, the bad, and the ugly in a professional's journey fosters self-awareness needed for teaching and other professional fields. Through the years, Palmer challenged educators to engage in inner work in collaboration with others to develop professionally (2000; 2004).

The literature highlighted additional qualities essential to mentoring and new teacher development; these included Rowley's recommendations of commitment, acceptance of the novice professional, providing support in different contexts, and modeling openness to

learning and solving problems. Rowley recommended that mentors model transparency as they learn, suggesting that a new teacher's mentor revisit her own first year of teaching to nurture dispositions such as acceptance and empathy (1999). Other researchers affirmed that teachers gain knowledge from experience; therefore, teachers and school leaders need opportunities to learn from each other by sharing past experiences and knowledge (Day, 2004; Freese, 1999; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2015). This idea gives support to Greenleaf's theory and expectation for leaders and stewards to learn and grow continually (2002).

The concept of mutual accountability also emerged as a construct in the literature. Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) research recommended developing teachers and educational leaders alongside effective mentors that model desired dispositions, actions, and beliefs in and for an organization. This view stands in contrast to the traditional mentor-mentee framework that typically invites a new teacher to participate and learn in a top-down relationship. The authors suggested that educational mentors invite new teachers to become partners in a professional journey. Since then, Wineberg (2012) suggested that working alongside one another in an open, collaborative partnership allows teachers and professionals to explore dispositions and the self with a new mindset. This approach affirms Day's earlier research noting the significance and links between what we learn, who we learn with, and how we learn (2004), as well as adds support to prioritizing, developing, and modeling characteristics and attributes for teacher development.

Rechtschaffen (2014) later presented a framework of thoughtful practices for teaching professionals to develop self-awareness. He recommended examining personal motives for professional growth. The author suggested starting with self so that teachers can then model and transfer experience and knowledge to students. He endorsed cultivating an ethos where teachers and children foster and fuel the inner self. This affirmed the importance of dispositional development and the trickle down benefit to others that includes students and colleagues.

Teaching continues to be a complex, emotional, and relational practice (Hargreaves, 2000) that requires pre-service programs to develop new teachers in multiple ways and in multiple contexts. In 2010, researchers at the University of North Carolina Wilmington encouraged the integration of a variety of experiences throughout a teacher preparation program to allow the teacher candidate to grasp the multiple roles of teachers. The authors highlighted developing content, skills, and dispositions needed in the profession (Fishetti, Imig, Ndoye, & Smith, 2010). The remainder of this paper examines how and where teacher candidates grow dispositions for professional longevity; and explores specific contexts conducive for modeling and developing dispositions in the pre-service teacher.

CONTEXTS FOR DISPOSITIONAL GROWTH

Contexts with Students

A first context for dispositional growth includes modeling with and for students. Modeling for students in teacher preparation contributes to dispositional awareness and development (Hughes, 2014; 2015). Modeling in a pre-service program can include faculty modeling of dispositions through coursework and teaching. Additionally, pre-service teachers can engage and model dispositions with peers and with their own students in clinical placements. Cooperating or lead teachers can model dispositions and attributes to teachers in training. Recently, Weissbourd & Anderson (2016) encouraged teachers to cultivate care for students in lieu of a linear focus just on student achievement; they suggested that teachers engage in routines and practices to send out messages about care alongside the typical teacher messages about performance. Likewise, Dearborn (2015) suggested that when teachers model and use caring communication, students know that they are cared for as individuals and students. Noddings (1984) first promoted this ethic of care. Similarly, Costa & Kallick (2013) promoted translating dispositions into actions in the classroom. Dweck's growth mindset theory (2006) points in a similar direction, promoting the development of lifelong skills and learning to encourage students and teachers to shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. This focus promotes nurturing characteristics such as perseverance and tenacity to impact student learning and classroom attitudes. This further validates the path of research that suggests that if teachers embrace the complexities in teaching, specifically the relationships found in teaching with students, they can impact student development (Fallona & Canniff, 2013). Hence, there is an important link to consider between dispositional development and personal connections and relationships in the classroom. Making pre-service teachers aware of this link can serve a significant role in professional preparation and development.

Contexts with Colleagues

Modeling with colleagues emerged as an additional context to foster dispositional awareness in pre-service teachers. Others (Francis, 1995; Costa & Kallick, 2013) have encouraged pre-service programs to link theory and practice. These scholars encouraged reflection as a learned practice that leads to action. Francis suggested using reflection to transform practice, encouraging teacher action in owning decisions and using a professional voice and platform. Ward and McCotter (2004) agreed with the idea that reflection was an ongoing exercise and process. These scholars recommended teaching pre-service teachers to actively reflect to change classroom practice. Additionally, looking for, naming, and observing dispositions in colleagues can serve to develop awareness and dispositional growth (Hughes, 2014; 2015); pre-service programs can create intentional space for dialogue and practice around dispositions to increase awareness in pre-service teachers. Schussler, Stooksberry, and Bercaw (2012) also

encouraged reflection to develop self-awareness, personal and professional perspective, and cultural competence.

More recently, David Brooks wrote about the value of educating an individual by integrating faith, intellect, and emotion (2016). He challenged institutions of higher education to engage students in dialogue to make passionate commitments to ideals, religion convictions, community, and personal passions. His approach adds reinforcement to the significance of dispositions in professional development. Brooks explicitly promotes developing personal and professional attributes for stewardship and leadership, encouraging growth of lifelong eulogy virtues over virtues only found on a resume (2015). Brooks' recommendations are not specifically aimed at teacher preparation, yet they do apply and stretch across professional disciplines. Pre-service programs can consider identifying, practicing, and encouraging reflection to grow self-awareness and professionalism around core values and dispositions.

Contexts outside the Classroom

A final context where novice teachers can develop and model dispositions is found outside a classroom's four walls. In particular, in 2015, Meidl & Baumann examined community service experiences as a context for dispositional development. The authors concluded that opportunities outside the classroom nudged pre-service teachers to examine professional motives and see beyond the curriculum. Additionally, using community service and non-academic experiences appeared to foster dispositional growth in developing teachers, stretching teachers beyond traditional academics and lesson planning. These scholars affirmed the significance of reflection and the need for practical practice space to develop reflective skills in pre-service teachers.

As previously mentioned, Spears (2010) named ten important characteristics to equip leaders that include awareness, empathy, and listening for character, stewardship, and community building. This leadership focus explicitly links mentoring and character development to meaningful professional practice and service, adding support to and for cultivating dispositions in leadership. Specific to teacher preparation, Wall's (2016) research revealed that service-learning opportunities in pre-service preparation enlarged the perspective of the pre-service teacher specific to diversity, students, and professionalism. Additionally, the study concluded that service-learning opportunities impact student confidence and social skills in elementary schools. Finding opportunities to model, nurture, and practice dispositions beyond the classroom can reap benefits for the individual teacher and his or her students.

MENTORING NEW LEADERS

Accomplished school leaders possess clear goals, have unique needs, and note important learning occurs on the job (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005). New

school leaders facing significant transition, reflect on both their past and future opportunities, and seek increased understanding of their own leadership style as they begin new challenges. Laughlin and Moore (2012) stated, "dedicated mentoring is a proven support structure needed for individual growth" (p. 38). Robinson, Horan, and Nanavati (2009) affirmed that mentoring "helps accelerate learning, reduce isolation, and increase the confidence and skill of newly appointed school leaders" (p. 35). Job-embedded and contextual specificity add to understanding of school and district priorities. Experienced mentors assist new leaders in defining their individual style, assist with managing their time, and work with adults as they encounter each leadership issue (Malone, 2000). Exemplary mentors, distinguished in their leadership skills, establish relationships void of fear and judgment and assist new leaders in developing strong networks. Mentors who listen first, hold positive expectations for growth, and focus on the needs of the new leader, uphold principles of servant-minded leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/1991). The formation of integrated knowledge and skill through effective mentoring practices engages new leaders on their most important task of developing a school climate focused on supporting student learning.

Turnbull, Riley, and MacFarlane (2015), in their study of principals, reported on the extent to which three support approaches led the principals to actual change in work practice and defined the need for mentoring new school leaders. In that study, individual support from a mentor/coach rated higher than did support received from supervisors or professional development. Mentoring relationships provided a critical base to learn in an individualized approach through observations, confidential reflection, and thinking deeply about leadership implications. A purposeful and necessary emphasis on problem-solving with practical and real-world application has dominated mentoring approaches in the field of education.

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Favorable contexts to nurture a pre-service teacher's dispositional development include modeling with students, modeling with colleagues, and modeling through activities such as community service. Each of these contexts uplift and validate the role of modeling as integral to dispositional development in teacher preparation (Murrell, et al., 2010; Schussler & Knarr, 2013; Sherman, 2013). These contexts affirm modeling as a means of developing new professionals (Fenstermacher, 2015; Hargreaves, 2000). Because these contexts elevate modeling in teacher preparation, they also add support to the research claim that when teachers demonstrate positive professional dispositions, they ultimately strengthen and uplift the teaching profession (DaRos-Voseles & Moss' 2007). This conclusion circles back to Palmer's (2000, 2004) encouragement for professionals to not overlook or disregard intentional work on the self, but instead elevate the significance of inner work for professional life.

Although specific to teacher preparation, the three contexts outlined in this paper affirm the significant role that modeling can play in the larger scope of

teacher leadership and a professional's dispositional development. These contexts support the body of literature in favor of embedding modeling contexts to specifically foster dispositional awareness in teacher preparation.   Intentional efforts to create time for reflection, as well as time, space, and practice opportunities for the articulation of dispositions are important considerations for both pre-service programs and new teacher mentoring programs.

To model specific dispositions, such as compassion or empathy, there is a critical prerequisite for teacher preparation programs to purposefully create opportunities and space to demonstrate and model dispositions. This call to action aligns with a recent recommendation for teachers to reframe their perspectives and develop self-awareness. Wormeli (2015) recently suggested that when teachers encounter difficulties with students or colleagues, they should take an open-minded approach to empower and renew themselves, as well as impact students.

Modeling within the three aforementioned contexts adds distinct validation to servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 2002). Teachers and educational leaders that prioritize service to others strive to model ethical behavior and decision making with humility and courage.   These teacher leaders balance not only the responsibilities and pedagogy of teaching, but they do so in combination with professional attitudes, dispositions, and character; they grasp the larger picture that links the significance of teaching with leadership and service. This focus on others uniquely merges the mind and heart of a teacher with the desire to serve students.

Additionally, teacher modeling strengthens the call for teachers to intentionally model, reflect, and stretch themselves. Teacher leaders should take advantage of opportunities to nurture relationships with students, listen intently to students, and build on students' strengths. Teacher leaders that keep the end goal in mind ultimately honor students' growth and long-term development (Bowman, 2005).

Future research could explore other approaches and practices that link modeling and dispositions in the mentor-mentee relationship in teaching and other service fields. Since the literature suggested that mentors share their individual stories, mentors can consider not writing a "how to" list but rather modeling their stories of resilience and grit; professionals can share experiences and wisdom from their personal journeys (Day, 2004; Greenleaf, 2002; Palmer, 2000). To further elevate leadership and professionalism, individuals need encouragement to recognize and pursue their own professional journey in community to add depth to and be part of something bigger than the self (Hargreaves & Boyle, 2015). This idea challenges a shift in the traditional mentor-mentee relationship and mindset where the mentor holds the knowledge and expertise. Essentially, modeling within mentoring can play an integral role in a teacher's professional development; the traditional model, where mentors serve only as experts, may not be enough (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). This thinking shines a light on the need for additional

exploration regarding the benefits and impact of reciprocal modeling and mentoring.

Ultimately, leadership in teaching begins with words and actions that uplift others. If pre-service programs embrace developing professional dispositions in a variety of contexts, then teacher educators, pre-service programs, and mentors can consider revising traditional advice giving and knowledge-sharing roles; mentors can intentionally create space and time for sharing professional stories of success, struggle, perseverance, and resilience to explicitly demonstrate attributes and dispositions needed in the field. Equipping teachers for career longevity requires stretching individuals pedagogically, practically, and personally.

Sherman (2013) recommended that teacher preparation programs make efforts to transfer dispositional awareness between faculty and pre-service teachers, as well as between pre-service teachers and students. One research team noted that cultivating moral dispositions is essential to what it means to teach (Fenstermacher et al., 2009). This idea strengthens the appeal to move beyond a requirement for professionals to not only value dispositions, but also to infuse dispositions and moral development across teacher education programs. With increasing expectations and demands on teachers and pre-service programs, the significance of dispositional development within teacher preparation should be prioritized in and past pre-service preparation. This challenge translates to how pre-service programs can integrate, model, and support dispositional development not only in the pre-service program, but also in and beyond the first years of teaching. Although these suggestions are specific to pre-service programs, mentors and developing leaders in all fields should be encouraged to embrace the unique responsibility and privilege to highlight, demonstrate, model, and pass on dispositional expertise. Professionals across fields should value the role and link between mentoring and modeling, incorporating practice opportunities to develop dispositions for the long-term.

To conclude on a personal note, a program graduate recently extended written appreciation to my colleagues and me regarding her pre-service experience. She shared that in addition to the expected content and skill preparation, the non-academic care and modeling she observed and received, armed her with the dispositions and heart needed for the teaching profession. May this new teacher's example encourage pre-service programs to embrace, equip, and inspire the next generation of teachers with dispositions for exemplary teacher leadership and professional impact.

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