Educational Leadership Reconceived
Through the Lens of the Capability Approach
of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores educational leadership reconceived through the lens of the Capability Approach as presented by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Chapter One explains our background and our inquiry process, with our inquiry question being: How can educational leaders work with intention to motivate each staff member? Chapter Two, our literature review, first focused on analysing various theories of motivation. However, upon discovering the limitations of these theories, we found a more holistic approach in the Capability Approach (CA), which led us to focus on the importance of people, what they are able to do, to be and aspire to be, rather than in the process of simply motivating them. Chapter Three demonstrates how educational leadership, reconceived through the lens of the CA, can be used to tackle real-life scenarios in schools. Each of the six scenarios we present focuses on one of the core concepts of the CA. In exploring these concepts, we found unexpected connections to important academic scholars as they relate to core ideas we felt were important to acknowledge. These scholars’ philosophies align themselves with our interpretation of the CA. In Chapter Four, we present our six recommendations on how to effectively use the CA as an educational leader. In furthering our understanding of the CA, we observe the pressing need for educational leaders to develop empathic relationships and demonstrate support and care for staff members as educators. At the core of our research findings is the realization that educational leaders must support staff members based on their individual capabilities and functionings - which are two of the six core concepts of the CA. They must place each staff member at the forefront of decision-making. This understanding would help teachers feel noticed and valued. In Chapter Five, we reflect on what we learned from this overall experience, as expressed in the declaration of our commitments.
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by equal authors, S. Anderson and E. Isabelle. This is a conceptual paper on reconceiving educational leadership through the lens of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum’s Capability Approach.
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## List of Abbreviations

| CA          | Capability approach |
Acknowledgements

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Finally, we would like to thank our school administrators: Dr. David Overgaard, Steve Rauh, Jennifer Bach, Garth Thompson, Brad Daudlin, Erica Schmidt, and Justin Wong for their support and advice throughout the process.
Dedication

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my parents, Heather and Garry Anderson, and to my wife, Alex, and two boys, Baylor and Eldon, for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study. This accomplishment would not have been made possible without their sacrifice, which has allowed me to complete this thesis.

Thank you,

Shawn Anderson

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, my family, and my dear friends for their unconditional love, support, and encouragement throughout this entire process.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Isabelle
Chapter One: Introduction

Background

We began this inquiry with the purpose of wanting to learn how to be effective educational leaders. Our combined professional experience goes beyond being teachers. We each have worked as managers and directors in various non-academic settings, and these have influenced and enriched our views on what successful leadership might be.

Shawn Anderson. Before becoming a teacher, I spent six years working in the restaurant industry. In that time, I developed and executed training plans, worked with hundreds of staff, and opened two restaurants. Opening a new restaurant concept was the most difficult experience I have had in my career. The sheer magnitude of work, coupled with navigating the multiple personalities involved, helped shape the direction for my life. I loved working with young people and the restaurant industry provided me with that experience; however, I found the industry and the people in it to be very selfish. The success of the individual in a restaurant is dependent on the performance of so many others, but I found that people were often concerned about themselves. My experiences, both positive and negative, directed me towards becoming an educator. I returned to the University of British Columbia where I completed my Bachelor of Education. Since graduating, I have spent the last nine years as a full-time teacher at West Vancouver Secondary School teaching business education. From my very first day, I committed myself to connecting with students outside of the academic environment. I have worked with students and colleagues coaching sports, coordinating school events, representing the voice of students as the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) school lead, and organized professional development events like TEDxWestVancouverED. My varied experience has
allowed me to be a leader and to be led. Drawing from both career paths, I have developed an understanding of the importance of good leadership in the motivation of employees, but I have yet to find a clear style or set of values I can lead with.

**Elizabeth Isabelle.** I graduated from York University’s joint degree program with Canada’s National Ballet School Teacher Training Program with an Honours Bachelor of Fine Arts in dance and a teaching diploma. I spent a few years teaching at several dance studios in Vancouver, BC before embarking on the fulfilling journey of being co-artistic director of a professional ballet school for girls aged 5-15 in North Vancouver, BC. During these nine years as co-director of this private institution, my business partner and I managed to build a school from the ground up, keeping in mind our vision of wanting to promote excellence in dance training for young students. Teachers had to be trained, supported, and recognised. Our dance studio managed to gain national and international recognition due to the strong artistry and technical skills of our students as taught by our staff and ourselves. As the years went on, the school became widely successful. Students were admitted into prestigious professional ballet schools across North America and Europe, but ironically, I began to feel unhappy and needed a new challenge. I felt that my teaching philosophy was changing from believing it was crucial to train dancers to be elitist, to feeling that all dancers were deserving of excellence in training, not just a few ones. As a director, I became aware of how my actions, words, and demands could truly affect my employees in a favourable or negative way. I knew that the students and staff were benefiting from my leadership as many had shared how I had impacted them positively. As I gained more experience, I realised the importance of making my staff feel more valued: I listened to their wants and needs more carefully, and I tried to make them happy in the
workplace. I was always interested in the well-being of the staff and students. At this point in my career, I had experienced first-hand, as an employee and an employer, how leaders can have a direct influence on staff motivation.

Consequently, I chose to complete my Bachelor of Education (Elementary) with a concentration in French immersion at the University of British Columbia. I changed careers with the goal of using my teaching experience in a different context in the hopes that I could begin feeling happy and motivated in the workplace once again. I am currently completing my third year as a secondary dance and French immersion public school teacher at Handsworth Secondary in North Vancouver, BC. Ever since I started my role in this school, I have always envisioned myself becoming an educational leader. As I familiarize myself with this position, I have observed how leaders can influence employee motivation. Professionally, I strive to be the best team-player, colleague, teacher, and leader I can be at my school. I am intrinsically driven: I am committed, I work hard, I care, and I am motivated. On the other hand, walking around the hallways, sitting in staff meetings and committees, I often wonder why some staff are more engaged and motivated than others. In picturing myself as a future educational leader, I ponder on what an educational leader can do to positively motivate her staff.
Inquiry Process

This Masters of Education was a process by which to examine the world and an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the world around us. In thinking about education, we reflected on the importance of our students, their wants, and their needs. As teachers, we attempt to provide our students with the best individualised learning experiences to help them flourish during the time they spend in our classrooms and in our care. When thinking about educational leadership, we wondered if teachers’ wants and needs were central to the educational leaders’ job. Are teachers taken into consideration in the same way our students and their needs are? We decided early on in our research to purposely put the teachers at the forefront of our inquiry process because we feel that they are an integral part of our students’ educational journey.

Furthermore, we wondered what makes teachers happy at work. On a philosophical level, we feel that happiness is a powerful component of our existence and seems to be a motivator for our colleagues. Nichomachean Ethics (2014) explains Aristotle’s philosophy of happiness, outlining that it is an activity and therefore something we do. He refers to it as eudaimonia which is synonymous with ‘success’ and ‘flourishing’. Therefore, people’s happiness or flourishing is not an emotional state, but rather a way of being (pp. 1095).

With Aristotle’s definition of happiness in mind, we decided to further explore what motivates teachers, what makes them happy in this career path. We developed two questions of inquiry to drive our literature review:

- How can we be the best leaders we can be?
- How can educational leaders work with intention to motivate each staff member?
Our literature review began with a general search of the literature on leadership and leadership styles. What we found was an enormous breadth and depth of literature. In order to narrow our search criteria, we included “education” as a key word to focus the attention on our field of work, educational leadership. For our purposes, an educational leader is not necessarily someone in a position of formal power. It can be anyone (teachers, school-based administrators or district administrators) within the school system who is trying to positively influence how the educational goals of the organization are achieved. We found that there are numerous leadership styles, all of which have value, but we found it difficult to identify one style that would work universally for everyone or encompass all the ideas of merit from the field. Moreover, under the large umbrella of leadership styles, there are also personality traits to be considered within each leadership style as they determine what makes each person who they are. For example, if someone is not charismatic or outgoing, they cannot force themselves to be that way, and so a leadership style that requires charisma would not be effective for that person. Feeling as though this was not quite connecting to the core of the problem of how to be a great leader and help others be the best they can be, we changed direction. We moved away from administrative leadership styles and focused more on the motivation of the teacher.

We then reset our literature review process, which we refer to as Capstone 2.0, with a focus on motivation. According to Eyal and Roth (2011), “Motivation results when the person believes that engaging in the behaviour will result in some desired experience or outcome” (p. 258). Our new literature review began with researching theories of motivation. The main focus began with theories related directly to education; however, we discovered that the available literature focused heavily on student motivation. Our aim was to look at teacher motivation and how to be the best leader by means of capturing teachers’ motivation. Therefore, we had to
expand our search to include the employer/employee relationship from the business and organisational literature. In order to work through the large number of motivational theories we encountered, we decided to categorize each of them as need-based, belief-based and goal-based.

We realised that the motivational theories we reviewed were very specific and rather limited; thus, we strongly believed that a more holistic approach would be more able to provide insights across the spectrum of diverse educational settings. We found that Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach (CA), based on the core concepts of capabilities, functionings, ultimate and instrumental values, conversion factors, means-ends distinction, and agency and freedom, provides an ideal lens for a holistic examination of motivation. We also discovered that Martha Nussbaum’s 10 central capabilities further elaborate on Sen’s work, and they place the CA in a social justice framework. This illustrates that the CA can be applied in a different field and provide tools and concepts by which the CA can be put into practice.

At this juncture, we realised that the CA has never been used to examine leadership in an explicitly educational context, and that this gap in the literature represented an ideal focus for this paper. To this end, we have created six scenarios to put each core concept of the CA into practice, illustrating how the CA can effectively be applied in an educational leader’s work in schools. This is the framework that we used to make our argument that educational leadership should be reconceived through the lens of Sen and Nussbaum’s CA.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The literature on theories of motivation is widespread and for the purpose of our research, we selected those that were reviewed more extensively. We chose to include only a cursory review of Maslow’s need hierarchy theory, Weiner’s attribution theory, Vroom’s expectancy theory, and Eisenberger and Rhoades’ organizational support theory. These theories were prominent in our research, but we felt that they did not connect to the field of education as closely as the following theories of motivation.

Theories of Motivation - Need Based

Achievement motivation theory. David C. McClelland is credited with the development of achievement motivation theory in 1961. His work is grounded in the notion that as people develop, they learn from the positive and negative emotions they feel from things that happen around them. Therefore, the desire of people to achieve positive feelings or prevent negative feelings influences their behavior. McClelland (1965) argued that “social motives are learned by close association with reduction in certain basic biological drives like hunger, thirst, and physical discomfort which loom larger in childhood than adulthood” (p. 321). He proposed that the need to achieve is established early on in life and reinforced by experiences in adulthood.

McClelland’s work identified three key characteristics of people who are high in achievement motivation:

1. They possess a strong desire to assume responsibility for performing or solving a task.
   ○ People with high achievement motivation tend to work alone or choose co-workers based on competence instead of friendship.
2. They are able to set moderately difficult goals.
   ○ Hard tasks have limited chances of success and could more likely result in negative feelings toward performance. On the other end of the spectrum, easy tasks represent things that anyone can do and therefore provide little satisfaction.

3. They possess a strong desire for performance feedback.
   ○ High achievers desire feedback, whether in their successes or failures. There is little opportunity for achievement satisfaction when a person cannot tell success from failure (p. 145).

We find this last point challenging as educators, since there is little feedback on performance in the classroom. Teachers work in isolation and very rarely receive meaningful feedback from peers or administration. As a result, teachers become reliant on feedback from students, which can be influenced by the students’ own wants and needs.

**Motivation-hygiene theory.** In the 1950s and 1960s, Frederick Herzberg researched the sources of employee motivation. Herzberg (1974) found that the things that made people satisfied at work were different from the things that made them dissatisfied, and referred to those conditions as motivation factors and hygiene factors respectively (p. 18).

Motivation factors, when present, created responses of satisfaction by employees. Commentary on these positive or “happy” events was dominated by references to achievement, recognition for achievement, the level of challenge in the work itself, responsibility, connection/relationship to advancement or promotion, and professional growth. Hygiene factors are dissatisfiers and are “an analogy to the health/medical term suggesting factors preventive and environmental in nature” (Timmreck, 1977, p. 106). These
dissatisfiers were most strongly connected to references of company rules and policy, over-supervision, interpersonal relations between superiors and peers, job status, and job security.

In Herzberg’s study, motivation factors, when gratified were connected to increased levels of satisfaction, as one would expect; however, when they were not gratified, they only produced feelings of minimal dissatisfaction. Conversely, Herzberg found that when hygiene factors were not gratified, a negative attitude was created, but when they were, there was only minimal job satisfaction. For example, a teacher not being able to photocopy exams on a school copier is likely to result in dissatisfaction; however, being able to make these photocopies is unlikely to increase job satisfaction.

Herzberg believed that leaders have to be aware of both sets of factors. Leaders must attempt to create job enrichment while simultaneously eliminating those aspects of the job that are likely to produce dissatisfaction. The challenge is that the motivation and hygiene factors will be different for individuals based on their current situation, which requires a thorough and personal understanding of every person in the organization.

**Theories of Motivation - Belief Based**

**Equity theory.** In 1963, John Stacey Adams was credited with the introduction of equity theory as it relates to workplace motivation. He was influenced by many scholars, but his work on equity theory was inspired by the findings of Herzberg’s research on motivation-hygiene theory. While the theory is referred to as equity theory, the major motivating force is actually the existence of inequity.

The basics of equity theory (Adams, 1963) begin when an individual exchanges something, referred to as ‘inputs’ and gets something in return, ‘outcomes’. If the individual perceives the exchange to be unequal, then the potential for inequities exists. “Inequity is said to
exist when the ratio of an individual’s outcomes to inputs departs to a significant degree from the ratio perceived for the reference source” (Miner, 2005, p. 136). The reference source or referent group is the third variable considered in equity theory. Reference groups are people or situations that an individual compares their own exchange relationships against to determine if there are potential inequities. It is important to note that the concept of inequity is subject to one’s own perceptions, and that fairness is in the eye of the beholder.

Perceived fairness of the exchange relationship and the corresponding equity or inequity has direct effects on employee motivation (Adams, 1963). These inequities interfere with work motivation and individuals attempt to reduce such feelings in three ways: they may try to increase their outcomes, they may quit or find other work, or they may reduce their inputs.

When employees feel they are being treated unfairly, their motivation often declines. To compensate for their feelings of inequity, employees may decrease inputs or even attempt to balance the situation by cheating, stealing, or other questionable practices. For example, a teacher who feels that she is putting in more hours than her colleagues may choose to take a sick day even if she is not sick. Equity in the workplace can have important practical and ethical implications on organizational performance.

**Self-efficacy theory.** This theory was first proposed by Albert Bandura in 1963. “Self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1994, p. 2). Self-efficacy beliefs contribute to motivation because they determine how people feel and think about themselves. In addition, our self-perception is an important determinant in what motivates us. Furthermore, these beliefs influence the goals that individuals set for themselves.
and how much time and effort they will commit to achieving those goals. The stronger a person's belief is in their capabilities, the greater the goal and the more effort and persistence exerted.

While self-efficacy expectations are derived from a variety of sources, Bandura (1994) outlines four major sources that determine their formation:

1. Mastery Experience – Someone’s experience plays an important role in developing an understanding of their abilities. “Successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy. Failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established” (Bandura, 1994, p. 2). In order to establish a resilient sense of efficacy, one must experience success by overcoming challenges. “After people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks” (Bandura, 1994, p. 3). The ability to face adversity and rebound from a setback develops one’s self-efficacy.

2. Vicarious Experiences - Bandura discussed the influence in observing someone similar to you succeed or fail, and the strong effect this has on the formation of self-efficacy. “The greater the assumed similarity, the more persuasive are the model’s successes and failures” (Bandura, 1994, p. 3). The strength of this influence is dependent on the individual’s perceived similarity to the model.

3. Social Persuasion – According to Bandura, it is much harder to instill beliefs of personal self-efficacy than it is to undermine them. “People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given activities are likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it than if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when problems arise” (Bandura, 1994, p. 3). While social persuasion can be used to encourage
an individual and improve how they feel and think, it is much more effective in creating self-doubt that leads the individual to avoid challenging activities.

4. Somatic and Emotional States - People rely on their physiological responses to tell them about anticipated performance. If an individual feels a positive arousal such as excitement, then they associate that response with positive self-efficacy. If the physiological response is fear, stress, or fatigue, then the individual has feelings of self-doubt and avoids the activity.

Self-efficacy is concerned with people's desire to have control over their lives. “Beliefs in personal efficacy affect life choices, level of motivation, quality of functioning, resilience to adversity and vulnerability to stress and depression” (Bandura, 1994, p. 14). People must have a sense of efficacy in order to understand their capabilities to exercise influence over their lives.

**Theories of Motivation - Goal Based**

**Drive theory.** In his book *Drive*, author Daniel Pink (2009) presents a look into the 21st century world of management, leadership, and motivation. Pink suggests that our use of rewards and punishment in the workplace is an outdated way of managing people, and that we need to “upgrade” our theory of motivation to presume that individuals have a drive to learn, to create, and to better the world. Pink connects drive to the individual's intrinsic motivation to do something because it is perceived to be interesting or challenging, not because they will receive a reward or be punished for not completing the task.

Drive theory acknowledges the fact that people need to earn a living and this is a starting point for the discussion on motivation. If compensation is not adequate, then the individual’s focus will be on the unfairness of the situation and there will be little motivation, if at all. However, once you are past the point of inadequate compensation, the use of rewards and
punishments will actually achieve the opposite of their intended result. The idea that rewards could have a negative effect on employee motivation was controversial as it challenged the practice of most companies and organizations. Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999) re-analyzed three decades’ worth of studies on the subject:

Careful consideration of reward effects reported in 128 experiments leads to the conclusion that tangible rewards tend to have a substantially negative effect on intrinsic motivation. Even when tangible rewards are offered as indicators of good performance, they typically decrease intrinsic motivation for interesting activities (p. 658).

The result of this study supports Pink’s idea that rewards actually diminish intrinsic motivation. He calls it the Sawyer Effect, named after Tom Sawyer, who convinced his friends it would be fun to paint a fence. The Sawyer Effect can either turn play into work or turn work into play.

Motivation that depends on rewards and punishment fosters what Pink (2009) calls Type X behaviour - behaviour that is fueled by extrinsic rewards. Type X behaviour causes the individual to be less concerned with the drive of intrinsic motivation and more with the external rewards that will be given for completing the activity. He suggests a new model of motivation that cultivates an environment that will allow Type I behaviour- behaviour fueled by the internal satisfaction of an activity. Type I behaviour leads to stronger performance, improved physical and mental health, and a greater overall well-being. Pink’s (2009) theory of motivation to increase Type I behaviour is based on three elements: autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

The first element, autonomy, is rooted in the curiosity and self-direction of human nature. A sense of autonomy provides the feeling that individuals are in control of their own lives. This sense of control is an important component to one's happiness. The feeling of control
has a powerful effect on performance and attitude. People need autonomy over what they do and when they do it. Furthermore, they want control over the people they work with and how they do the work. Autonomy is not about individualism, but rather about “creating conditions for people to do their best work” (Pink, 2009, p. 86).

The second element, mastery, is about getting better at something that matters. Rewards and punishment as a driving force for motivation is about control and compliance. Pink’s (2009) model of motivation seeks engagement, and “only engagement can produce mastery” (p. 111). Engagement is a powerful motivator. When you are engaged in a task that you believe you can achieve you are willing to work extremely hard for it. For example, learning to play the guitar requires that a person be willing to spend countless hours practicing, exerting effort, feeling frustration and pain, all so that they may improve. Furthermore, they engage in this process for fun, on their spare time, and actually spend money doing it. Mastery abides by three rules:

1. Mastery is a mindset - Mastery requires that people not view their capabilities as fixed or limited, but instead as accessibly improvable. Carol Dweck (as cited in Pink, 2009) stated that “a signature insight is that what people believe shapes what people achieve” (p. 120). Mastery encourages effort as a way to improve in something that matters.

2. Mastery is a pain - Mastery demands effort. “Effort is one of the things that gives meaning to life. Effort means you care about something, that something is important to you and you are willing to work for it” (Dweck, 2000, p. 41).

3. Mastery is an asymptote – an asymptote is a concept in algebra that is a line that approaches but never quite reaches another line. Like an asymptote, mastery can never fully be reached. So the question to be asked is, why reach for it? Drive Theory would
posit that “the joy is in the pursuit more than in the realization. In the end, mastery attracts precisely because mastery eludes” (Pink, 2009, p. 127). This is why mastery can be simultaneously frustrating and alluring.

The third element of Type I behaviour and the cornerstone of drive theory is purpose. “Autonomous people working toward mastery perform at very high levels. But those who do so in the service of some greater objective can achieve even more” (Pink, 2009, p. 133).

The central idea that drive theory brings to the foreground of the classic ‘carrot-and-stick’ motivation is that there is a disconnect between scientific knowledge and organizational practice. Pink (2009) summarized this by stating:

The science shows that the secret to high performance isn’t our biological drive or our reward-and-punishment drive, but our third drive - our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to extend and expand our abilities, and to live a life of purpose.

(p. 145)

**Self-determination theory.** Gagne and Deci (2005) have stated that self-determination theory makes a distinction between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (p. 333). Autonomous behaviour involves choice and congruency, whereas controlled motivation is characterized by pressure, tension, and demand.

To better understand autonomous and controlled motivation, it helps to begin with the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci (2000), two of the leading authors regarding intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, defined intrinsic motivation as “doing something because it is inherently interesting and enjoyable” (p. 55). This naturally leads to more autonomous behaviour. Autonomous motivation is affected by basic
human needs. Ryan and Deci’s approach to self-determination theory outlines three human needs for autonomous motivation: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The first, *competence*, refers to taking on a challenging task. The second, *autonomy*, refers to feelings of choice and the willingness of an individual to participate. The third, *relatedness*, refers to the feeling of both being cared for, and caring for another.

External motivation is defined as “performing an activity because it leads to some separable outcome” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 60). When activities are considered uninteresting, a person is more likely to require extrinsic consequences in order for the person to be motivated. When a person's motivation to perform a task is not intrinsic, then the resulting behaviour is said to be controlled and must be internalized by the individual. Ryan and Deci (2000) identified three levels of internalization:

1. **Introjection** - involves completing the activity but on the basis of maintaining one’s self-esteem. The individual places value on completion because they have an inner desire to behave.

2. **Identification** - involves a more fully internalized form where the individual has identified the value of the activity but does not find the activity inherently interesting.

3. **Integrated** - involves the activity being assimilated into one’s needs and values. (p. 61)

It is important to note the identified and integrated methods of internalization are not considered intrinsic motivators because they are done for reasons other than interest and pleasure. Self-determination theory emphasizes the importance of creating environments where individuals can be influenced by their autonomous motivation.
Reflection on the Motivation Theories

The theories of motivation in our literature review all had elements that spoke to us as future educational leaders. We also felt that we would respond positively, as teachers, in situations where our educational leaders used the techniques outlined. Each motivational theory appears to have merit for individual scenarios, but does not appear to be universally applicable across a wider spectrum of situations. The theories are compartmentalized and specific, which would require an educational leader to potentially select a different approach for every situation. This would likely prove challenging to implement on a daily basis, therefore we direct our discussion on a more person-centered and holistic lens that would apply to typical school scenarios.

Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach

The capability approach (CA) was first introduced in 1979 (Wells, N.D.) by Amartya Sen, an Indian economist who is currently a Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University. In 1993, Sen argued that

In social evaluations and policy design, the focus should be on what people are able to do and be, on the quality of their life, and on removing obstacles in their lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life which, upon reflection, they find valuable.

(p.30)

According to Robeyns (2003),

The core characteristic of the capability approach is its focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be, that is, on their capabilities. This contrasts with philosophical approaches that concentrate on people’s happiness or desire-fulfillment or
on theoretical and practical approaches that concentrate on income, expenditures, consumption or basic needs fulfillment. (p.5)

There are six core concepts that define the CA:

**Capabilities.** Capabilities, as defined by Sen (1979), are the set of abilities and opportunities that a person has that ultimately define what it is they are able to be and do. The distinction between abilities and opportunities is critical to a full understanding of the approach. For example, a person without physical limitations may have the ability to ride a bicycle, but if they do not have access to one, they cannot be a bike rider. The combination of abilities and opportunities, therefore, defines what a person can be or do. Robeyns (2016b) explained that capabilities are what Sen called “real freedoms”, a set of often-interrelated opportunities to choose from and to act upon. Capabilities are thus a form of freedom.

**Functionings.** In the CA, functionings are essentially a set of outcomes that results from a person's capabilities. They are the things a person is able to be or do based on the abilities they have and the opportunities they have to use them. In more philosophical language, Sen (1985a) argued that functionings are “a part of the state of that person”. Alkire (2010) added that functionings ought to be intrinsically valuable to the person and should be intuitive. These points illustrate a key concept that functionings are a part of who the person is and what is important to them. A contextual example would be when a teacher decides to sign a continuing contract with a school district for a specific position. This represents a functioning because she managed to get the position she wanted (to be) and she chose to sign the contract (to do) (p.14).

Furthermore, a distinction can be made between personal and occupational functionings. Personal functionings refer to what the individual feels is important to do or to be
for himself in his personal realm. They represent the ability to achieve goals that are important for this individual’s private life. An example would be when a teacher provides for his family, and also spends quality time with them. Taking care of his family is a personal function that he values, and by achieving this, he feels happiness and fulfillment. On the other hand, an occupational functioning refers to the ability to achieve goals in the workplace, as valued and desired by the individual. Such a goal, for instance, could be to become a member of the school leadership team after going through the application process and after laying the groundwork to become a successful applicant. Both personal and occupational functionings can contribute positively to an individual’s well-being when given the opportunity to fulfill them. In a sense, they are interconnected. If people are really happy at work, they will likely carry some of this happiness into their personal lives and vice versa.

**Ultimate & instrumental values.** Capabilities and functionings are only meaningful to the individual if they are valued by that individual. They are the things we care about. Robeyns (2012) supported this fundamental idea by stating, “The freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people’s valuable capabilities, that is, their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value” (p.1).

Two types of values, ultimate and instrumental, need to be distinguished as they each serve a distinct purpose. Robeyns (bewig.net, 2013) explained that “the ultimate value represents what we really care about, while the instrumental value is something that is influential in helping us achieve what we want.” In schools, this distinction is critical since understanding it will greatly change how educational leaders choose to get involved in any specific situation based on what is required. In the context of the school system, an example of an ultimate value
could be when staff want to develop a certain skill through professional development (what they really care about). An instrumental value (what would help them) would be the funds to pay the expense incurred by the staff’s attendance in a short course or a conference for the purpose of developing the desired skill.

Robeyns (2012) clarified, “for example, money or economic growth will not be valued for their own sake, but only in so far as they contribute to an expansion of people’s capabilities” (p.8). This means that educational leaders need to understand the ultimate values of their staff in order for them to give the appropriate instrumental value (the resources needed). Instrumental values can help achieve the functionings of staff members, but do not represent what their ultimate desire is. Understanding the difference between ultimate and instrumental values will help educational leaders determine what can be done to help individual teachers reach their goals by understanding what may be stopping them from realizing those goals.

**Conversion factors.** Just as with instrumental values, functionings can be enhanced or constrained by conversion factors. A conversion factor, as defined by Robeyns (2016b), is “the degree to which a person can transform a resource into a functioning”. For example, imagine two people: one has learned to ride a bike (the biker) and one has not (the pedestrian). The biker has a high conversion factor as she is able to use her bicycle as a mode of transportation, whereas the pedestrian has a very low conversion factor as she cannot use a bicycle efficiently, and therefore her bike does not serve a purpose. In this case, how much someone can travel with the bicycle (the level of the conversion factor) represents how much functioning one can get from a resource.
The CA highlights human diversity as it embraces all the possibilities within one’s capabilities and functionings. To be more specific, as presented by Robeyns (2016b), “The capability approach conceptualizes a metric of well-being (in terms of functionings) and well-being freedom (in terms of capabilities).” Sen’s CA discussed three types of conversion factors: personal, social, and environmental.

**Personal conversion factors.** These “are internal to the person such as metabolism, physical condition, sex, reading skills, or intelligence” (Robeyns, 2016b). An example of a personal conversion factor in our schools could be a teacher presenting in front of their colleagues. One employee who is introverted could be petrified, and will have a low personal conversion factor in this instance, whereas an extroverted teacher who excels in public speaking will have a high conversion factor.

**Social conversion factors.** These “are factors from the society in which one lives, such as public policies, social norms, practices that unfairly discriminate, societal hierarchies, or power relations related to class, gender, race, or caste” (Robeyns, 2016b). Imagine a situation, during staffing, where senior teachers get to pick their courses first (high conversion factor), while the new teachers must content themselves with whatever is left to build a schedule (low conversion factor). In this case, some teachers may benefit or be hindered due to a social conversion factor.

**Environmental conversion factors.** These “emerge from the physical or built environment in which a person lives. Among aspects of one's geographic location are climate, pollution, the proneness to earthquakes, and the presence or absence of seas and oceans” (Robeyns, 2016b). Consider the varying sizes and shapes of classrooms in our comparison of two drama teachers. The first is given a large studio in which to teach that allows his students to
plan scenes and move freely (high conversion factor). The second is given a small classroom with equipment along all four walls (low conversion factor). The former is much more likely to achieve the most with his students based on the facility he is able to teach in.

Conversion factors can be seen as a tool to better understand why an individual is able or unable to do something. Personal, social, and environmental conversion factors can be seen as high or low, depending on the degree to which a person can transform a resource into a functioning. It is necessary to get to know our staff, the community we work in, and our physical work environment in order to help others achieve their functionings based on their conversion factors. Knowing the internal (personal) and external (social and environmental) conversion factors of an individual can help educational leaders decide on a purposeful course of action to turn any low conversion factor into a high one.

**Means-ends distinction.** The idea of looking at someone in terms of what they can do instead of what they cannot do may seem simple, but it is an important distinction to make in the discussion of our social interactions and judgments. We must ask ourselves if we look at others as capable beings or as individuals lacking a particular skill. Are we basing our interactions with others on a clear desire to get something from them in the end? Means represent the resources, while ends are the capabilities and the functionings themselves. Robeyns (2016b) explained that “the main reason why the capability approach holds that it is better to focus on the ends rather than the means, is that people differ in their ability to convert means into valuable opportunities (capabilities) or outcomes (functionings)”’. This is the means-ends distinction.

From an educational leadership perspective, the means-ends distinctions suggest that we evaluate others with their capabilities and functionings in mind. The approach focuses on
improving conversion factors rather than the need for additional means. Instead of focusing on what can be done with the resources at hand, educational leaders can try to put conversion factors in place to help individuals reach ends. As a result, we would more likely set up people for success as we would be catering to their individual abilities, giving them the best opportunities to accomplish their goals. It is also important to consider what ends others have in mind. Focusing on the ends rather than the means has its advantages, besides what has been discussed regarding the instrumental values. Robeyns (2012) explained:

By starting from ends, we do not a priori assume that there is only one overriding important means to that end (such as income), but rather explicitly ask the question which types of means are important for the fostering and nurturing of a particular capability, or set of capabilities. For some capabilities, the most important means will indeed be financial resources and economic production, but for others it may be particular political practices and institutions, such as effective guarantees and protections of freedom of thought, political participation, social or cultural practices, social structures, social institutions, public goods, social norms, and traditions and habits. (p. 8)

Ideally, each means will match the best ends based on someone’s capabilities and freedoms. A means-ends scheme would be to offer the opportunity to all staff members to be part of an organizing committee at school. This would give various people the chance to work collaboratively towards an end goal, keeping in mind that everyone has something to contribute, and to provide them with a framework to capitalize on that gift or the insight that they bring. The means-ends distinction should have a focus on what has been recognized as important based on the individuals who are actively working towards the end goal of that particular task.
Agency & freedom. Sen (1985b) viewed agency as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important” (p.203). In an educational context, an example of agency could be to offer teachers choices about what to teach, but more importantly, how to teach. Educational leaders should strive for a conceptualization of professional agency in the workplace to promote meaningful careers for each individual. As professionals, we both want to be empowered and to take ownership over our learning. We are looking for agency in both our work environment and our professional learning. As teachers ourselves, we want to have a voice and feel that we can shape the decision-making process at the administrative level in our schools.

It seems fair to say that a life lived making choices for ourselves based on what we value can help in our pursuit of happiness and to bring us a sense of fulfillment in the long run. According to Robeyns (2016b), “For Sen, capabilities as freedoms refer to the presence of valuable options or alternatives, in the sense of opportunities that do not exist only formally or legally but are also effectively available to the agent”. In an educational context, a teacher may have the freedom to apply for a general leave of absence to pursue other endeavors, without the fear of losing her continuing contract. Another example would be to have the freedom, as a teacher, to ask for a transfer-request (from your school board) from teaching in an elementary to a secondary school, or vice versa. The freedoms are opportunities that are available to teachers; they can use their agency (ability to choose) to act on that opportunity.
Martha Nussbaum’s Direction for the Capabilities Approach

Building from Sen’s CA theoretical framework, Martha Nussbaum, an American philosopher and current professor of law and ethics at the University of Chicago, has worked to develop the CA. Her focus has been to expand Sen’s Capabilities Approach as a normative model for assessing quality-of-life and to theorize about basic social justice. A normative model provides perspective on what ought to be done or how things should be based on a standard. Hobson (2011) described Nussbaum’s work as offering “modifications of the CA, maintaining that it is imperative to develop a normative model of basic capabilities of social justice that could be applied across societies” (p. 153). Nussbaum’s work on the Capabilities Approach lays the groundwork for discussion and debate about what factors are important to consider when looking at a theory of social justice.

While Nussbaum’s version of the CA differs from Sen, Nussbaum (2011) explained that “we may continue to treat the approach as a single, relatively unified approach to a set of questions about both quality of life and basic justice” (p. 20). Nussbaum (2011) preferred the term “Capabilities Approach” to emphasize the importance of multiple elements influencing a person's quality of life. This emphasis considers each person as an end, not simply looking at what is best for the group. Diane Wood & Luisa S. Deprez (2012) highlighted this advantage of the Capabilities Approach by stating that “broadly speaking, a particularly compelling and demanding feature of the Capabilities Approach is its refusal to measure the quality of social decisions, practices, and policies by using aggregates of people as the unit of measure” (p. 476). This movement away from a utilitarian approach to social justice is at the core of Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach. The goal of a utilitarian approach is to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In education, we often find examples of this in the
interactions between teachers and students. In a high school classroom with 30 students, all with varying degrees of understanding and learning styles, teachers commonly teach the course to reach the greatest number of students. Nussbaum argued that focus must be on choice or freedom for each individual, and must take into account that the capabilities for achievement will be different in quantity and quality for each individual.

The essential elements of Sen’s CA are integral to Nussbaum’s version of the Capabilities Approach; however, Nussbaum has placed emphasis on areas of the approach for which Sen purposely remained ambiguous. She has offered the approach as a theory of basic social justice with emphasis on human dignity and a minimum threshold of capabilities. Nussbaum (2011) has described how Sen views all capabilities as valuable freedoms and therefore “does not employ a threshold or a specific list of capabilities, although it is clear that he thinks some capabilities (for example, health and education) have a particular centrality” (p. 19). Like Sen, Nussbaum acknowledged that there are countless human capabilities, but that it is important to acknowledge individual differences within the Capabilities Approach. Wood and Deprez (2012) summarized the importance of acknowledging individual differences by asking, of the many things humans have a capacity to do, which are the important ones (p.476). The protection of freedoms for the individual is a main focus of Nussbaum’s work. Nussbaum (2011) argued that we must protect areas of freedom that are so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity (p. 31).

This brings us to her next question, “What does a life worthy of human dignity require?” Nussbaum (2011) outlined 10 central capabilities where a minimum threshold level is required:

1. *Life.* Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length.
2. *Bodily health.* Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.

3. *Bodily integrity.* Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault.

4. *Senses, imagination, and thought.* Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training.

5. *Emotions.* Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence.

6. *Practical reason.* Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.

7. *Affiliation.* (A) Being able to live with and towards others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings. (B) Having the social basis of self-respect and non-humiliation.

8. *Other species.* Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. *Play.* Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. *Control over one’s environment.* (A) *Political.* Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life. (B) *Material.* Being able to hold property and having to have property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others. (p. 33)
The importance of Nussbaum’s central capabilities and theory of social justice. Nussbaum (2011) described the 10 Central Capabilities as a proposal that should be contested or debated and not just accepted. Nussbaum emphasized that in order to develop a lens of social justice with which to view the Capabilities Approach, it is imperative to first select a list of capabilities from which to work on. Without first establishing this list, all capabilities could be viewed as fundamental freedoms, and the valued capabilities simply as instances of what we are able to do and to be (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 70). In order to view capabilities as an approach to social justice, Nussbaum argued that the selection of central capabilities makes commitments to what we value as a just society. If society is to provide a socially just environment it is “urgently important to distinguish items that are genuinely fundamental (the freedom of speech, protection of bodily integrity) from items that are not fundamental” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 73). Nussbaum (2011) contended that determining items that are genuinely fundamental from items that are not allows her version of the capabilities to be “an account of minimal social justice and constitutional law” (p. 71). With the creation of laws, policies must be crafted to ensure that the law is upheld, and therefore the capabilities that are genuinely fundamental to the well-being of a just society would be defended.

The Adoption of Sen and Nussbaum’s Capability Approach

As we researched, explored, and discussed the elements of the CA outlined by Sen and Nussbaum, we oscillated between clarity and confusion. The deliberate vagueness of Sen’s work leaves room for interpretation and application across multiple fields, whereas Nussbaum’s deliberate selection of 10 Central Capabilities allows the reader to see the specific application of the CA with a focus on social justice. More importantly, recent efforts have been made to apply the CA in the field of education. Tony DeCresare (2014) detailed its recent application:
Like its applications in general, applications of CA within education have been characterized by some variety of purpose; it has been used as a framework for thinking about such things as educational policy making (Walker 2006); children’s rights (Biggeri et al. 2006; Biggeri 2007); higher education (Walker 2007); girls’ and women’s education and gender equality (Unterhalter 2005; Walker 2007); justice and education (Walker and Unterhalter 2007; Terzi 2008); and disability (Terzi 2005, 2008; Taylor 2012). (p. 150)

In spite the connection to the field of education, we did not find that the CA was used as a framework for thinking specifically about educational leadership. Therefore, we saw a clear gap in the literature, which pushed our inquiry even further.

Each person has a unique combination of thoughts, perspectives, and motivations. What if educational leaders were to focus on teachers’ well-being, as it relates to their individuality? We began to think about the impact of making conscious leadership decisions, such as being present and attentive to the individuals in our organization, and its effect on each one of these relationships. This attention to the things that set each of us apart could allow us to explore a conceptual approach that would place the staff member, rather than a sole focus on students’ needs, at the forefront of an educational leader’s job.

As we began to shift our thoughts from the motivation of individuals to the individuals themselves, connections fell into place. Working from a place of understanding the capabilities and functionings of each teacher could provide a more personal foundation for relationships. This paradigm shift could also have a significant impact on teacher motivation. In order to fully explore this concept, we focused on examining educational leadership from the perspective of the CA as defined by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. According to Robeyns
(2016b), “the capability approach purports that freedom to achieve well-being is a matter of what people are able to do and to be, and thus the kind of life they are effectively able to lead”. Each individual possesses strengths and areas for improvement, and we wanted to learn how to support people based on their specific wants and needs. As a result, we suggest that by uncovering what people can do and want to do, we would better be able to offer them opportunities to feel fulfilled, valued, and motivated.

In order to examine educational leadership as reconceived through the lens of the CA, we will discuss all of Sen’s six core concepts, connecting each with real-life educational leadership scenarios in schools. This inquiry process will put the CA into practice, and aims to fill the gap in the literature by explicitly applying the Capability Approach to educational leadership.
Chapter Three: Leading with the Capability Approach in Mind

In order to highlight our main argument, the need to reconceive educational leadership through the lens of the CA, we went through an inquiry process to put this into practice. We created six scenarios that represent real-life experiences that educational leaders may come across in schools. Each scenario is explored by looking at educational leadership through the lens of each of the CA’s core concepts, namely: capabilities, functionings, conversion factors, instrumental and ultimate values, means-ends distinction, and agency and freedom. This has been an exercise of seeing educational leadership through a different lens from that of the more established approach, which focused primarily on leadership styles. In the process, we were taken to unexpected places in our inquiry, where the ideas of our inquiry intersect with those of several philosophers’ in various fields, thus illustrating the holistic nature of our study. For the purpose of these scenarios, the role of the educational leader is played by a fictional character named Wilson, who has the chance to interact with staff members in six different scenarios.

Scenario #1 - The Course Assignment of an Art Teacher

Scenario. Every spring, the course selection numbers are released to the departments in high schools. This can be a stressful time especially for elective or specialty teachers as the number of sections available for each course are determined by student enrolment. Often, the course offerings are handed to the department heads with a list of teachers and how many courses they each need to be assigned with in that department. The teachers then create their staff assignments selecting the courses they want to teach for the following year. This process can be contentious as previous assignments and seniority often dominate decisions. This can leave new teachers with challenging staff assignments (with multiple preps and different subjects) they have never taught. Teachers in these meetings can be heard saying, “I teach the
senior courses”, “I only want three preps”, “I have been here the longest”, “I’ve paid my dues”.

The educational leader is removed from the discussion and the decision-making is primarily left to the teachers to decide among themselves.

Now, consider the story of Stella, a third-year art teacher at this school. She is the newest teacher in the department. Even though she has extensive experience in photography, these courses have only been offered to senior teachers in the past. She excels at teaching ceramics, but unfortunately, this school does not offer a ceramics course. Stella is glad to have a full-time job as an art teacher; however, as the newest teacher, she feels required to simply be grateful for the courses she is given. She has the impression that she will need to wait her turn, until she will have enough seniority, to teach what she loves and is able to do well.

**Leading with CA in mind (capabilities).** Firstly, in looking at this leadership opportunity through the lens of the CA, Wilson would want to be involved in the distribution of the staffing assignments. We propose that Wilson first make a list of all the courses available and the people that are best suited to teach each course based on what he has observed and know about each teacher thus far. Wilson would then take the time to meet with each individual teacher to survey what they would like to teach next year, what they feel they excel at, and if they would like to try something different. Wilson could use the concept of a “passion project” or storytelling in gaining valuable information about his staff. In this community building activity, Wilson would ask each staff member to share his or her passion with the school. The outline of each staff member’s passion would then be carved out on black sheets of construction paper and all of these pieces of art would be exhibited in a common area at the school to create an awareness that all the staff members have a passion that can be shared, cultivated, and celebrated.
Through this activity, Stella would have the chance to talk about the fact that she is able to teach senior photography courses and that she excels at ceramics. By engaging with the staff, Wilson would provide teachers an opportunity to share certain aspects of themselves that may not be obvious to other colleagues or to the administration. In considering the strengths and preferences of each staff member as well as the needs of the entire department as a whole, Wilson should then sit in on the department meeting pertaining to the staffing assignments. He would be an active participant in the selection process, facilitating the distribution of courses and sections, while keeping in mind the needs and abilities of each individual teacher. As an outcome, Stella could be given the opportunity to teach at least one photography course, as she demonstrated she is able to do. There could be a balance in the staffing assignments, where everyone gets something they can do well and something that may be more challenging for them. This way, everyone’s capabilities would have been taken into consideration. Furthermore, Wilson could propose that Stella submit an application to add a ceramics course for the following year and to request funds from the Parent Action Committee (PAC) to buy a kiln, if not already available. Wilson, keeping in mind Sen’s core concept of capabilities, would have been able to help Stella put forth her capabilities by using her abilities and creating new opportunities for her.

**Unexpected Connections.** Through this inquiry process of using the core concept of capabilities as a lens by which to look at educational leadership, this scenario made us think of Henry Thoreau’s Moral Life & Maxine Greene’s Wide-Awakeness. Henry Thoreau was an American philosopher who died at the age of 44 in 1862. Thoreau is best known for his book *Walden*, which has been described by John Updike (2004) as “an anti-establishment masterpiece and a testament to individualism” (Para.1). In Thoreau’s (1854) book, he introduced the concept
of moral reform as “the effort to throw off sleep, [and] to be awake, is to be alive” (p.68). This refers to the fact that our life is influenced by our surroundings and we must be aware of the details of our surroundings to know how to best act on them. This could give each teacher a chance to share a passion. According to Thoreau:

I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of a man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavour. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. (p.68)

The lens by which each person makes meaning of life, events or situations, will affect the outcome of the decision that was made. We act in various ways based on the same situation depending on how we look at it. What matters is that the decision is based on a conscious endeavour. In order to do so, one must be awake to the information available, then after consideration, decide how to act based on what the decision-maker values at his or her core. This can be seen through Wilson’s actions when considering Stella’s capabilities. He had to be awake to the information he had in order to make the best decision.

Maxine Greene was an American educational philosopher, author, social activist and teacher who passed away in 2014 at the age of 96. Greene (1978) wanted to:

stress the connection between wide-awakeness, cognitive clarity, and existential concern. She wanted to highlight the fact that the roots of moral choosing lie at the core of a person’s conception of herself or himself and the equally important fact that choosing involves action as well as thought. (p. 48)
Wide-awareness and the moral life are important in educational leadership. Leaders must do their own work, and be aware of their prejudices. Leaders must also define their own values, consider different points of view, and become moral agents in their school. Becoming a moral agent, according to Greene (1978) is a result of several actions: “the more considerations they [the teachers] take into account, the more they consider the welfare of those around, the closer they will come to making a defensible choice” (p. 46).

In summary, Thoreau and Greene’s philosophies on wide-awareness and the moral life can serve as guidance for educational leaders, as they make use of the CA approach to help them problem-solve educational leadership issues. Being wide-awake helps the educational leader to be empathetic towards their employees’ capabilities and be aware of their realities and seek to understand each person for who they are. Furthermore, this perspective could make the educational leaders’ conscious endeavours improve the staff members’ well-being by simply signalling to the teachers that their needs and wants are considered important in decision making. Wide-awareness and the moral life both play an instrumental role in enhancing the capabilities of teachers and educational leaders’ themselves.

**Scenario #2 - Professional Development Opportunity**

**Scenario.** Mark is entering his 5th year as a high school teacher. He loves his job and works very hard to continue to develop as a teacher. He is open to feedback from students, colleagues, and educational leaders. He believes he is a good teacher and connects well with students; however, he feels like he needs more out of his teaching. The work that students produce in his class is excellent and they all do very well on standardized tests. Mark wants the class to be more meaningful for the students. He wants the learning in class to be more authentic and for the students to shape their own learning. He believes that connecting the course content
in a way that is meaningful and relevant to his students will take his teaching to the next level. Mark has expressed his ideas for changing the classroom experience for himself and his students to anyone in the school that would listen.

**Leading with CA in mind (functionings).** Looking at this leadership opportunity through the lens of the CA, our educational leader Wilson, could work to support Mark in achieving his goals for his classroom (functionings). Mark is a caring and passionate teacher who knows what he wants out of his teaching environment but is looking for support to make it happen. Using the CA, Wilson would spend time talking with Mark about his vision for his classroom and develop a plan to help Mark achieve his goals. Maybe he could also work to have a vision plan for all his teachers or yearly reflections or goal-setting or a follow-up. Wilson could offer to connect Mark with other teachers that are actively doing what Mark wants to do or even offer release time so Mark could visit other classroom teachers.

Wilson may even offer to observe lessons and provide feedback to aid Mark in establishing the type of environment that he has been talking about or connect Mark with professional development opportunities where conferences are offering training on this type of teaching style.

Making a significant change to a teaching style can be a challenging exercise. Even though Mark may know what he wants to do (capabilities), he needs support to achieve those goals (functionings). Wilson, leading through the CA and hearing Mark’s call for support, could engage with Mark to determine exactly what he wants and work with Mark to make it happen.

**Unexpected Connections.** Through this inquiry process of using the core concept of functionings as a lens by which to look at educational leadership, this scenario made us think of Hannah Arendt’s (1958) views on storytelling. Arendt was a German-born Jewish American
political theorist who died in 1975 at the age of 69. Arendt (1958) claims that we must listen actively to each other’s stories. These stories provide the vehicle by which the storyteller (staff member) expresses himself and the listener (leader) learns more about the storyteller. Even prior to valuing stories, educational leaders should value taking the time to pause, listen, and have a conversation. Only then can they really get a sense of who the individual is (capabilities and conversion factors), what is important to them (ultimate values) and what their wishes are (functionings). Listening is the first step. In order for the staff member to open up and share their thoughts with the leader, they must feel comfortable to do so. Rarely do people share their thoughts in a truly honest way with someone who seems neither present nor genuinely concerned for their well-being. Storytelling is the means by which one reveals one’s true identity. Arendt (1958) explained:

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. (p.179)

The storytelling then becomes a hermeneutic framework, a methodology for interpretation, by which to make sense of the message shared with us. To be an active listener, we should aim to be wide-awake to the world surrounding us. Then, we need to be present and attentive to hear the story being shared. Furthermore, we should seek to understand the message given to us. Lastly, and most importantly, we should make the decision to act upon what we know. All of this can only be made possible through open communication to deepen our understanding of the human condition. It is crucial for an educational leader to get to know each staff member personally. We cannot underestimate the power of taking the time to have a conversation and to
listen to the story being told. Ultimately, these stories are where we can learn the most about the functionings and capabilities that we seek to use in our decision-making as leaders.

**Scenario #3 - Teacher’s Work-Life Balance**

**Scenario.** Judy is a perfectionist. She works incessantly to create the best lessons possible. She is always looking for new resources and ways to engage her students. She arrives one hour before school starts and stays a minimum of two hours after school ends; she marks assignments, plans lessons and focuses on work. On weekends, much of her time is spent preparing for the week ahead. She feels tired and overwhelmed at times, but is excited with the impact she is making on her students. On the other hand, as a newlywed, Judy feels that she is failing her husband, as she does not spend much time with him. She also feels that she is not pursuing leisure activities for herself. Her educational leader has noticed that Judy looks more and more stressed and has been losing part of her joie de vivre. She still performs well at work, but something seems off.

**Leading with the CA in mind (instrumental and ultimate values).** In looking at this leadership opportunity through the lens of the CA, Wilson would want to know what is going on in Judy’s life, how she is doing, and what is important to her at this time. He wonders what her ultimate and instrumental values are. After making the time to speak with Judy, Wilson finds out that she is ready to achieve a work-life balance as she feels work has been overtaking all her free time and she does not get to spend quality time with her husband. She feels the pressure to succeed at work, but is also ready to find a more balanced way. She does not know how to make this transition and is at a loss.

With this information in mind, Wilson could suggest Judy join the Wellness Wednesday sessions being offered by the school district for free. He feels this could help her achieve her
ultimate value of well-being and her goal of finding a work-life balance. Wilson also has to think about resources (instrumental values) to help her in this direction. Wilson could suggest some of the following ideas to Judy: share lesson plans with another teacher to cut down on the work she has to do, decide on one weekly activity that she could do with her husband and stick to it, and consider giving a few large assignments or projects per term to cut down on the time she spends marking. Ultimately, the educational leader, in this scenario would try to provide the staff member with as many resources or ideas (instrumental values) as possible to help her find a work-life balance (ultimate value).

**Unexpected Connections.** Through this inquiry process of using the core concept of ultimate and instrumental values as a lens by which to look at educational leadership, this scenario made us think of the importance of caring for others. Without genuine care for Judy’s well-being, Wilson may neither have tried to know what the problem was nor work towards being of assistance. Nel Noddings, an American feminist, educator, and philosopher best known for her work in philosophy of education and ethics of care came to our through our process of applying the CA in this scenario.

Noddings stated in her book *Caring* (2013) that “as human beings we want to care and be cared for. Caring is important in itself” (p.7). To better understand what caring means, we must understand the relationship between the one-caring and the cared-for. Noddings (2013) explained this dynamic in more detail:

> When my caring is directed to living things, I must consider their natures, ways of life, needs and desires. And, although I can never accomplish it entirely, I try to apprehend the reality of the other. This is the fundamental aspect of caring from the inside. When I look at and think about how I am when I care, I realize that there is invariably this
displacement of interest from my own reality to the reality of the other. Kierkegaard has said that we apprehend another’s reality as possibility. To be touched, to have aroused in me something that will disturb my own ethical reality, I must see the other’s reality as a possibility for my own. This is not to say that I cannot try to see the other’s reality differently. [...] We also have aroused in us the feeling, “I must do something.” When we see the other’s reality as a possibility for us, we must act to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce the pain, to fill the need, to actualize the dream. When I am in this sort of relationship with another, when the other’s reality becomes a real possibility for me, I care. Whether the caring is sustained, whether it lasts long enough to be conveyed to the other, whether it becomes visible in the world, depends upon my sustaining the relationship or, at least, acting out of concern for my own ethicality as though it were sustained. (p.14)

According to Noddings, the one-caring is responsible to take the first step and make a connection with the cared-for to set up the conditions necessary for the cared-for to share and for a relationship to form. Once established, the one-caring must be open to seeing the other’s reality and be willing to act on it. With time, this may also become reciprocal, where the one-caring and the cared-for build a solid relationship based on mutual respect, care, and support. In order for this relationship to grow and flourish, both entities must feel valued.

When looking at educational leadership through the lens of the CA, Noddings’ ethic of care helps support the fact that healthy relationships between educational leaders and teachers are necessary for each of them to feel cared for. In this framework, educational leaders will be required to see the teacher’s reality and act on it as needed. Care is the cornerstone of the positive, supportive relationships that we all long for. Noddings (2003, p.179) emphasized that
“human relationships are perhaps the most important single ingredient in happiness”. Noddings’ ethic of care is important in developing relationships with open communication. It reminds us how important it is for the one-caring to want to support the cared-for, develop their capabilities and help them realize their functionings. From making these important connections, the educational leaders could find ways (instrumental values) to best support the staff members in accessing what they each ultimately value.

Scenario #4 - Beginning Teacher

Scenario. A recent graduate from the teacher education program, Jennifer has been hired for her first full-time job. The job assignment is a variety of courses that would require long hours of preparation for even an experienced teacher. Jennifer is nervous about joining a new school, starting her career, meeting staff and students, and doing a good job. Her position is a temporary, one-year contract, but she is hopeful that if she does well, she will be rehired.

Leading with CA in mind (conversion factors). Our educational leader, Wilson, in leading through a CA lens, could make a conscious decision to develop a plan for orienting Jennifer in her new role. Her ability to transform her resources into action (conversion factors) at the new school will be slow. Connecting her with an experienced teacher mentor will provide Jennifer with a colleague to check in with.

Being a new person in any job can be a challenge and the process of developing confidence in a fast-paced, dynamic environment can be stressful. Jennifer’s personal conversion factors will be aided by a mentor who supports Jennifer in gaining self-confidence. A mentor can help Jennifer alleviate her anxiety towards her new role by connecting her with the resources she needs to get her bearings and complete the everyday responsibilities of her work.
Schools, like any workplace, have established social structures. Social groups and norms have been formed and reformed over the course of many years. A mentor can help Jennifer to make connections, develop relationships, and establish herself in the social hierarchy of the school. Developing Jennifer’s social conversion factors will ease any social anxiety that she may be experiencing.

The environmental conversion factors can be a challenge for educational leaders and mentors to address as some are fixed, such as the timetable and limited classroom space. Wilson could support Jennifer’s environmental conversion factors by purposely assigning her a classroom that is centrally located in the building. This could work to limit the feelings of isolation that she might experience and make it easier for her to develop connections with other people in the school. Wilson could also try to keep the beginning teacher in one classroom instead of her having to use several classrooms throughout the day to reduce stress and make her feel more connected to her classroom.

Wilson should make a conscious decision to imagine the experience of Jennifer, or remember the time when he was a new teacher. The feelings of isolation and anxiety can limit the likelihood of Jennifer having a successful start to the year. Ensuring that Jennifer has a connection in the school by means of a mentor, for instance, and giving some thought to the physical environment she will work in, Wilson could help her feel more comfortable and become established more quickly in her new role and in the school community.

**Unexpected connections.** Through this inquiry process of using the core concept of conversion factors as a lens by which to look at educational leadership, this scenario made us consider Hannah Arendt’s idea of ‘visiting the other’. Gardiner (2015) claimed that “for Arendt, this orientation to research refers to the ability to try and think from different perspectives. It is
through a diversity of views that she maintains we will be able to comprehend a phenomenon in a richer, more complete fashion” (p.109). Visiting the other should become an integral part of educational leadership. Leaders should think from different perspectives to understand staff members. The aim is to seek understanding rather than to simply gather evidence. According to Arendt & Kohn (1994),

Understanding, as distinguished from having correct information and scientific knowledge, is a complicated process which never produces unequivocal results. It is unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world. (p. 307)

Educational leadership should be about making connections and making each staff member feel valued and cared for. In order to accomplish this, educational leaders should aim to visit with staff members to consider situations from their perspective. Educational leaders should want their staff members to feel that they are recognized and listened to, which would allow them to feel a sense of belonging with the organization, thus decreasing or perhaps even removing negative personal, social, and environmental conversion factors.

**Scenario #5 - Creating a Vision Statement for the School**

**Scenario.** Our educational leader, Wilson, has been the principal of his school for two years now. He feels that he has established quality relationships with staff members and has gained their respect. At the first staff meeting of the year, Wilson presents to the staff a goal to establish a vision statement for the school. His idea is to create, with the staff and students, a vision for where the school would be in the next 5 years. He is aware that not all staff members would want to engage in the process, but he announces that a committee would be created and it would be open to anyone who might be interested in this endeavour. The committee would meet
every second Tuesday at lunch with the hope of completing the vision statement by the end of the year.

**Leading with CA in mind (means-ends distinction).** Wilson has invited staff members to attend and contribute to the future vision of the school. Wilson’s aim should be to work with all staff and support the vision that all members have for the school; however, he should not be hesitant in contributing his opinions.

One of Wilson’s key roles, as an educational leader, is to keep the committee focused on the end vision. The means for the project are the staff that volunteer in this effort and the time frame of one academic year. The CA approach suggests that Wilson should not worry about the means to get to the end; instead, he should focus on increasing conversion factors for the committee members to allow them to produce the best product that their capabilities allow with the means available.

**Unexpected Connections.** Through this inquiry process of using the core concept of the means-end distinction as a lens by which to look at educational leadership, this scenario made us consider Gary Fenstermacher’s (2000) views on educational goals and ideals. Fenstermacher is a Professor of Education at the University of Michigan, MI. Fenstermacher proposed that “there is a difference between what we can do and what we ought to hope for. Between what is real and within the realm of possibility, on the one hand, and what is ideal and impossible, on the other” (p.1). Fenstermacher’s suggestion is that educational goals and ideals can be confused. He clarified the difference by stating:

Northfield, you see, is the place you want to go. The North Star provides a way to guide you there. You aren’t going to the North Star; you’re going to Northfield. On the
journey to Northfield, the North Star is the means you use to establish the correct
direction for your travel. (p.2)

In using the means-ends distinction in our scenario, the vision statement is our Northfield. It is
the place we want to go. Wilson wants to create a vision for the school to work towards. The
staff members on the committee are the means (North Stars) to establish a direction where the
majority of staff members will be willing to travel the path for the journey.

Scenario #6 - New School-Based Initiative

Scenario. Wilson, our educational leader who has been a principal for a few years, wants
to put forth a new school-based initiative. His idea is to carve out time in the schedule, every
Wednesday, to allow students and teachers to use this time as they see most useful. This has the
potential to be truly innovative for the school and the district. The school schedule is normally
rigid and students and teachers are required to be in certain places, at certain times, doing
specific tasks. Wilson believes that this new initiative may open the door to a list of new
possibilities for students such as time to exercise, time to study, time to work on group projects,
time to try a new activity, etc. Wilson needs to present his idea to his staff members as this is
meant to be a school-based initiative.

Leading with CA in mind (agency & freedom). Wilson presents his idea at a staff
meeting. Leading with the CA in mind, he gives his staff the opportunity to discuss the idea
among themselves. Also, staff are able to voice their concerns and ask questions. What becomes
clear in this way of introducing the concept is that the teachers are given the choice to approve or
disapprove this new initiative. Wilson knows that as the principal, forcing the staff to get
involved will not work if they are disinterested. For the initiative to come to life, the majority of
the teachers have to agree with the concept, at least in principle, and to vote in favour of it. In
doing so, staff members may likely feel they have a choice and their opinion would matter in the decision making (agency). Fortunately for Wilson, the staff voted in favour of this new initiative.

The next step is to develop what this special school-based initiative entitled “Innovation Wednesdays” would look like. A committee, open to all teachers, is put into place to clarify the details and parameters to move this project forward. What becomes clear to Wilson is that this could provide an opportunity for teachers to share their passions with students (freedom). For example, some teachers may decide to offer yoga sessions, run debates, or clubs, or introduce leadership programs to prepare students to become outdoor school counsellors. The possibilities are limitless. In doing so, the teachers feel free to choose what to offer the students with the intention that they will explore and share what they are passionate about. Leading with the CA in mind for this new school-based initiative would be an excellent way for a principal to foster agency and freedom in teachers, and to make sure it is a success as it ensures teacher agency.

**Unexpected Connections.** Through this inquiry process of using the core concept of agency and freedom as a lens by which to look at educational leadership, this scenario made us consider that in order for teachers and students to flourish, educational leaders must lean on the CA to explore and support the capabilities and functionings of their staff. Consequently, the educational leaders themselves would likely be more successful in their attempt to best support their staff, which in return, could then also make them happier in the workplace.

Ultimately, what we are learning is that happiness is achieved by way of flourishing as human beings. This can be said for both the teaching staff and educational leaders. A strong parallel can be made between Aristotle’s idea of human flourishing and using the CA as a lens. Aristotle, as explained by Kleist (n.d.), reminds us of the importance of being proactive in our
pursuit of the good life. Happiness is found by those who actively pursue it. In the case of our scenario, Wilson, by using the CA as a lens, would have helped many of the staff members to flourish through living out their passions. This is a powerful way of being for Wilson as an educational leader. While helping others to flourish, he himself would also flourish as a human being.
Chapter Four: Conclusion

At the beginning of this process, in thinking about shifting our roles from being teachers to becoming educational leaders, we wanted to learn how to become the best educational leaders we can be. We have valued the support and understanding of the educational leaders we have worked with and have directly experienced the influence they have had over our motivation. As emerging educational leaders, we feel that if we can motivate our staff members, we will be successful. As we began our inquiry, we wondered what was the best way to motivate the staff. For this reason, we began analysing a multitude of theories of motivation. We were, however, left unsatisfied. Since each motivational theory comprises positive aspects or applications, we began to realize that no single theory would help us understand the role of an educational leader.

Fortunately, the CA as presented by Amartya Sen, and further developed by Martha Nussbaum provided us with a purposeful lens by which to analyze educational leadership. The CA refocused our thinking away from motivating staff members as our priority, to looking at each individual’s capabilities and functionings. It has helped us focus on the importance of what each individual person is able to do, to be, and aspires to be. From researching and applying the CA lens to aspects of educational leadership, we have determined 6 recommendations for current and future educational leaders to consider.

Recommendations

1. Make a conscious decision to be present and attentive.

Leadership cannot be casual. Whether the interactions are impromptu conversations, formal group meetings or scheduled check-ins, educational leaders should make a conscious decision to put aside their own busy lives, clear their head, and be open to the conversation and
interactions they are about to have with their staff. By taking the time to understand and feel compassion for others, educational leaders can thus strengthen human connections from these empathic interactions. If the educational leaders do not make the decision to be present, they limit their ability to fully understand other staff members’ wants and needs. It is necessary to build a bridge of empathy between educational leaders and their staff, as this allows people to feel safe and communicate openly with others. In turn, this will provide educational leaders with the means to better understand the capabilities and values of the persons with whom they are in conversation with.

2. Develop relationships to uncover each staff member's capabilities, functionings, and conversion factors.

With communication and empathy, educational leaders can develop relationships built on a foundation of trust and caring. The CA has highlighted the importance of building relationships, but with the goal of helping each individual staff member become the best they can be. By focusing on individual staff members as the ends rather than the means, educational leaders would have the ability to assess the means required to achieve their capabilities.

3. Support each staff member to achieve their capabilities and functionings.

The development of authentic relationships with each individual staff member is of the utmost importance for educational leaders. Through conversation and attentive interaction, educational leaders learn about the capabilities and functionings of each individual. From a place of understanding, leaders can develop a plan to best support each individual staff member in their goal of increasing their conversion factors and maximising their functionings. True
leadership is not about the wants and needs of the leader; instead, it is about how the leader can support the wants and needs of each of the individual in the group, in order to move them toward achieving their goals (capabilities).

4. Place each staff member at the forefront of decision-making.

   Educational leaders should take the time to consider the perspectives of the individual people involved. Making decisions for the well-being of the greatest number of people is an ideal course of action, but by definition, it will always include sacrificing the wants and needs of individuals within the group. Placing each individual at the forefront of decision making will ensure educational leaders can make informed decisions.

5. Help teachers connect with their passions.

   Motivation comes to teachers when they feel valued, cared for, and able to pursue their passions. Being able to share their passion at work can be a powerful way to motivate the staff as it is something they highly value. A passionate teacher is an engaged teacher. By celebrating a teacher’s passion, educational leaders would also celebrate their individuality.

6. Remember that no one can do it alone.

   No one arrives at a destination without the help of someone else along the way. Educational leaders have the opportunity to shape others and be shaped by others themselves. We are all connected as we move forward on the path of human flourishing. Educational leaders have the power to make a difference in the lives of the teachers in their care. Whether a teacher
or educational leader, in order to reach our true potential, we each need someone who believes in us, who knows us, and who puts us first.

**Final Message**

The Capability Approach has helped us look at motivation more holistically. We recommend that educational leadership be reconceived through the lens of the Capabilities Approach to put each individual’s capabilities and functionings central to the decision-making process. Ultimately, we suggest that the Capability Approach should be used to guide the way we live our lives, not only in our role as educational leaders, but in our personal interactions as well. Adopting the CA should be a way of being, an activity in helping people flourish in their lives and reach a state of well-being.

**Implications for future research**

The use of the Capability Approach in education is in the early stages of adoption. Our conceptual approach to educational leadership requires further application and consideration.

Our conceptual study raises many opportunities for further research. First, our conceptual literature review on motivation in education returned extensive information on the importance of the teacher/student relationship as it pertains to student motivation and achievement; however, on the importance of the relationship between educational leaders and teachers, we felt the research was limited. Research on the teachers’ well-being was concentrated on teacher retention and burnout instead of the creation of an environment where teachers can flourish.

Secondly, our thinking led us to question the role of the principal as the head educational leader. Principals have a large number of responsibilities within the school that require their
attention. Many of these responsibilities are administrative and operational. By restructuring the administration hierarchy to eliminate operational tasks, principals would be free to work with and develop staff members through relationship-building. Furthermore, principals would be the agents of change by connecting and sharing their vision for the school. In addition, a longitudinal study on the well-being of teachers in a school where leaders have been trained in the CA would be beneficial in the field of education.

Finally, further research into the relationship between teacher well-being and student performance is required. As students are the central focus in the education system, what would be the impact of using the Capability Approach on the leader/teacher relationship on student performance?
Chapter Five: Commitment Statements

Shawn Anderson

My greatest takeaway from this experience has been the importance of being purposeful and conscious in conversations. Providing focus to the individuals I am interacting with shows respect for them and respect for the content of the conversation. Therefore, I commit to making a conscious effort to be present with the people I interact with and ask personal questions to engage in conversations. I make this commitment knowing that it will be a challenge. I will make mistakes, need constant reminders, and it will take practice. However, I make this commitment knowing it is the right thing to do, it is an important thing to do, it is a purposeful way of being.

The Capability Approach has reminded me that it is important to add constructive energy in the world and interact more deeply with the people in my life. As a teacher, I have the opportunity to influence young adults every day. I entered teaching because I did not feel connected to enough of my teachers throughout high school and university. I commit to making that influence as positive an experience as I can. While high school is only 5 years in the life of a person, it can be an extremely influential time. I want my involvement in the lives of my students to be a positive experience.
Elizabeth Isabelle

I believe that the Capability Approach goes far beyond the realm of educational leadership, and ought to be applied in every aspect of my life. I want it to become my way of being, something that I do daily, with love, care, and intention. I therefore commit to putting people first in my personal and professional life. I will make the time to connect with the people around me and be more present and attentive. I will not take for granted the power of fostering positive relationships. I will slow down and do my best to understand other people’s perspectives, and get to know more about who they are and what they aspire to be. By making this commitment, I believe I can help others flourish and in so doing, live a more meaningful life myself.
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