

Dispositions: reframing teaching and learning

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Abstract	"A costly gap exists between what we claim to value as educational essentials and how we evaluate results. In Dispositions, Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick present a game-changing look at why and how to 'mind the gap'".- Cover
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1) Significant quotes:

"No one ever 'achieves mastery' of dispositions--they are a work in progress. All of us can continue to perfect our performance, to develop our capacities, to be more alert to opportunities for their use, and to more deliberately employ the dispositions throughout our lifetime. All of us can become continual learners." (47)

- Dispositions, and the act of acquiring them, are not terminal endeavors with definable ends.
- The process of learning is a continuous one begun at childhood and extending well into old age.

"Probably the foremost disposition in the post-industrial society is the heightened ability to think in concert with others, to find ourselves increasingly more interdependent and sensitive to the needs of others." (63)

- Interdependency and the ability to work with others are among the most important dispositions we should learn and teach.
- This could come into play in the classroom environment with encouraging collaborative projects and social workability.

"Studies suggest that the degree of toddlers' empathy depends, in part, on how sensitive their parents are to others. This would make sense given the theory on mirror neurons. Children learn a great deal by imitating what they see others do." (70)

- Children mirror what their parents do; this not only reflects on listening skills, but in other areas as well.
- Getting children to break old habits can be tricky, but possible.

"The term [dispositions] may come by many names: inclination, mindset, tendency, propensity, predilection, proneness, habit, characteristic, penchant, capability, aptness, potential, leaning, proclivity, urge, affinity, affection, and so on. They are all aiming in the same direction." (18)

- Dispositions can take many forms and encompass a wide array of behaviors.
- The general habit of growth and self-enhancement is key to understanding and practicing dispositions.

"What is important in deciding which list to adopt is that a staff builds commitment to them, that they are relevant and make sense to the teachers, and that the staff is willing to implement them consistently and collaboratively throughout the grade levels and subject areas." (36)

- Ergo, theory means nothing unless it is applied in a classroom setting.
- Teachers and administrators give power to the theories themselves.

2) List of key concepts:

- learning theories
- dispositions
- empathy
- collective
- interdependent
- social
- congruous
- mastery of dispositions
- work in progress
- dispositional learning
- education Aims and objectives
- educational change
- educational psychology

3) Author's main argument: Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick's main argument is that it is simply not enough to encourage knowledge acquisition and teach facts in a classroom; rather, teaching dispositional behaviors will enable students to carry their learning beyond the classroom, and help them with everyday life.

4) Examine the author's stance on roles and responsibilities:

a) The authors would suggest that teaching is not simply about presenting facts and ideas to a classroom, and expecting students to digest and remember everything. Rather, what is more important is to teach students that there are dispositional roles such as listening, interdependency, and humor, that will greatly help them operate in society and carry out their work. In other words, the "what" of the lesson does not necessarily matter more than the "why" and the "how" of what is learned. For this reason, teachers' responsibilities should not be test-centered, but should encompass the overall well-being, growth, and personal development of the students. Although it can be difficult to unify the two goals, teaching in an encouraging environment that supports the development of dispositions can help to create better-rounded lesson plans, with the collaboration of other professionals. It is simply not enough to wish students to develop on their own; dispositions must be practiced on a regular basis so that students can not only "talk the talk," but can actually "walk the talk."

b) Another reading brought up has been H. Richard Milner's (2010). In *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There*, Milner advocates that knowing a subject matter is simply not enough to teach students effectively. He notes that bringing attention to race, socioeconomic status, religion, and gender, among other things, encourages students, and educators to acknowledge the differences among everyone, but also to provide the knowledge and understanding to know how to effectively teach. Similarly, Costa and Kallick have demonstrated that pure knowledge is not enough. Perhaps they would advocate that the dispositions with which we approach race, religion, gender, and socioeconomic status could have a massive impact on the education of youth. Both of these ideas could work together in a classroom environment to bring about a safe, open-minded setting in which to teach ideas and positive, constructive behaviors.

5) What do you learn from the author about yourself?

I learned that, growing up, I myself never placed much emphasis on dispositions. Neither did my teachers, for that matter; some of them even discouraged me asking questions, feeling that my inquisitiveness detracted from the lesson. I was not encouraged to work with others, nor was much attention paid to listening skills or humor until later on in my education. However, I should note that character was one of the key components taught at my elementary school; the students would frequently get reinforced for positive behavior, so that we understood that the way we treat others has consequences. I do wish that more of my teachers paid more attention to the development of dispositions, especially because the authors have claimed that certain ones are harder to reacquire later in life once they are gone. However, the authors have also instilled the hope that I, as well as my future students, could learn these dispositions and practice them in our everyday lives; dispositions, like knowledge itself, must be rehearsed in order for it to imprint into the human brain.