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# A Study of Leadership Dispositions of Transformational Leaders in Georgia High School

Todd Douglas Veland  
*Georgia Southern University*

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A STUDY OF LEADERSHIP DISPOSITIONS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL  
LEADERS IN GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOLS

by

TODD DOUGLAS VELAND

(Under the Direction of Linda Arthur)

ABSTRACT

Education reform has reached new levels of urgency and accountability over the last decade. The role a principal plays in leading the direction of a school is of vital importance. Leadership theories suggest that transformational leadership is the best way to achieve the goals of schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Educational leadership programs try to emphasize transformational leadership skill, but these schools need to identify transformational leaders before they enter into school leadership. Dispositions are innate qualities and not necessarily a skill that can be taught by educational leadership programs.

The purpose of this study is to identify dispositions of transformational leaders in Georgia high schools. A total of eight interviews have been completed of transformational high school principals in the state of Georgia. This qualitative study highlights several dispositions that may be assessed prior to admittance into educational leadership programs.

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by

TODD DOUGLAS VELAND

B.B.A., University of South Alabama, 1998

M. A., University of Alabama in Huntsville, 2001

Ed. S., Georgia Southern University, 2005

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TODD DOUGLAS VELAND

Major Professor: Linda M. Arthur

Committee: Constance Campbell  
Paul Brinson

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family. Without the encouragement, support, and patience of my wife Deborah, this accomplishment could never have been made. The untold lost hours with my beautiful daughters Rylee and Sophie can never be regained, but in dedicating this work in part to them, and dedicating myself to improving their future through the work itself, I hope I will receive their future understanding. Thanks must also be extended to my mother, and her unwavering faith in my abilities, and support of my endeavors. Special thanks also go to my father John Veland, without whom this would not have been possible.

Most of all I would like to thank God; whose will I hope I have followed in the completion of this work. Prayer has made this work possible, and I am grateful for it, for Him, and for my family.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **A STUDY OF LEADERSHIP DISPOSITIONS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS IN GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOLS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Many educational leadership programs have been criticized for not producing true transformational leaders. Merseth (2009), a lecturer from Harvard, calls educational leadership programs “cash cows” or “diploma mills.” She also stresses that diffident and transactional leaders are graduating from university leadership programs that are accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

The assessment of personal attributes, especially the attitudes, beliefs, and personal values long associated with transformational leaders, plays a far less significant role in the selection and admission procedures in educational leadership programs at major universities (Bass, 1998). Mallory and Melton (2009) found that the most recent educational leadership standards left out leadership dispositions. Legitimate educational leadership programs continue to design their programs and assessment processes largely based on skill and trait theory. Moreover, the development of dispositions once candidates are admitted to educational leadership programs receives scant attention.

These programs could ensure more transformational leaders would emerge if assessment of dispositions were also used in the selection and preparation of educational leaders. While accredited educational leadership programs are required to assess dispositions, the actual research and assessment procedures in this area have not been well researched. Indeed, one of the first steps in assessing leadership dispositions should

be to identify the actual dispositions held by highly effective leaders-their assumptions, their worldviews, their attitudes, and their personal values (NCATE, 2010). By studying the leadership dispositions of identified transformational principals in Georgia high schools, this research was able to provide a clear picture of transformational leadership dispositions.

## **Background**

### **Leadership Theory and Transformational Leadership**

Much of what educational leadership programs have learned about leadership or management comes largely from the private sector. Business management and leadership theory influenced and continues to influence educational leadership programs. Many leadership programs, whether private business or educational leadership, start with McGregor (1960). His theories on X and Y leadership are well-known. His Theory Y leadership principles align well with transformational leadership and his Theory X is more transactional (Bass, 1998: McGregor, 1960). Both McGregor (1960) and Bass (1998) would agree that Theory Y leaders and transformational leaders provide motivation and a vision for their organization, and a Theory X leader or transactional leader would use incentives to try to achieve goals rather than truly lead the organization.

Another major leadership theory that educational leadership programs use includes the Deming model. Walton (1990) discusses the Deming management theory when she talks about the theory of continual improvement with constancy of purpose.

Deming's principles can definitely be geared toward education. The leadership theory presented by Deming is similar to the leadership styles promoted by Hoy and

Miskel (2008). Hoy and Miskel believe that the transformational leader inspires an organization toward constant improvement and this is consistent with Deming.

Having published many books on the subject, Burns and Bass are considered to be the most well-known researchers of transformational leadership. First, Burns laid the foundation for transformational leadership in his great work, *Leadership* (1978). Bass continued on Burns' transformational leadership path and discovered that transformational leaders had certain characteristics, such as charisma, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). After crossing over from industry to education during the late 1990s, Bass (1998) emphasized the need for educational organizations to take on these new transforming leadership styles and transform their organizations with vision and long-sightedness (Bass, 1998). All of these researchers agree that transformational theory is the basis for successful educational leaders today. Hoy and Miskel (2001) stress that a true transformational approach to the entire system is best accomplished through working on the culture, climate, communication, power, structure, and leadership in that particular organization. They believe this would create a true "Renaissance Man" of transformational leadership.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) have emphasized building trust in organizations and they stress to stay in love with an organization's vision. This fits perfectly in the transformational model because a true transformational leader has to be in love with what they do or else they will fall back to transactional leadership when the times get tough (Bass, 1998). A transactional leader relies on rewards and punishment and no vision or transforming qualities for the organization can be achieved with this type of leadership (Bass, 1998).

Other researchers have been more specific when discussing transformational leadership. According to Fowler (2004), the transformational leader needs to be aware of relationships that develop in leadership positions and in order to transform these organizations leaders must be aware of these power structures and use these to accomplish an organization's vision. In the book *Supervision*, Glickman, Gordan, and Ross-Gordan (2005) explain that the leader provides the direction and purpose of the school. This leads to the leader becoming a "super" visor. All of these attributes include characteristics seen in transformational leadership.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) presented a plan based on their research that offers a leadership structure that is proven to work. They stress the importance for strong leadership, and realize that their data has certain characteristics of an effective transformational leader. The culture, communication, order, and input from others are the characteristics a school should focus on to foster a growing and successful environment.

Many transformational leadership theorists have expressed similar leadership qualities consistent with the theories of Collins (2001), Phillips (1992), and Burns (1978). Burns described transformational leaders who emphasize moral value. Collins (2001) explains that everyone should be on the same page, working towards the same organizational vision, with the right people on board. He also emphasized the greatest of all transformational characteristics, humility. Although not a traditional leadership theorist, Phillips (1992) discusses Lincoln's transformational leadership during his presidency by exploring his humility during the Civil War. For example, Phillips (1992)

illustrated Lincoln's humility by his choice to stay at a hospital for wounded soldiers rather than the White House during much of the Civil War.

Passion and humility are also proposed by educational theorist Kouses and Posner (2002). Other discussions on transformational leaders go back to antiquity. Aristotle, according to Fishman (2001), proclaimed prudence as the most valuable trait of a transformational leader. Fishman expresses this prudent value usually takes place in a leader who has the characteristics of humility (2001).

### **Paradigms in Leadership Theory**

Leadership theory as a singular discipline of study is a relatively recent addition to post-modern management programs and schools of education. These schools of education, and in particular schools of educational leadership, need to focus on leadership dispositions, instead of the debate of trait vs. skill theory (Merseth, 2009). Dispositions were dropped by ISLLC Standards in 2008. They were dropped because of the vagueness of dispositions, and the research base that is lacking (Mallory and Melton, 2009).

One of the early debates in educational leadership was the trait vs. skill debate. Although paradigms have shifted and this debate has waned in recent years, educational leadership programs can focus on dispositions first, and then worry about skills, traits, etc. If educational leadership programs would institute disposition based entries that are based on disposition research, these educational programs could ensure the emergence of transformational leaders.

Similar to the nature vs. nurture debate, leadership theorists have similar discussions about whether or not leaders have certain traits that are instinctive and not

necessarily learned. This leads to a dilemma. The dilemma is, if MBA programs or colleges of education believe leaders are born and not made then what is the purpose of leadership programs in teaching certain skill-sets? If a person is a natural born leader, that person does not need skills taught by leadership programs. Perhaps by identifying transformational leaders and true leadership dispositions, researchers could help finally add a whole new category of debate. The new category would be a focus on dispositions instead of traits or skills.

Researchers Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) provide the definitive answer to the important question, “Is it trait or skill?” Kirkpatrick and Locke found certain key characteristics that leaders possessed when studying leadership traits. The study was conducted in response to a growing backlash against “great man” theory. The traits which Kirkpatrick and Locke found in all successful leaders were: drive, the desire to lead, honesty, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and knowledge. Other traits that have weaker support were charisma, creativity, and flexibility (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). The authors further stress the importance of follow-up skills in association with leadership traits.

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) explain the importance of showing the results associated with these traits. They observed that successful leaders show leadership by leading their organizations to greater accomplishments. They found that not only do leadership traits matter, but transformational leaders go further and actualize their leadership into successful results. The actualization categories are skills, vision, and implementation.

Traits are further explored by Judge and Bono (2000), in an article titled *Five Factor Model of Personality and Transformational Leadership*, in which they stress the relevance of the trait model. The authors used the five-factor model of personality, and examined personality traits that transformational leaders possess. The five-factor personality model is based on years of research based classifications. The five-factor model includes: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional adjustment, and openness. The authors concluded they can predict transformational leaders by their personality traits. Some personality traits were stronger predictors than others when establishing relationships between transformational leadership and personality traits.

Their study attempted to correlate these personality traits with transformational leadership, and contribute new scholarly research to transformational leadership and general leadership theory. Judge and Bono are very clear in their general findings. They found a definite relationship with the personality trait of charisma and transformational leaders.

More of a skill approach would be Fullman (1997), who explains that leaders are continuing to learn skills which improve their leadership capacities over time. He stresses the continual learner approach. The classic researchers promoting trait over skill or vice versa are Stogdill (1974), who is credited with the trait theory, and Katz (1955), who is credited with skill theory. Regardless, the skill vs. trait debate rages on.

What is missing from this debate and educational leadership programs is a discussion of leadership dispositions. Instead of educational leadership programs relying only on skill and trait theory, these programs can add a research based third element with research on leadership dispositions. Serious leadership disposition research is just

beginning. Many educational leadership schools stress dispositions, but the research on leadership dispositions is very minimal. More research needs to be done in this area.

The new leadership focus will be to determine leadership dispositions and nurture these dispositions to create a true transformational leader.

### **Dispositions**

Instead of considering their traits or trying to teach skills to someone who might not have the right disposition, identifying leadership dispositions should be the place to start for any organization which wants to identify and train transformational leaders. Most of the research regarding dispositions lies in teacher dispositions without specific reference to leadership (Wilkerson & Lang, 2007). Many researchers have identified teacher dispositions such as, compassion and creativity (Collison, 1999). These dispositions are used to integrate the teaching and assessment of university teacher educational programs (Edick, Danielson, and Edwards, 2007). Mallory and Melton (2009) found a void in the research on leadership dispositions. A bridge could be made from teacher dispositions to leadership dispositions because the successful teachers are the ones who usually are placed in leadership positions.

Because of this void in research based leadership dispositions, educational leadership programs have had problems identifying dispositions, and thus applying dispositions into leadership assessments. Mallory and Melton (2009) found that leadership standards stressed dispositions until 2008. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) omitted dispositions, and instead decided to stress performance-based actions. Because 1996 ISLLC standards have influenced most educational leadership programs, they all have dispositional language assessing and



nurturing future educational leaders, in an attempt to produce transformational leaders. Now with these relatively new standards, leadership dispositions have been left out and leadership programs do not know whether to continue or not with disposition assessments of candidates.

A more in- depth look at the 2008 ISLLC standards finds that although dispositional language may have been omitted, the implications of dispositions can be found throughout the standards. For example, a sample of the principles from those standards follows:

- Reflect the centrality of student learning;
- Acknowledge the changing role of the school leader;
- Recognize the collaborative nature of school leadership;
- Improve the quality of the profession;
- Advance access, opportunity, and empowerment for all members of the school community.

An educational leader's personal values and world-views are inescapable and each component implicitly hints at the dispositions of continual improvement and vision.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While curriculum and research in educational leadership programs have been built upon leadership theories from traits to skills, dispositions may have more of an impact in producing sound transformational leaders. By identifying dispositions of transformational leaders and assessing candidates before they enter educational

leadership programs, educational leadership schools could combat negative stereotypes of educational leadership programs as “diploma mills” or “cash cows.” Many university educational leadership programs were influenced by the 1996 ISLLC standards and dispositions were assessed in most leadership programs. However, with the new 2008 ISLLC standards, explicit disposition language was omitted. They left dispositions out because they are so vague and nebulous (Mallory and Melton, 2009). New research could help better define dispositions and further enhance educational leadership programs selection processes and ultimately enhance transformational leaders emerging from these institutions. With this research, standards can be put in place to emphasize dispositions instead of trying to ignore inherent qualities of transformational leaders embedded in the 2008 ISLLC standards.

### **Research Questions**

The research that needs to be completed on identifying dispositions is still very limited. The singular research question in this study is this:

What are the dispositions of transformational high school principals in the state of Georgia?

### **Significance of the Study**

The research that supports trait and skill theory is significant, while educational leadership theorists have never fully explored nor adequately researched leadership dispositions. This study identified leadership dispositions of transformational Georgia High School principals, and with this data university programs may include these dispositions in a research based admissions process and cultivate these leaders with research based disposition theory that turn out transformational leaders.

## **Research Procedures**

### **Research Design**

Because of the early stages of research on dispositions and the exploratory nature of the study, the researcher used a qualitative approach and conducted a basic interpretive study (Merriam, 1998). According to Glesne (2006), a qualitative study provides the researcher with much more depth of data than numerical statistical calculations and results.

### **Participants**

The researcher interviewed eight identified transformational high school principals who are recognized by peers as being “transformational leaders.” These school leaders were selected by using a selection process made up by nominations from the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (GAEL). With the original nominees, a snow-ball effect and an expert committee of Georgia Southern University professors were used to confirm the eight transformational high school principals (Glesne, 2006). The selection criteria used the personal traits found to be associated with transformational leaders by using Bass (1998) as the foundational leadership theorist. By using GAEL as the expert selection committee, Georgia Southern University professors as confirmation and leadership theorist Bass as confirming transformational traits, the researcher found the best transformational leaders in Georgia high schools.

During his/her interviews, the transformational leaders confirmed the other transformational leaders from GAEL recommendations. This is commonly known as the “snow ball” effect in research (Glesne, 2006). Informed consent was obtained from all

the participants according to Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board policies. Each participant was kept confidential and identified by pseudonyms. All the interviews were audio-taped and verbatim transcripts were prepared from the audio tapes. After the transcripts are transcribed, the audio tapes will be destroyed. The transcripts will be kept in a locked file, with only the researcher having access. Transcripts will be destroyed after five years to ensure confidentiality.

### **Procedure**

The interview questions are aligned with the research question. The interviews were coded and inductive analysis was completed to distinguish actual dispositions. The study included face-to-face interviews which provided the researcher with more depth to this particular research question than quantitative analysis. Because the subject matter of dispositions is so nebulous, a qualitative study is the best method for data collection.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of face-to-face interviews, with the protocol aligned to the research questions. The interviews took place in a neutral environment where the researcher and the participant were not affected by outside stimuli. Questions were not given to the participant in advance; however, a general guide on topics was emailed two weeks before the official interview takes place.

### **Data Analysis**

Coding analysis was completed to identify specific themes seen throughout the interview process. The interviews were compared to confirm findings and probe dispositions which were identified. An inductive analysis was completed in order to determine if a set of common dispositions can be identified.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The study is delimited to Georgia High School principals and may not be generalizable outside the state of Georgia or lower K-12 grade levels.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study dispositions are defined by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). A professional disposition is the professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities (NCATE, 2010). These positive behaviors support student learning and development. Dispositions could even go deeper by exploring a leader's assumptions, their worldviews, their attitudes, and their personal values. In this study, transformational leaders will be identified according to criteria set derived from research on transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), Georgia Association Educational Leaders (GAEL), and an expert panel of Georgia Southern University professors.

### **Defense**

The study proposed as is an introduction to more exhaustive dispositional research. This qualitative study should be used in combination with other leadership dispositions both qualitative and quantitative studies. Using this research with other research will allow leadership programs a research-based entry assessment and add to leadership curriculum as a whole.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Teacher dispositions have been extensively researched while leadership disposition research has received scant attention (Wilkerson & Lang, 2007). Even though many educational leadership programs use dispositions as selection criteria, these dispositions are not based on research. A research base for selecting and informing educational leadership schools on dispositions will ensure that transformational leaders will emerge from these institutions producing a positive impact in the overall achievement in the U.S. education system. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to identify leadership dispositions of transformational leaders in Georgia high schools.

#### **General Leadership Theory**

Colleges of education throughout the country are based upon the leadership theory of colleges of business leadership and management. These transitions started to take place with Deming's model from the 1950s and 60s. His model is based upon constancy of purpose and continual improvement (Walton, 1990). Leadership schools in education began to observe that business leadership theory could benefit schools by replacing profit margin with academic achievement. Educational leadership programs continue to emulate leadership models developed from the field of business management and leadership.

One of the most current examples is the leadership theory presented by Jim Collins (Collins, 2001). In his book, *Good to Great*, he studies very successful businesses and attempts to identify the reason for their success. He found that all of the business's achieved as a direct result of the leadership of their organizations. The leaders all had the fundamental quality of humility. Phillips (1992) great work on Abraham Lincoln made this case previously, but his study focused only on one individual. This is reminiscent of leadership studies presented from a political perspective as well. Fishman (2001) studies presidential administrations and makes the case that successful administrations were based upon prudent leadership. The qualities associated with prudence are values and ethics; these qualities can be traced back to antiquity.

Educational leadership schools mold general business leadership theory into their own. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2005) propose schools need to be led by someone who seems superhuman. This ideal leader will inspire and motivate others toward whatever particular vision is desired by an educational organization. Kouzes and Posner (2002) proposed a leadership theory based upon trust. According to their research, trust is the foundation needed to actually reach an organization's vision. Leadership theory is extensive in business schools, the political realm, and in schools of education. This research will focus on transformational leadership theory.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership was essentially defined by James MacGregor Burns in his classic, *Leadership* (1978). These two types of leadership are transactional and transformational. A transactional leader is one who uses rewards and punishments as a

way to achieve certain goals, while a transformational leader uses positive interactions with individuals in their organization to lead them in the direction of a shared vision. Goodwin, Wofford, and Whittingham (2001) found that transactional leadership is not promoted by leadership theorists of today because even if there is positive influence from leadership, the results will be finite and only come through continuous rewards and punishments. They found that transformational leadership is more effective because this is more psychological and is adept at making a positive change that directs subordinates toward their vision continuously, even without extrinsic rewards or consequences.

Similar to transactional and transformational theories is the Theory X and Theory Y leadership theory. McGregor (1960) is the foundational theorist for these two types of leadership. A Theory X leader works on the assumption that workers or subordinates do not have the necessary motivation to accomplish a task without motivation from leadership. A Theory Y leader taps into the inner motivations of subordinates and workers to work towards an organization's vision. Because of these differences, a Theory X leader is more aligned with transactional leadership, while a Theory Y leader is more closely aligned with a transformational leader.

For the purpose of this research, the focus will be on transformational leadership. The preeminent scholar on transformational leadership is Bernard Bass. His contributions to leadership theory are unmatched. Bass (1985) promotes transformational leadership because a transformational leader achieves better outcomes by providing a role model who inspires colleagues and subordinates to work towards a common vision defined by the leader. Alternatively, a transactional leader uses rewards and punishments as a way of controlling expected outcomes. Ruggieri (2009) finds that



from a subordinate or follower perspective, transformational leaders create a better environment in the work place and create a more team-centered approach that results in more effective problem solving.

Most of what is known about transformational leadership comes from business studies and analysis. Many transformational CEO's exhibit the same characteristics as transformational leaders in education. The top CEO's try to motivate their workforce toward a particular vision and encourage employees to reach beyond their known capabilities toward higher and better outcomes (Kase, Riquelme, & Saez-Martinez, 2005). These leaders tend to have high charisma and draw their workforce towards their particular vision with stories and emotional appeal (Messick & Kramer, 2005). One of the foundational theorists for transformational leadership in business is Robert House. House (1992) portrays transformational leadership and charisma as being inseparable traits. He believes that transformational leadership is largely distinguished by charisma and self-confidence.

Because charisma is a characteristic that is often associated with transformational leadership, it is important to point out that this may not be an accurate description of true transformational leaders (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002). Avolio and Yammarino (2002) believe that the original intent of a true transformational leader discussed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1998) discount charisma somewhat because this characteristic can be misleading. A leader who has charisma such as, Adolf Hitler, but has no ethical boundaries, is not a transformational leader. Ethics and moral high ground are essential qualities in transformational leaders (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002).

Leadership theorist Popper (2005) adds to the characteristics of a transformational leader as one who has empathy and caring for others. This would continue to eliminate many of the worlds so called charismatic leaders as non-transformational. Northouse (2008) emphasizes values and ideals as essential characteristics of a transformational leader. All of the major leadership theorist indicate this quality of a transformational leadership.

For instance, in a study by Groves and LaRocca (2011), transformational leaders that exhibited ethical, principled leadership laid the foundation for followers to be inspired and more productive. In contrast, the researchers found that transactional leaders were not inspiring to their followers nor as productive. This research confirms accepted beliefs that transformational leaders are more successful at improving and inspiring their followers. Confirming these accepted theoretical beliefs and providing concrete research that transformational leaders get results is why leadership theorists and leadership programs stress transformational leadership.

The researchers Hargris, Watt, and Piotrowski (2011) confirmed transformational leadership works as well and went even further in how deep of an impact transformational leaders can have. They found that not only are transformational leaders effective but they form more of team building bond. They found the reward component of transactional leadership was ineffective at building team cohesion and does not produce as much results as transformational leadership.

The scholarship of transformational leadership continues to be the dominating direction for both businesss and educational leadership leadership theory (Bass, 2008). Bryman (1992) emphasized that transformational leadership is the new paradigm in

scholarship and that paradigm continues today. David Batstone's work on transformational leadership is known as *Saving the Corporate Soul*. Not only is transformational leadership the new paradigm in leadership theory that dominates the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century but he extends this to include a totally new paradigm focused on spiritual leadership. All of the fundamental qualities of a transformational leader discussed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) are found in his new approach to leadership.

Transformational leadership is stressed in leadership schools because it works. Just as Groves and LaRocca (2011) found, researcher Yukl (1999) finds that it works also. The researcher confirmed that transformational leaders have a positive impact upon all areas of the organization upon which they lead. This is the reason why transformational leadership is still used as the model upon which business and educational schools of leadership are based. Many of these schools are trying simpler ways to identify transformational leaders. The one way upon which transformational leaders are identified today is by a quantitative survey instrument known as the (MLQ) Multifaceted Leadership Questionnaire (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). All of the studies on transformational leadership are quantitative in nature, perhaps more can be learned about transformational leaders by trying a qualitative approach instead of a quantitative one.

### **Dispositions**

The research on transformational leadership is more extensive than leadership dispositions. By looking at teacher dispositions, perhaps a gap can be filled by providing a bridge to leadership dispositions. In 2009, the National Council for Accreditation of

Teacher Education (NCATE) focused on the concept of fairness and the ability to motivate as crucial dispositions of teachers. NCATE went further by expressing dispositions as a value system of honesty, empathy, and compassion. This has led to a focus of teacher preparedness programs to implement a series of assessment procedures to follow when identifying teacher candidates. As mentioned in the introduction ISLCC (2008), the primary leadership organization for preparing leaders in schools, decided to drop dispositions from leadership standards because of the problem of actually identifying these leadership dispositions. Thus, the dispositions of teachers is the best place to start building a case for dispositions of school leaders.

According to Dottin (2010), teacher preparation programs have rushed to include disposition language and assessment procedures to maintain accreditation, but these assessments and dispositions themselves have never been clearly defined. Her research suggests teaching dispositions as an introductory course in teacher preparation programs. She believes teacher dispositions consist of someone who is reflective, caring, passionate, and open-minded.

The same problem as Dottin identified was discovered by researchers Koeppen and Jenkins (2007). They felt that there is no explicit material related to the concept of dispositions and definitely no “singular” definition. This presented a problem with teacher preparation programs who had to abide by NCATE standards and somehow assess dispositions from a nebulous concept. Their research identified the following teacher dispositions: thoughtfulness, cooperation, respecting of self and others, reflective, and continuous learning. These dispositions were used to construct an assessment procedure along with a teacher education class on dispositions themselves.

Even though teacher preparedness programs have found the same struggle with defining and assessing dispositions as leadership programs, they are much further along because they do have systems in place. Researchers Karges-Bone and Griffin (2009) list teacher dispositions as: compassion, fairness, respect, and integrity. They developed their own assessment procedure at Charleston Southern University teacher preparedness program. This assessment procedure is similar to many around the country. Johnson, Almerico, Henriot, and Shapiro (2011) added an assessment procedure to the University of Tampa. They emphasized values, attitudes, and beliefs as the dispositions for their teacher preparedness assessment. All of these assessments have similar dispositions found in previous ISLLC standards and many leadership programs around the country are trying to develop assessment procedures for leadership dispositions as well.

As far as leadership dispositions go, the scholarship is limited. Researcher Wasicsko (2007) expresses that when individuals are asked to describe their favorite leader, it is not so much what the leader knows or does not know but the fact that the leader had a certain disposition that was appealing to the subordinate. Wasicsko does not discount abilities and skills but definitely emphasizes dispositions. He found honesty, enthusiasm, and people-focused dispositions are what made these school leaders stand out to teachers, students, colleagues, and the community.

Many theorists confuse charismatic leadership as the dominate characteristic of a transformational leader. As we mentioned before, charisma does not go far enough because it leaves out the important disposition of morality. Avolio and Yammarino (2002) suggest dispositions would include ethics and a moral high-ground. This would suggest a disposition is indeed a deeper look into a leader than just basic characteristics.

According to House (1976), a charismatic leader is one who is self-confident and has a strong desire to influence others. With this research, we will focus on dispositions, which go much deeper into a leader's inner-most self.

These inner qualities can not be substituted with any form of teachable skills. According to Podrakoff, Mackenzie, and Bonner (1996) a transformational leader either has these qualities or does not. They correlate transformational leadership and dispositions as somehow making the subordinate believe, trust, and commit to the vision of the organization because of the disposition of the transformational leader. According to these researchers, the actual dispositions are very hard to identify in the transformational leader but can be seen by studying the relationship of the subordinate to the transformational leader.

Many leadership theorist have attempted to identify specific dispositions. Leith and Jantzi (1990) found that transformational leaders develop a school culture built upon the foundation of collaborative frameworks by using transformational dispositions such as moral leadership and shared vision. They believed they found a clear disposition of a transformational leader, a leader who is moral.

Godzyk (2008) found a correlation between the disposition of humility and transformational leaders. She found that the ability of a transformational leader to identify the true character and abilities of themselves and those of subordinates to improve the organization is and essential disposition. She used humility to define this capability.

Hagan (2004) found that a transformational leader is seen as trustworthy. The qualities that lead to trustworthiness are integrity, competency, and vision. This implicit

disposition is hard to quantify, but Hagan uses a quote from Napoleon to explain his point. “Leaders are developers in hope! (p. 104)”

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) describe the difference between transformational and transactional leaders. They believe idealized influence is the factor which separates these two types of leaders. Idealized influence is when subordinates follow their leaders because the leader stands on an ethical and moral higher plane. Followers believe in the direction and vision of the organization because they believe in the leader of the organization.

Clampitt and Dekoch (2011) confirmed transformational leadership works and still should be the leadership paradigm that needs further exploration. They found that great transformational leaders persevere through the ups and downs of the organization and that leaders follow them because they all have a meaningful message and they do not focus on personal goals.

Researchers have tried to identify leadership dispositions but little consensus exists. Helm (2007) believes that she has identified caring, work ethic, and critical thinking dispositions for educational leaders. Later, Helm (2010) has added some clear dispositions of educational leaders which consist of the following: humility, honesty, empathy, fairness, and most of all integrity.

Some of the prior research seems more muddled in identifying clear dispositions. This research concluded that transformational leadership dispositions revolve around social dominance, role model, and the belief of the transformational leaders in his/her ability to influence others (Popper, Meiseles, & Casternuvo, 2000).

Edick, Danielson, and Edwards, (2007) have integrated dispositions into the teacher preparedness programs at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and suggest dispositions need to be integrated into educational leadership preparedness programs as well. They realized the difficult task of identifying dispositions but as a faculty they have a consensus and use dispositions throughout their entire program. Their definition includes the combinations of beliefs, values, and attitudes which is very similar to the dispositions of educational leaders. This is very similar to ISLLC or NCATE definitions of dispositions. Even though they have the same problem as other educational leadership programs with identifying and putting in place assessment procedures for dispositions, they have instituted a program towards a particular goal (Green, Mallory, & Melton, 2010).

The most impactful study thus far on dispositions and transformational leadership is a study by Hacket and Hortman (2011). They found a correlation between emotional competencies and transformational leadership. They use emotional competencies as dispositions. The reason they decided to tackle the ties between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership are the same reasons for the need to clarify what dispositions transformational leaders possess. If educational leadership programs expect to graduate transformational leaders than they must have assesement systems in place to identify these leaders and ensure a higher quality school leaders exists these programs (2011).

The purpose of this study begins this process. By identifying the dispositions of transformational leaders, graduate programs can choose their participants based upon certain dispositions. Recently, MBA programs and educational leadership programs



have diluted their visions by focusing on profit margin rather than academic excellence (Merseeth, 2009). By focusing on dispositions, perhaps these visions could be corrected.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

The focus of this study was to interview transformational leaders of Georgia high schools and identifies their dispositions. This qualitative component will allow the researcher to provide the depth of analysis needed to tackle such a nebulous topic as transformational leadership dispositions. This qualitative approach could be the key to finding specific dispositions of transformational leaders. Glesne (2006), believes that qualitative analysis is the best kind of analysis because it takes into account more phenomena besides just numerical data and a restrictive quantitative approach. According to Cresswell (1994), the qualitative approach involves a more complete picture of a particular topic. The difficulty in identifying transformational leadership dispositions may lie in the fact that qualitative approaches have not been attempted and a clearer picture of transformational leadership dispositions could be made with this holistic approach.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) believe a qualitative approach provides a richer description to the research question. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) also point out that researchers have believed in the past that quantitative studies provide a more scientific approach, but qualitative studies are becoming more and more respected by academia. The complexity of the research question fits well with qualitative research because this

type of research is also complex (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) finds that the qualitative approach is a process of building themes or generalizations from the data. It is with these themes that the researcher hopes to establish a complete picture of dispositions of transformational leaders. Creswell (2009) also believes that qualitative approaches are best when there has been little or no research attempted on a particular phenomena or concept. This qualitative research approach fits perfectly with identifying dispositions of transformational leaders because as researchers Mallory and Melton (2009) found out, there is just very little research.

### **Research Question**

The overarching question of this study is this: What are the dispositions of transformational high school principals in the state of Georgia?

### **Research Design**

This was a qualitative study of transformational leaders. The qualitative approach will provide the researcher and other interested parties an understanding of the intrinsic dispositions within a transformational leader. Leadership dispositions are very difficult to identify using standard quantitative approaches, thus a qualitative approach will add new and enlightening data to the academic scholarship by identifying dispositions of transformational leaders. Supported by Kvale (1996), the in-depth interview process provides data which will be used to provide definitive answers to dispositions of transformational leaders.

## **Participants**

The researcher interviewed eight identified transformational high school principals. The selection process was completed by contacting the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (GAEL) and asking their input on identifying Georgia high school principals that were considered transformational leaders. This was completed by an email survey to GAEL. The email consisted of the definition of a transformational leader (Bass, 2005). The leadership of the GAEL organization responded with consistent nominations. The GAEL nominations process identified eight transformational high school principals and the snow-ball effect and consultation with Georgia Southern University professors was used to confirm that the participants were transformational (Glesne, 2006). This process lead to identifying eight Georgia high school principals that would be considered transformational and an interview will be completed with all of the participants.

All participants were interviewed voluntarily and informed consent will be obtained from all the participants in the study according to Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board policies. Each participant identity will be kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms. All interviews will be audio-taped and verbatim transcripts will be prepared. The transcriber signed a confidentiality contract to ensure anonymity of the participants. Then, after the audio-tapes were transcribed and analyzed, they will be destroyed. This ensured confidentiality.

### **Procedures**

Each participant was interviewed for from 60-90 minutes with a semi-structured instrument by the researcher. This will give the researcher and the interviewee the ability to dig deeper into areas that indicate the need for further exploration. All of the participants will be kept confidential and the interview transcripts will be destroyed after the data is analyzed to ensure confidentiality.

The interview questions were compiled after a review of literature and an expert panel of Georgia Southern University professors. A pilot interview was done to improve the study's questions and processes. The data collected provided a tentative idea to the researcher about how to go about the interview process and it will provide ideas for adjusting particular questions asked to the interviewee.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of face-to-face interviews at a site of the participants choosing with protocol aligned to the research questions. The interviews took place in a neutral environment where the researcher and the participant will not be affected by outside stimuli. Questions were not given to the participant in advance; however, a general guide on the topics was emailed before the official interview took place.

### **Data Analysis**

Coding analysis was completed to identify specific themes seen throughout the interview process. After first level of analysis has been completed, if additional research is needed, a follow up interview was conducted. This second interview was coded and a second stage of inductive analysis was conducted. The interviews were compared to confirm findings or probe dispositions which may be unclear. Finally, a third stage of inductive analysis was completed in order to determine whether a set of common dispositions were identified.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The study is delimited to Georgia High School principals and may not be generalizable outside the state of Georgia or lower K-12 grade levels. The qualitative research approach is also relying on the honesty and personal experiences of the participants.

A limitation is the difficulty in generalizing the dispositions found in the transformational leaders used in this study and transformational leaders as a whole.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

In 2008, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) decided to omit dispositions as a standard and move towards a new performance-based model for assessing and educating educational leaders. However, many leadership programs are based upon previous ISLLC standards which stressed dispositions as a standard to be used in admitting and indoctrinating school leaders. Mallory and Melton (2009) found that because there is a void in leadership disposition research, both the ISLLC standards and other leadership programs have struggled to identify specific leadership dispositions. When ISLLC decided eliminate the whole idea of dispositions from their standards, this put educational leadership programs in a predicament because they are based on the old ISLLC standards and these schools still have the need and the desire to identify dispositions of transformational leaders. The confusion is made even worse when the new ISLLC standards hint about using dispositions but do not specifically state this in the new standards.

Therefore, a need exists to identify the dispositions of transformational leaders given that leadership programs have the desire for these types of leaders to graduate from their programs. In this study, the researcher examined eight transformational leaders of Georgia high schools and attempted to answer the singular research question: What are the dispositions of transformational high school principals in the state of Georgia? Data

analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed several themes that emerged as dispositions. The data is presented using text selections which identify dispositions of the transformational leaders. Each participant is identified using a pseudonym that protects his/her identity. The literature review provided a glimpse of leadership dispositions; however, these semi-structured, in-depth interviews reveal much needed clarity and concrete identification of the dispositions of transformational leaders.

Each interview consisted of 60-90 minutes of open-ended conversations based upon the questions from Appendix A. Each interview was audio taped. The researcher also took research notes during these meetings. Both the interviews and research notes were analyzed for essential themes and constructs that identify dispositions of these transformational leaders.

### *Participants*

The participants were nominated by GAEL and confirmed by an expert panel of Georgia Southern University professors. As seen in *Table 1*, collectively these educational leaders have over 200 years of experience in education, and 130 years of experience in leadership. The principals range from 5-32 years of experience in leading Georgia high schools. The eight participants consisted of seven males and one female from geographically diverse areas throughout the state. An overview of the participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

### *Profile of School Principals and Pseudonyms*

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Years in</i>	<i>Yeas in</i>	<i>Gender</i>
<i>Name</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Principalship</i>	



Debra	38	17	Female
Bob	11	5	Male
Steve	26	21	Male
Carl	18	13	Male
John	25	19	Male
Jeff	19	15	Male
Eric	38	32	Male
Anthony	27	8	Male

The participants were asked a series of in-depth questions designed to identify dispositions of transformational leaders. The following dispositions were identified: team-centered, passionate, humble, compassionate, ethical, fair, reflective, empathetic, spiritual, and integrity. The dispositions have no order or hierarchy because they all related in some form or fashion to each individual question. The value systems displayed by these transformational leaders are aligned with the definition of dispositions by ISLLC and NCATE which emphasized these standards at first, and then imply these standard with their newest ones. Based on these findings, ISLLC and NCATE now have research based evidence to support dispositions.

Some of the questions used in this study were more revealing than others. When asked about their leadership style, almost all agree that they are a mixture of servant and team leadership, and they believe that the power of schools is in real democracy centered settings. The interviews revealed the similar themes throughout and a common vocabulary was shared by them. In all of the participants an inner-belief value system that

the participants truly believed in was vibrantly clear. For example, on team oriented leadership, Bob stated,

I like to lead people, I guess. I try to really empower each individual to do their best. Classroom teachers see things, students see things, and parents see things; I think to be an effective leader, you need those eyes in all areas, and it's your job as a leader to take that different information, pull it together, and make a decision.

John continues this theme and adds to it by revealing,

I feel like my leadership style is based upon balance. I feel like it is important for people to know that I am the leader of the school, but to be a communicator to people and not a dictator is important. I am more of a listener and I communicator. We're going to do this thing together!

Eric expressed his thoughts in a more concise manner by saying, "Well, you know really over a period almost four decades, it's gone from autocratic to distributive. I believe in synergy. I believe there is a lot of power in the sharing of ideas for better solutions."

Steve uses the direct terminology of servant leadership. He states,

Well, this is probably an overused term, but I would say a servant leader. My job is to provide the resources and tools that our teachers need and encourage them and challenge them and set the vision, set the tone, try to develop the culture in the building so that they can do their job which is the most important job in the building in my opinion, teaching our children.

Jeff also uses the direct terminology of servant leadership but he expresses his point this way, "I think you want to be a servant leader. It's something I strive to be seen

as for sure. Someone who is actually serving the people and someone willing to do whatever else anybody needs them to do, I am going to help people achieve goals.”

By viewing these leadership styles, the participants reveal how much a team oriented approach is important to leading people and transforming organizations. When working with the definition of dispositions as the attitudes, personal beliefs, and values systems of people, it is obvious that these participants attitude is about having a passion to achieve the vision of their organization.

Probing even further, the participants were asked to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Their responses clearly revealed their own growth through reflection. A number of consistent themes run throughout their responses. According to Bob, “I think for the strength, I have good communication skills and I am able to relate to individuals. I think that I’m pretty good with empathy as well, which plays very well when individuals are complaining about struggling and workloads.” Carl believed that his strength is that he is people focused. He states, “My strength is people. My strength is working with them. I am passionate about making connections with people. I love the people who work for me and I hope they feel the same.”

John again reiterates teamwork and collaboration with his answer. He believes, “A strength I think I have is communication. I feel like that I can convey what I need to convey in a way that will motivate teachers. I put myself on the same level with them. I think that’s a strength, it is collaboration.”

A significant theme that emerged was the importance of self-reflection to ensure that they were making the best decisions. Each participant seemed to reflect on every disposition discussed but also described a reflection process inherent in all of their

actions. Like Debra said, “I think all transformational leaders need a process of self-reflecting so you do not get the big head and think the organization is moving toward the vision because of you— not the people actually working together.”

Humility was a disposition that the researcher identified as each participant discussed his or her weaknesses. All were able and willing to disclose something they believe to be a human weakness. They all discussed humility in a similar fashion. John responded by stating, “A weakness is sometimes my impatience. If I see something that needs to be corrected, I want it corrected now. And not in a way in a forceful sense, but in a way of I’m not going to sleep until it’s corrected. I want to get it fixed, so to speak, and sometimes that fixing does not take place as quickly as I want it to take place.”

Just as John responded, Steve reflected, “as far as a weakness, I always try to learn and improve and get better and sometimes I’m not real patient with that. So I think that would probably be an area of weakness, if I could be a little more patient.” Jeff answers the question differently and rather humorously, “you can ask my teachers and they’ll give you a thousand weaknesses. I know you’re supposed to be an instructional leader, and I do understand the curriculum; but getting inside the classrooms is a weakness for me. I reveal that in all of my end of the year evaluations. I think that is why I search for a great instructional coach because I know that is my biggest weakness.”

The ability and willingness to self-reflect, to be honest, and to have humility are telling dispositions of these transformational leaders. Bob’s honesty is the most revealing because he shares a struggle consistent with all of these transformational leaders.

He says, “as far as a weakness goes...I constantly get this and that is that I don’t delegate enough. Because I guess that empathy always holds me back that I almost don’t want to put more on another individual because we are all so busy already.”

Another struggle for transformational leaders is the appropriate balance of professional and personal life. The weakness revealed here was implied by all the participants and best expressed by Anthony when he stated, “a personal weakness is sometimes I can get out of balance. I have to really watch myself balancing my family and my job because I can get way out of whack and become a workaholic.”

The best example of a value system which relates to the definition of NCATE and ISLLC standards is that of ethics. The disposition of ethics in transformational leaders is the one characteristic which negates the attractiveness of a leader’s charisma. In the past it has been assumed that charisma is a disposition of a transformational leader. However, that has changed over the years. Not only is charisma a surface characteristic, it also does not relate to a value system; rather it only applies to a follower’s attractiveness to a leader. Ethics relates to the value systems of leaders and how they view their role as a leader of an organization. The participants all emphasized the importance of being ethical leaders.

Debra felt strongly that, “ethics are critical, critical! You will lose. . . I don’t care how capable you are, you’re going to lose everybody around you if you’re ever viewed as unethical.” She explained that “in leadership when you’re given the position of authority and you really have to make major decisions of influence that affect lives at the that depth, that educational leaders do, then to be unethical in use of that power is not only

unethical, it's sinful, it's immoral." It is easy to see that Debra felt very strongly about the role of ethics in leadership.

Anthony was just as passionate when he explained, "Being in any leadership role, you're in the spotlight, so ethics is something you have to have. Teens watch and assess everything about you all the time, whether you are in the school setting or see you in the community you have to be ethical in your behavior because you are a role model."

Steve agrees with Anthony but expresses, "I think ethics are huge. Again, the people we deal with everyday are obviously our students, our teachers, our parents, but even in the community. You know in this job in our community it's a very visible position and you have to be ethical 24/7."

Carl clarified when he stated, "I think you've got to be ethical; you can't lie, you can't cheat, you can't steal, you can't cover stuff up. You know if it's bad, deal with it." This answer reveals how important ethics are to Carl and it reveals that Carl acts ethically even in uncomfortable situations or complex decisions he has to make. All of the participants described this ethical pursuit in their leadership, and this disposition was repeatedly displayed throughout the interview process. Perhaps Jeff sums it up best when he answers, "I think ethics are critical. Are you willing to make a tough decision that people aren't happy with, but it's the right thing to do for kids?"

Ethics is the one disposition that revealed a deeper passion through all of the participant's answers. The topic of ethics is one that all of the participants were passionate about, not only in their vocabulary, but also through the emphatic tones, expressions, and lively mannerisms observed in the interviews. The ethics-based decision making process described by these transformational leaders is distinctly different

from the outcome-based decision making process used by transactional leaders, and more consistent with the goals of improving education. It is interesting to note that a transactional leader may make decisions based upon the ends justifying the means but a transformational leader must make decisions based upon a value system and world view dominated by ethics.

The participants described the process of self-reflection and the disposition of humility has appeared implicitly in all of the participants' answers to all of the questions provided them, as well as those questions explicitly about humility. They all believed that humility is of vital importance in leadership. The participants' viewpoints show the importance of this disposition and provide great insight into their personal value system.

Eric's viewpoint explains,

I think you have to be quick to pass on the credit where it's due. Any type of credit, any type of recognition that might come your way towards your organization, make sure that's from a source other than yourself and that everybody is recognized and shares in that credit. It is not about what you accomplish; it is about what the organization accomplishes."

Similarly, Bob shares a great example of humility when he stated, "again it goes back to trying to work through the team concept and allowing them to take the accolades for success and as a leader step up and take the blame for failures and the short comings of your organization." This attitude reflects a great humility and shows that these leaders are very self-actualized because they can handle criticisms or shortcomings of their particular organization. Debra continues with a description of humility as "being able to

laugh at yourself.” She continues, “approach people on a personal level and give everybody credit for the job well done.”

Jeff added,

As far as humility is concerned, you’re not effective if you don’t understand you make mistakes. If you don’t understand that I’m going to make a mistake, maybe even on a daily basis, but you have to be willing to admit those mistake; otherwise, people will lose respect for you. You must evaluate your decisions and was it right for the kids and was it right for the school and those types of things on all different levels, all the time. You must correct mistakes first by admitting them and moving forward together.

John talked about a more specific circumstance when he talked about an anonymous annual evaluation from the faculty. He said, “to be honest some of the things hurt me personally, but you have to get beyond that and keep focused on the vision of your organization and say we are going to get better about who we are and the direction we are going.” He believes, “if I am doing the process of trying to get better, than you can lead by example.”

The humility shown by these participants was not only implicit in their interviews before, but now with the discussions of humility directly, you can see just how important humility is explicitly. All of the participants stressed their own dispositions and had the ability through their answers to show true humility. Humility became an evident disposition in almost every response. From the research notes, the researcher identified an “aura” of humility reinforced by the people they worked with, as well as their colleagues in their profession.



The disposition of empathy was discussed at length during the interviews. The theme of empathy as invaluable to leadership was described with conviction and passion by the participants. Steve said, “life is going on outside of work, with our students and our staff. We have to be empathetic towards people and say, We’re all in this thing together through the good and the bad.”

Empathy brings challenges to leadership and can distract from working towards a particular vision. The challenges of empathy were expanded upon by Anthony says, “That’s a tough one. There’s a fine line there, but I think you have to have it. I don’t care how many aggressive mistakes you make. The only mistakes I don’t want to see are the mistakes of not caring and the mistakes of laziness.” He stresses the same points as Steve but states, “peoples have lives outside of your organization and it is important to realize that but it is also important that we are in the business of changing kids’ lives, and that is the focus.” Debra continues with those same feelings by expressing, “we have to figure out what’s the best thing for our children, our community, and our schools. I want things to work out well for you too, but that is our priority, the kids in schools.” She adds, “I will be empathetic and we will work out problems together but the focus is always on the kids.”

Carl’s answer provides the most common empathy theme, with him stating how empathy yet challenging; “We still got a job to do and you know, the old saying, when life gives you lemons, than squeeze them and make lemonade. So let’s make the best of it.” Perhaps most revealing is when he says, “sometimes if you have to bend a little bit or help somebody out, that’s going to go a long way and people remember those things.”

The importance of empathy by these leaders as a disposition is revealed and the challenge of empathy was expressed over and over again. The problem with being empathetic and having everyone “on board” with your organization’s vision was a challenge that was unexpected. The fact that all of these leaders cared deeply about their staff, faculty, and students shows in these interviews, but also the passion placed upon the vision of the organization is very evident.

The theme of fairness was also stressed by the participants in the interviews. All of the participants felt that fairness was an inherent disposition of a transformational leader, but many saw the simple theme of fairness as very complex. Some of the more direct answers were like Steve’s when he said, “so we strive very hard to be very consistent in what we do. We want to be very consistent in how we treat people. What we did in one situation, we need to strive for a consistent decision in the next. The interesting part of this quote is the use of “we” and the use of the word “consistent.” Similar answers were expounded upon by Carl when he stated, “you can’t break rules. You can’t break policy. You have to follow those kinds of things. If you can work within that, then that’s how the fairness can come in.”

The complexity of fairness was also discussed by Jeff when he expressed, “you know it’s hard to determine fairness and it’s really hard for people on the outside looking in. So you try to stay as consistent as possible. You know sometimes that fairness is not necessarily what people on the outside would like it to be.” In Jeff we see again a very self-actualized individual who is not scared to make complicated decisions.

Even more revealing is John when he shared personal experiences; “Since I have been principal I have had to suspend the superintendent’s son and daughter, two board of

education members' daughters and even more influential members of the community's sons and daughters. John felt very passionately that he had to show fairness in these critical decisions because he says, "I had to be fair. I had to be consistent, and I knew everybody was watching to see what I was going to do." He relied on his inner value system and worldview of fairness to make these very difficult decisions.

The theme of fairness was consistently recognized by all of the leaders to be essential in decision making. This disposition needs to come from a value system or worldview because this comes from the very definition of a disposition used in this research. All of the leaders mentioned consistency and the complicated nature of fairness. It was interesting that they all seemed to have an inner debate with themselves during these answers. Most likely, this inner debate was about inconsistent decisions they had once made and the inner-self struggle of striving to be fair and consistent. This is based upon the researcher notes and intuition of the researcher.

The disposition with the most similar responses was the theme of spirituality. Spirituality is what all of these transformational leaders mentioned that was most important to them. All of the previous dispositions that these transformational leaders identified relate most to this theme.

For instance, Debra felt, "I think that we're placed here and we're given these opportunities of influence and leadership and you better use them well, because I think the first price you're going to pay is to the God that allowed you to have this position in the first place." She continued a theme mentioned by all of the others and that was that self-reflection was a practice inherent in spirituality. She expressed,

I think you have to constantly question and ask yourself, am I doing the best I can? And be able to look in the mirror when nobody is there, say, what else do I need to do? You have to ask the Lord, give me the strength, give me the wisdom, show me the direction and admit when I don't know what to do. Seek counsel with others when needed.

This concept of spiritual accountability was the most prevalent in all of the transformational leaders' interviews in one way or another and provided the most personal insights in the interview.

John believes, "In this business kids got to know that you care about them. The moment that kid's thinks that you don't care, it's not going to work. I believe that the sense of care comes from my spiritual relationship with God." John believes that he has to stay in conscious contact by completing a devotion every day. This is a daily practice that was consistent with all of the transformational leaders. John expresses it this way, "I do a devotion each morning and that starts my day off in the right frame of mind." Along the same lines, Bob said, "I have a strong faith. A very strong faith! This faith is my number one priority." He continued, " I think it is that faith that allows me to be successful with kids, parents, and the staff, without it, I could not imagine leading anyone." The comments by Bob relate to a follow up question that was asked because of the similar responses and that question was "Can you imagine leading organizations without a spiritual relationship with a higher power?" Unequivocally, all of the transformational leaders said, "no way!" For instance, Debra said, "I don't want to lead without them. Those are the guiding principles. Those hard decisions that nobody taught

you in a classroom or book about, you've got to rely upon your principles to answer that.”

All of the leaders interviewed seemed to have a quiet reassurance that was adamant but not preachy. A very telling response was from Anthony,

I don't dictate to people what they believe and I don't share with them unless they want to know what I believe, but I truly believe this, that your confidence is knowing that you spend time with a stronger spiritual being than yourself.

The spiritual beliefs portrayed by all of the transformational leaders was very powerful discourse and somewhat unexpected. They all felt that their worldview and value systems were shaped by their beliefs in a higher power. The self-reflective nature of these leaders was enhanced by a daily devotional and attempts at a constant contact throughout the day with a spiritual being. On a cautionary note, Jeff noted, “ I know some unethical people who claim to be a Christian and I know some people who are atheist who are very ethical. But I really can not think of a leader that I admire who does not have a basis of spirituality, not necessarily religious.”

The theme of integrity is identified throughout the discussions with these transformational leaders. Even though there is a question about integrity, the discussions about values, such as, ethics, fairness, compassion, passion, consistency, etc., all had the theme of integrity insinuated or directly stated.

For example, Steve said, “One thing I think is crucial regardless of your leadership style in terms of a leadership quality or characteristic is integrity.” Steve even felt that in any business most everyone is looking for a leader with integrity. He expressed it best when he said,

Through the years multiple studies and surveys about what do people look for in terms of a leader and time and time again, not only in education circles, but in the secular world and corporate business, people are looking for somebody with integrity.

Carl felt strongly, “If someone’s not ethical, you can’t teach them to be ethical, it has to come from personal integrity.” Similar to Carl, John believes, “the students must see you acting with integrity whether that is at school or in your private life.”

Interestingly, these were questions that did not directly state or address the issues of integrity but the leaders themselves constantly mentioned this belief.

The direct question based upon the disposition of integrity is very telling. Jeff stated, “if they respect your decision making, if they respect the way that you personally deal with them one on one, or the staff or their friends or whatever, than your integrity is going to be intact.” He felt strongly as did all of the other participants when he said, “if you are not seen as a leader with integrity, it will not work.” Along those same lines, Eric felt, “Integrity and trust is highly critical. I mean, if you do not feel someone has integrity, then that is not a person you want leading your organization. Or from my perspective, you do not want that person part of our vision.”

Integrity was a big part of the overall discussions by these transformational leaders. This theme is consistent with the value systems and worldviews of these participants and provides a clear picture that leaders have to have integrity. Perhaps, the same problem with defining integrity exists with defining dispositions but it is easy to see how these leaders strive for that value.

The interviews provided an in depth look at transformational leaders. The values of passion, compassion, reflectiveness, ethics, spirituality, humbleness, and empathy were identified. These dispositions were not only identified in specific probing questions but they were identified throughout all of the questions and even in the personas of each interviewee. This is why placing them in a particular order or hierarchy is difficult. An example of this is when the transformational leaders were asked, why do you think people follow you? Some people would think the ability of the participants to answer a question on humility would be hampered. However, an aspect of humility is the ability to truly assess yourself and who you really are. The participants did share some valuable thoughts to this question which included a variety of dispositions.

Eric shared: "I'm all about building capacity of people I work with, whatever it takes to get people together in partnerships and accomplishing our vision, that I have a passion for." Continuing with the theme of passion, Anthony felt strongly: I don't think people stay long if their leaders lacks passion and really believes that you are passionate about accomplishing great things."

Bob expressed: "I think that a leader in the education world has to connect with the teachers, has to connect with the parents, has to connect with the different stake holders and clearly communicate what the vision is and clearly communicate what the steps are that need to be done to accomplish the vision." He continued, " along the way, you need to be passionate about this but also patient and compassionate when it does not happen as fast as you would like." Jeff expressed it this way when he said, "I told someone this the other day, we have to always be moving forward and doing what is best for kids, I think people want someone who is doing this with integrity and passion."

Carl touched upon the same themes as Eric, Bob, and Jeff but he expressed it best when he said, “I think relationships are a key to accomplishing things and I try to establish relationships based on the value of trust.”

Trust implicitly encompasses all of the dispositions. Integrity, ethics, humility, passion, compassion, spirituality, and empathy all have a base in trust. During the interview process the researcher felt an ease and comfort immediately upon meeting these transformational leaders. This “aura” was hard to identify because it was not explicitly identifiable. When looking at the transcripts, interview notes, and overall interpretations of the interviews the “aura” is the trust the researcher immediately had with each transformational leader.

The interviews revealed the dispositions of these transformational leaders and yielded specific circumstances when these dispositions had to be relied upon to make very difficult decisions. The value systems and worldviews of the transformational leaders can be identified when we analyzed these situations.

Most of the transformational leaders mentioned a discipline issue with prominent members of their community and how they had to rely upon their worldview and value systems to make a sound leadership decision. They each reported that all had very similar circumstances with superintendent’s siblings, BOE siblings, or a very influential member of their community. John explained, “I found out some very disturbing information and had to turn that information over to the proper authorities even though it was a very prominent member of our community.” He added further, “I really had no choice, first of all, ethically, and second of all because it was the right thing to do.”



Eric mentioned a cheating scandal that involved several students whose parents were very influential members of the community. He said, “There’s been some incidents where some prominent peoples’ kids were caught cheating and I dealt with that the same way I would if someone was not a prominent community member. I mean those decisions people may not like; as a matter of fact they did not, but you have to make the right decision.”

Most of the leaders mentioned a death of a student within their school that was a very trying and difficult time for everyone. Jeff expressed, “it was a tremendous blow to this group and to the teachers, staff, kids, community. So I think at that point you really do just pray you hope you’re doing the right thing and try to be there for as many people as possible. Allow them to come and grieve or if you need to be a sounding board sit there a listen and those type things. I definitely had to rely upon my values and spiritual beliefs in that situation; it really devastated the school and community.” When the leaders discussed these situations it was easy to tell from their tone and reflective nature during our interviews that empathy, compassion, and a sense of togetherness permeated throughout their answers.

The most telling dialogue came from Debra, Anthony, and Carl when they mentioned a very close and dear friend who became involved in situations in which they had to be asked to leave their organization. Carl explained, “I knew that it was the right thing, but it was a hard thing because of our relationship, but it just had to be. My spirituality, my moral and ethical make up, was tested very strongly by this incident and I mean our school and myself were in turmoil.” He further explained, “no matter what we had to move on because when you make the right call, that will take care of itself, you

got to get back to focusing on the kids.” In a similar situation, Anthony reacted by expressing, “I tried to be loyal to my school system and my immediate supervisor, but I felt there was a level of unfairness toward this particular person. I had to pray for patience and everyone involved in that situation. It played itself out, but I definitely had to rely on my spiritual beliefs.” The more telling example came from Debra when she stated, “this person made a big mistake, but we were going to go through the process together. I was not going to separate myself from someone at my school because of something you did wrong, but I’m certainly going to do what my job is and that’s to protect the children.” She continued, “I felt the need for everything to be done properly but at the same time, I was going to have compassion for the individuals who were affected by what this person had done and compassion for the person who did it.” She correctly pointed out, “as a leader, your compassion can not be conditional.”

These specific circumstances identified the dispositions of these transformational leaders. Compassion, empathy, spirituality, ethics, integrity, and fairness all played a fundamental role in each of these circumstances. By looking at day to day decisions or very difficult ones, transformational leaders use these dispositions on each decision that they make. One of the many points that they agreed upon is the fact that none of them wanted to make decisions without these value systems and they all said, “I would not want to lead an organization were my values would be compromised.”

Each of the transformational leaders identified their profession as a calling rather than a planned job they always wanted. They all agreed that this is what they were supposed to be doing and it was a career that served a higher purpose from a higher authority. Not only is this portrayed in their quotes, but also from just meeting with

them, you could tell the ease and comfort they shared came from a purpose they found for their life. The realization of a purpose was exhibited by each interview participant.

Bob said, “Like I said, I have a strong faith, a very strong faith. You know I have always known that this is what I am supposed to be doing and I think that is definitely related to my belief in God and a higher purpose.” Humorously, Debra added, “I’ve always known that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing. I knew that as a teacher and I know it as a leader. I am scared to retire; my purpose in life may be over.” Steve related the struggle of humanity when he stated, “By nature we are selfish and want to be self serving, so I think that there’s got to be some basis, some greater cause than ourselves. If we are truly about people, than we should lead them with this in mind.”

Anthony said,

Yes. It is a calling. It’s a calling to have a great deal of passion too. I’ve seen people in this business that didn’t like it and they’re so miserable. You better have a passion to be an educator because otherwise you will be miserable in a very short period of time. My passion comes from my belief that this is about others and not necessarily about myself. The burn out rate for teachers and administrators is so high in this profession because most probably do not consider it as a calling but a job. When you are about educating young people, it can not be a job, it has to be a calling, otherwise, you will be in a battle you can not win. Let go, do the very best that you can, and let God work in people’s lives. From a dear mentor, I was taught as a young administrator the work will be here tomorrow. You have to walk off and leave it because it’s never ending. I had to learn that. I had to learn that it’s okay to leave something until tomorrow. You

don't finish it every day. That's something I had to learn. It's ongoing and you patiently go about leading and trusting in God.

Along those same lines, Eric said, "There is so much parallel between our service and service to the Lord. There's a lot of parallel in our vocation regarding servant leadership, service to others. We all should be in this as a calling. This is a passion. This is not a job.

The researcher found the "calling" aspect of this profession constantly referred to by all of the participants. They all related this to their spirituality and the belief in a higher purpose. The researcher attempted to get to know the participants in a more personal way by asking them about their personal life as well. This was done in an attempt to provide a lucid portrait of each transformational leader. Their answers revealed their priorities and dispositions.

Anthony described his weekends when he stated,

I'm real into school activity stuff and we usually keep a lot of things going on and I'm one of those crazy people that love to . . . do all kinds of stuff. But most of all, I like to spend time with my family. I have a daughter here and I have a son who is here, and most of my time is spent with them. Everything is pretty much family oriented, the only personal thing I do is play golf occasionally. I am not any good but I like to go out with my wife and have some time with her, just being outdoors and talking with her, it really is not about golf because I just hit the ball all over the place.

John said,

The biggest thing right now in my life really. . . my wife and I still ride motorcycles. I love to ride motorcycles. That's a hobby I have. I workout at the gym, I may not look like it, but I do get on the treadmill. I enjoy that. I enjoy going to all our sporting events. I go to just about everything. And I don't go because I feel like I have to go, but I enjoy being around kids. The rest of the time I spend at church and those type of activities.

Steve stated,

What we do on the weekends is a very valid question. You can tell a lot about a person if you can look at our checkbook or debit register, and at our calendar, what we spend our time doing, tells a lot about a person. It's easy for me to answer. I can tell you as recent as last night I came home about 10:30. We have a large family and we spend all of our time with them if I am not at work. My personal time is almost non-existent. And I don't say that negatively or complaining whatsoever. I say that to tell you that basically our family is important to us and what our children are involved in is what we're doing. It doesn't matter what that is. We are a very close nit family and we feel like that's our role as parents. That's our responsibility and outside of that our social life revolves around what's going on in church. We're not socialites by any stretch of the imagination; our time away from work is usually in one of those two places. Whatever is going on with our children, our family, and our church.

Simply put, Jeff said, "Being a high school principal means very little time in your personal life, but that is why it is a calling. When I do get time off, it is all about family."

All of the transformational leaders provided revealing details related to this question and even appreciated its ability to expose similarities of themes related to dispositions by discussing personal life activities. The researcher noted how each focused on family and spiritual beliefs of each participant. It is through these priorities that the dispositions of each participant can be deduced.

The interview transcriptions and research notes yielded very specific dispositions of these transformational leaders. These dispositions are: team-centered, passion, humility, compassion, ethical, fair, reflective, empathy, spirituality, and integrity. Not only were these revealed in the interviews but in every correspondence, meeting with their subordinates, and basic small talk with each participant. It was amazing to connect leadership theory with a specific transformational leader and identify a vital component in what makes this leader transformational, and that is their disposition.

**CHAPTER V**  
**SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND**  
**RECOMMEDATIONS**

**Summary**

A very respectable academic recently said: “It used to be graduate school was about getting accepted academically and now it is only about whether you can pay for it.” This sentiment has grown in recent years with Merseeth’s (2009) beliefs that educational leadership programs have become “cash cows” and have very little to do with graduating leaders who will grow and improve organizations. Whether this belief is true or not, recent evidence demonstrates more and more leaders are graduating with higher degrees without the necessary skills to transform organizations. The major leadership theorist in both the college of business and the college of education of many universities are graduating leaders that are to some degree the exact opposite of what the leadership theorist advocate. The leading theorists like Burns (1978), Bass (1985) and House (1992) promote transformational leadership as the key to successful leadership in business and education, but many transactional leaders are exiting universities with degrees in hand, unprepared by both disposition and training for the challenges that await them. Even though MBA programs are dealing with the same issues, the focus of this research will be on colleges of education and leadership. The primary purpose of this research is to identify the dispositions of transformational leaders in Georgia high schools. By

identifying transformational leadership dispositions and nurturing these dispositions throughout the academic pursuits of candidates in educational leadership programs, a transformational leader is more likely to exit.

A more modern approach to teaching leadership began in the MBA programs of major universities in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It began slowly with Deming in the 1950s. He studied the remarkable progress of Japanese companies and came up with the total quality management plan and the focus of constant improvement. McGregor (1960) contributed to this movement with his Theory Y and Theory X leadership theory. The identification of transformational leadership began with Burns foundational work, *Leadership* (1978). Bass (1985) continued development of this theoretical approach with his main focus on transformational leadership and set the paradigm of leadership schools to focus on transformational leadership as the fundamental leadership theory that works. This paradigm continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has infiltrated college of education leadership programs as the way to effect positive change in schools.

College of education leadership programs have selection procedures which are based upon ISLLC and NCATE standards. In the past, these standards emphasized dispositions of educational leaders as a foundational aspect for graduating transformational leaders. These dispositions were assessed by exploring the personal attributes, especially the attitudes, beliefs, and personal values of leadership candidates. Mallory and Melton (2009) found that the most recent educational leadership standards left out leadership dispositions because there was very little consensus or research that identified specific dispositions of transformational leaders. Even though the most recent standards omitted dispositions, many of the educational leadership programs are based



upon the old standards. Teacher preparation programs are further along in the process of identifying specific dispositions of successful teachers. Many of your major university programs have assessment procedures for identifying dispositions of successful teachers and incorporating dispositional theory throughout their program. This is a fairly new process. Educational leadership programs are facing the same challenges teacher preparation programs experienced in assessing and implementing dispositions as part of their overall curricula.

This research is designed specifically to identify the dispositions of transformational high school principals in Georgia. As a result of this work, educational leadership programs can have an evidence-based tool for assessing dispositions of transformational leaders. Educational leadership programs can use this in the admissions process and once these candidates are identified using dispositions, they can further enhance their programs by nurturing these dispositions throughout the leadership program. This will ensure that transformational leaders emerge and make an impact in transforming and improving schools.

In-depth interviews were conducted on eight transformational high school principals in Georgia. The semi-structured interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions found in Appendix A. The questions were reviewed by an expert panel of Georgia Southern University professors and piloted with both transformational leaders and transactional. The eight transformational principals were selected by an expert panel made up of the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (GAEL). The participants chose the location and times for the interviews and each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. The

research notes and interviews were transcribed and analyzed (Creswell, 2009) to answer the overarching research question:

What are the dispositions of transformational high school principals in the state of Georgia?

### **Discussion of Findings**

Transformational leadership is a form of leadership designed to make a lasting and positive impact on organizations. Transformational leaders motivate through vision, rather than rewards and punishments, a technique associated with the another form of leadership known as transactional. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the paradigm in leadership and management theory has shifted towards the transformational approach. Using transformational leadership, schools could greatly enhance the improvement process in our nation's schools.

Avolio and Yammarino (2002) began to fully explore transformational leadership and hinted at dispositions in their research. They approached transformational leadership from a moral and ethical standpoint. They debunked previous trait theory and the beginnings of transformational theory when theorist proposed the major characteristics was charisma. For instance, someone may be able to characterize Hitler as being transformational if you use charisma as a characteristic of transformational leadership. However if you use the approach of Avolio and Yammarino (2002), transformational leaders have an appeal from a moral and ethical standpoint which discounts those previous assumptions about charisma while the idea of dispositions being critical to

leadership success are affirmed. Avolio and Yammarino imply a transformational leader is someone whose values, worldviews, and attitudes are necessarily based in morals and ethics.

In this research, the transformational leaders that were interviewed unfailingly stated explicitly and implicitly they had to have a moral and ethical foundation from which to lead their organization. They consistently referred to these value sets when making both critical institutional decisions and everyday decisions regarding the direction of their schools toward their vision statements. A consensus among all the leaders was that they could not imagine leading without a moral and ethical base. This disposition was identified in all the leaders and consistent with the implied dispositions of Avolio and Yammarino (2002).

Popper (2005) believes a transformational leader should have empathy towards members of their organization and it is this thoughtfulness and compassion that attracts these members to work towards the organization's vision. Empathy was most definitely identified as a disposition of the transformational leaders of the present study. All of the leaders suggested empathy was a vital ingredient in being able to lead. All identified this as necessary to understanding and resolving everyday issues with students, faculty, and staff. Others even spoke more candidly about major events in which this disposition had to be relied upon. Empathy and compassion not only was identified in transcriptions and dialogue but also in the research notes the researcher felt, "all seemed to have an empathetic and compassionate disposition."

Northouse (2008) is one of the major leadership theorists today. His work implies a general disposition of a transformational leader as one who has a set of values

and ideals. This follows along with previous definitions of dispositions by NCATE and ISLLC standards. Most likely, Northhouse was one of the major theorist these organizations relied upon when attempting to define dispositions. Groves and LaRocca (2011) continue with these assumptions by Northhouse and make indirect statements about dispositions as being ethically and value based. The researcher found direct evidence that a disposition of a transformational leader is based upon values, ethics, and ideals. Not only is there direct evidence in the transcriptions but the researcher also identified a spiritual disposition is an important component in this base.

Transformational theorists have not previously overtly state the dispositions of transformational leaders. The lack of definition and clarity with regards to dispositions is clear when reading transformational leadership theorist; however, the research described in this paper adds clarity and brings these dispositions into full view for anyone interested in identifying a disposition of a transformational leader.

The haze about the proper use of dispositions is not unique to leadership academia. Teacher preparation programs experienced a similar process as educational leadership programs are having now. First, the teacher preparation programs needed to identify successful teachers and identify their specific dispositions. Because these teachers are the very ones who will most likely be selected as future leaders, these dispositions could be the same as educational leaders or possibly even transformational ones.

The literature on teacher dispositions is more extensive than leadership dispositions. Interestingly, the same dispositions of truly effective teachers are very similar to leadership dispositions identified by this research. Dottin (2010) identified

reflectiveness, passion, and open-mindedness as dispositions of effective teachers. The eight transformational high school principals in this study provided evidence that supports these dispositions in transformational leaders as well. All eight demonstrated a passion for leadership and transforming organizations. During the interviews, passion was identified throughout the dialogue and was identified from interview notes as well. Passion was identified by this researcher almost instantly and is undeniable when you personally meet these leaders one on one.

It was also interesting to note that all of these leaders had a process of reflection. Most of the reflecting practice was related to the spirituality of each participant. They collectively had an inherent process based upon the value systems of each leader because each leader practiced this method without realizing they were doing it. It was a process where these leaders were constantly assessing and trying to improve decisions they had made, thus improving decisions they may make in the future. It reminded the researcher of Deming's constancy of purpose and improvement. Even though these leaders were most likely exposed to leadership theory and partially developed their skills as students in educational leadership programs, it was expressed by the participants and identified by the researcher that the reflectiveness and passion was a disposition of all of these transformational leaders. These findings were consistent with Koeppen and Jenkins (2007). Along with Dottin, they identified thoughtfulness and a reflective nature as teacher dispositions. According to the researchers, the thoughtful and reflective teacher was one who was the most likely to have an inherent desire to improve. Their findings are consistent with this research. Thoughtfulness was identified throughout the interview

with each participant as well. Whether it was specific decisions or the answers to several questions, thoughtfulness was a disposition of each transformational leader.

Kargess-Bone and Griffin (2009) identified compassion, fairness, and integrity as dispositions of successful teachers while this research confirmed compassion, fairness and integrity as analogous dispositions of transformational leaders. All eight of the transformational leaders shared these dispositions. The most illuminating discussions came about when discussing fairness. All seemed to have an inner struggle during these conversations about fairness. The researcher made a note that they all seemed to be reflecting upon decisions that they had made and pondering the successes or failures of those decisions. They all answered similarly and each participant pondered with distracted mannerisms and introspective thinking. Their pondering continued even while answering the question on fairness. They all pointed out the complicated nature of fairness and believed fairness did not necessarily have to mean equal. One even told a story about fairness related to his or her childhood. The story began with his/her mother and father purchasing shoes for the children. One child would get shoes once a year and this would rotate annually through each of the three children. The moral of the story was even though as a child it appeared as favoritism for whichever child received shoes, inwardly he/she trusted that our turn was coming. This is a great story about fairness because sometimes what is fair is not always easy to explain. Just as parents, community, and students may perceive an action to be unfair, the question of fairness is always complicated and not always what it seems.

Integrity is identified throughout the interviews. This term and disposition was identified in every question asked by the researcher. It resonated throughout the

interviews. All of the transformational leaders suggested this as a requirement, not only to lead, but also to be involved in their organization. Having integrity is most simply defined as being honest with others and with one's self. The researcher experienced an unusual level of personal trust with each leader upon introduction. Each seemed to be very authentic, self-actualized and comfortable with themselves. They all seemed to be very self-actualized and comfortable with themselves which provided an air of comfort and trust.

Researchers Johnston, Almericho, Henriot, and Shapiro (2011) identified dispositions of successful teachers in more general terms. They found the dispositions of attitudes and values to be the dispositions of successful teachers. This passionate attitude consisted of positive attitudes in regards to both students and colleagues. These teachers also had a value set based upon ethics, integrity, and fairness. Again, these were all found in the transformational leaders in this study. The passion and value sets were unmistakable in each.

The bridge from successful teacher dispositions to transformational leadership dispositions is built upon the foundation that successful teachers become the transformational leaders of schools. Just as in business, truly successful leaders usually started out on the bottom and worked themselves up the latter by exhibiting qualities associated with the very dispositions discussed here.

Beginning with Leith and Jantzi (1990), they found that a transformational leader's disposition was based on a moral sense that attracted subordinates. The subordinates followed their leader because they were attracted to the leadership abilities and followed their leader's moral compass. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005)

described this disposition as idealized influence. The researcher discovered these dispositions in the transformational leaders involved in this research. The disposition of morality and ethics exhibited by the participants in this study was very telling. After each interview the researcher felt a strong personal connection to and affinity with each leader, presumably consistent with feelings' their subordinates must feel within their organization. The feeling can only be described and actually is noted after each interview in the researcher's notes and that is the statement, Wow! The researcher believes this comes from an attraction to the moral compass and idealized influence found in the leadership theory on dispositions. It is interesting to note if the researcher felt this in just a 60-90 minute interview, how much the pull of this moral compass would be in being led by these transformational leaders every day.

Hagan (2004) found the disposition of a transformational leader is trustworthiness. Again, this disposition was identified in each transformational leader interviewed in this research. The researcher found this as an overall theme that underlies or reinforces each of the dispositions identified. Everyone involved with the leader seemed to have an enigmatic trust or bond with the participants. The difficulty of identifying specific dispositions perhaps lies in the pragmatism of today. Ideals such as trustworthiness may be diluted by political correctness and the need to include everyone's viewpoints. The researcher identified trust in the interviews and experienced it through interactions with individuals involved in the organization of each transformational leader in this study.

Wasicscko (2007) identified honesty and people-centered as dispositions of transformational leaders. The researcher confirmed these dispositions in this research.



Each transformational leader used the specific language of democratic leadership, team leadership, and shared leadership in their interviews; however, a difference between their answers and the answers provided in the pilot interviews with transactional leaders was identified by the researcher. The researcher believed the transformational leaders were exposed to leadership theory, and they included the language of leadership schools into their already developed leadership dispositions while the transactional leaders talked the talk but did not seem to walk the walk. This means the transactional leaders used the vocabulary of transformational leadership without demonstrating the dispositions or achieving the results of transformational leaders. The research notes evidenced a disparity in school climate and culture in schools led by transformational leaders compared to schools led by transactional leaders. Similar to the findings of Hoy and Miskel (2001), the school climate and culture of a school is found to be directly related to school leadership. The “Renaissance Man” or transformational leader has a school climate or culture that is immediately perceived within the schools the researcher visited while the same feeling was absent in the pilot interviews with transactional leaders.

Godzyk (2008) researched transformational leadership dispositions and identified the disposition of humility. Collins (2001) supports this discovery in his great work, *Good to Great*. The humility exhibited by each participant was one of the notable dispositions that amazed the researcher. They revealed this humility through specific interview questions, research notes, and other questions not directly related to humility. Humility infused itself in all interactions. The interview subjects felt their accomplishments were the organizations and not their own. These disclosures did not appear to be done in a self-effacing way, or with the language of self-deprecation, but

rather with genuine humility expressing honest sentiments. It was truly a refreshing experience for the researcher. The reflective nature of each participant also indicates humility. The participants show a disposition which transformational leaders have and that is the disposition of self-reflection. This self-reflection is exhibited by the humility expressed in their answers. A transactional leader would most likely be able to relate a weakness but that weakness would be more related to the organizational structure, subordinates, or just a typical contrived answer. This was identified through piloted interviews with transactional leaders. Contrarily, these transformational leaders exhibited passion and humility which was a value system and they provided answers that could not have been easily contrived. They all answered with deep inner thoughts, which is something a transactional leader would not have the ability to do.

Researcher Helm (2010) continues this premise on dispositions but finds additional dispositions, such as, care, work ethic, honesty, and fairness. All of these were identified by the researcher in each participant. Even though the transformational leaders were very busy, each participant took time to make the researcher feel like they were fully engaged in our conversations and genuinely interested in making contributions to the field of leadership through their participation in the research. In contrast, the researcher felt from the piloted transactional interviews that these participants were finished for the year and not as excited about sharing their experience to help others. The researcher identified the disposition of passion from the research and it matches with Helms's "care" because each participant exhibited demonstrable passion and care for their endeavors, including the research itself. Fairness and honesty leadership dispositions matched the teacher dispositions discovered by Karges-Bone and Griffin

(2009) and Dottin (2010). As previously noted, the participants all discussed the complicated nature of fairness and exhibited the disposition of honesty.

Ruggieri (2009) identified the disposition of transformational leaders as team centered. The research suggests all transformational leaders have a sense of shared leadership or democratic leadership even before being exposed to these concepts in leadership academia. Hargis, Watt, and Piotrowski (2011) continued this theme and focused on the most important aspect of being a transformational leader as building this team-centered approach. They found that this had to be a disposition because if you were building a team focused on democratic or shared leadership an organization had to have buy in from the leader first and foremost. This did not happen if the leader did not have a disposition toward team-centered leadership. All of the participants in this study had a team-centered approach. They not only had the disposition but used the language of a team centered approach specifically. The researcher noted that anyone could use the language but the participants honestly believed in their responses.

Hacket and Hartmann (2011) discuss emotional intelligence and approach dispositions from a psychological perspective. They found transformational leaders attracted followers by having exceptional emotional intelligence. This relates with Marzano, Wates, and McNulty (2005) and idealized influence. From Hacket and Hartman (2011) this idealization comes from sensing an emotional intelligence in the transformational leader. Using the psychological approach even further, the researcher connects these by referring to them as self-actualization. An individual that is self-actualized is very confident and comfortable with themselves. This is sensed by others as some type of emotional intelligence. The researcher discovered exceptional self-

actualization in the participants. The research indicates this emotional intelligence or self-actualization comes from the values, worldviews, assumptions, and attitudes of the participants, essentially the very specific dispositions identified in this research.

A transformational leader exhibits a certain self-confidence in personal interactions. House (1992) felt this was the basis for transformational leadership but did not go far enough in identifying this as a specific disposition. Looking deeper a self-actualized or self-confident leader who exudes this through emotional intelligence actually has the dispositions of humility, passion, ethics, empathy, self-reflective, team centered, integrity, and compassion. This makes the transformational leader comfortable in who they are and what they are about. These dispositions are observed by individuals and tend to attract everyone in their organization to follow the transformational leaders in any organization. These were all identified by the researcher in this study. All of the participants exhibited this heightened level of self-confidence and the researcher identified this when leaving each interview by being astounded at the level of self-actualization, idealized influence, and emotional intelligence that each participant radiates.

One of the foundations of Hacket and Hartmann (2011) research on emotional intelligence is the foundational aspect of psychology and leadership. They discuss Maslow's theory of development. A criticism of Maslow is that his research was based upon circular reasoning. This research has some elements of circular reasoning and that is why text selections and research notes are cited to confirm the identified dispositions of transformational leaders.

Groves and LaRocca (2011) focus their research on transformational leadership dispositions on ethical principled leadership. The researcher found this disposition in all of the participants. They all based their decisions on an ethical basis. Surprisingly, you would think transformational leaders would be more flexible regarding policy and regulations but all believed in a strong sense of working within rules. The participants all felt ethically personally bound to behaving ethically, as well as being a requirement for success in their professional roles. They all felt you either had it or you did not. Podrakoff, Mackenzie, and Bonner (1996) felt transformational leaders either had a base in principled ethical leadership or they did not. The transformational leaders in this research concur.

Spirituality is identified in this research as a fundamental disposition of transformational leaders. Not only is there a significant lapse in research concerning dispositions, research on spiritual dispositions is almost totally absent. David Batstone (2003) establishes a new spiritual approach to leadership. He believes in placing organizational vision and priorities toward spiritual principles and that organizational success will be a byproduct of this change. These participants placed spirituality and spiritual principles at the top of their list of priorities in both their personal and professional life. All of the participants in this study revealed a spiritual disposition for the base of all their other dispositions. The reason spirituality is a disposition is because it is the participant-defined foundational basis of the values found in this research and according to them, molds the participant's worldviews and attitudes. This is the very definition of a disposition.

Because leadership theory is generally secular in nature, especially from colleges of education, spirituality is not discussed to the degree that it should. Matusak (1997) believed that the servant leader is rooted in a spiritual disposition. The connection between team leadership and servant leadership is seen in all of the transformational leaders discussed here and the researcher would assume that this basis is a spiritual disposition. All of the participants described their leadership positions as a calling that is primarily spiritual in nature. They believe they are in their leadership positions to best serve their spiritual purpose.

Most of the popular leadership theories proposed by major MBA programs throughout the country connect in some way to leadership dispositions. The classics like Phillips's (1992) analysis of the Lincoln presidency found the very same dispositions discovered in this research. Lincoln had the dispositions of humility, compassion, passion, ethics, reflectiveness, and spirituality which collectively made him one of the most successful leaders in world history. Collins (2002) found the disposition of humility in his studies of very successful business leaders. Even the major foundational theorist like Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) have discovered these dispositions in some form or fashion. However, there has never been a study that specifically discovered these dispositions of transformational leaders from a qualitative perspective. This work attempts to add to the formation of a definition of dispositions of transformational leaders. The vagueness of this term in educational leadership programs is perhaps made more finite by this research. These findings can lead to better preparation and assessment procedures in these programs to ensure transformational leaders exit and make a difference in schools. This may even prompt ISLLC or NCATE to add again

specific dispositions expected from educational leaders of today. As a leadership theorist Kotter & Cohen (2002) and Glickman and Gordan (2005) explained, leadership must come from the heart, and the heart consists of these leadership dispositions: team-centered, passion, compassion, humility, empathy, ethical, and spirituality.

### **Conclusions**

There are several conclusions that the researcher drew after interviewing the participants:

To begin with.....

- In the interview process, it became clear that most transformational leaders are a product not only of their nature: they are also influenced by their experiences, their study, and their reflection. It became clear that a transformation leader is not necessarily born but also may be developed over time.
- Transformational leaders are not afraid to admit their mistakes. Each participant seemed not only reflective but also extremely thoughtful as they discussed the process of trying to be a successful leader.
- Transformational leaders never lose sight of the fact that they are leading real people with real life joys and problems. Not one of them expressed a hardened approach in working with individuals, whether employees, parents, or students.
- Transformational leaders definitely influence members of their organization through idealized influence. Each participant portrayed a poignant picture of an ideal leader in the values they represent, their worldviews and their attitudes towards others.

- Transformational leaders believe in servant leadership based upon the spiritual value of service to mankind.
- Transformational leaders have very specific dispositions that can be identified and used to identify future transformational leaders.
- All eight of the transformational leaders referenced each other when asked to identify other transformational leaders.

### **Implications**

This study sought to identify specific dispositions of transformational high school principals in Georgia. By basing your selection process on dispositions, this research can be used to improve admissions processes within colleges of education throughout the country who struggle with identifying candidates inclined to be transformational leaders. This will impact colleges of education because they will be working towards more rigorous admission procedures and it will deter many who view colleges of education degrees as pay jumps instead of academic accomplishments. In addition, school organizations will be receiving a more qualified leadership product through the investments in these programs. These new leaders will finally be able to make a significant contribution to public education. Furthermore, educational leadership professors can use discussions of dispositions to mold a leader who is based on a set of values, worldviews, and attitudes identified by this research.



### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The research presented here does present many avenues for further research. The following recommendations for further research are suggested:

1. Further research should include transactional leaders and compare the dispositions of transactional leaders with transformational ones. This would expand upon the evidence provided and provide a clearer picture of dispositions in general.
2. The study could be expanded and provide a more diverse picture by looking at gender, race, or ethnic subgroups.
3. This study was limited to high schools. Including elementary, middle, and higher education would provide a clearer picture of dispositions of educational leaders in general.
4. This study was limited to educational leaders and a more inclusive approach by including business leaders, religious leaders, and military leaders would provide even more evidence of leadership dispositions.
5. Further quantitative studies could be completed to identify dispositions of transformational leaders from a wider range of participants.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions for Transformational Leaders

1. What is your background? (Start by telling me about where you are from and how you chose your career path)
2. How long have you been in the education profession as a teacher and now as a leader of a school?
3. What is your leadership style?
4. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a leader?
5. What is your philosophy on education?
6. Who are some of your heroes as leaders and why do they inspire you?
7. As a leader, how do you get people to follow you?
8. What is it as your role as principal that is important to you about your job?
9. How would you describe your personality?
10. What do you believe are the most important ethical guidelines in the principalship of a high school?
11. What do you believe are the most important values that a leader should exhibit?
12. What does the role of integrity play in your role as a leader or how do you define integrity?
13. What role does humility play or how would you define humility?
14. How do you show empathy for others in your role as a leader?
15. What role do spiritual principles play in your role as a leader?
16. From a professional standpoint, what is the role of fairness?
17. What roles do morals and ethics play in leadership?
18. What activities or hobbies are you involved in outside of the workplace?

19. From those core transformational values that we have discussed, can you think of an instance professionally that you had to rely on those values? (humility, fairness, spirituality, integrity, etc)
20. Do you know of any leaders in your profession who come to mind from the topics that we have discussed so far?



## Appendix B

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs <b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021 P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	

**To:** Todd Veland  
Dr. Linda Arthur

**CC:** Charles E. Patterson  
Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Initial Approval Date:** 05/29/12

**Expiration Date:** 07/31/12

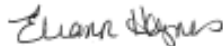
**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H12453** and titled "**Identifying Dispositions of Transformational Leaders in Georgia High Schools.**" it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of 8 subjects.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer

Appendix C  
Literature Review Charts

<b>Theorist</b>	<b>Dispositions</b>
Burns (1978)	morals and values
Bass (1985)	values
House (1992)	self-confidence and charisma
Avolio & Yammarino (2002)	morals and ethics
Popper (2005)	empathy
Northhouse (2008)	values and ideals
Groves and LaRocca (2011)	ethics and values

<b>Theorist</b>	<b>Dispositions</b>
Collison (1999)	compassion and creativity
Dottin (2010)	reflective, caring, passionate, open-minded
Koeppen & Jenkins (2007)	thoughtfulness and reflective
Karges-Bone & Griffin (2009)	compassion, fairness, and integrity
Johnson, Almericho, Henriot, & Shapiro (2011)	values and attitudes

<b>Theorist</b>	<b>Dispositions</b>
Leith & Jantazi (1990)	moral leadership
Phillips (1992)	humility and morals
Matusak (1997)	spirituality
Collins (2001)	humility
Batstone (2003)	spirituality
Hagan (2004)	trustworthy
Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005)	idealized influence
Wasicsko (2007)	honesty and people-focused
Godzyk (2008)	humility and critical thinking
Helm (2007), (2010)	caring, work ethic, humility, honesty, and fair
Ruggieri (2009)	team-centered
Hacket & Hartman (2011)	emotional intelligence and competency
Hargis, Watt, and Piotrowski (2011)	team-centered and building capacity
Groves & LaRocca (2011)	ethical principled leadership

