

ABSTRACT

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Title: A Phenomenological Study of Superintendents of High-Performing, High-Poverty School Districts as Servant Leaders

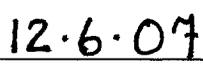
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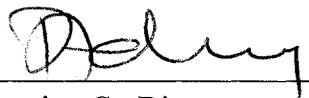
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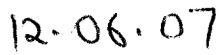
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ABSTRACT

This research study examines the servant-leadership characteristics expressed by public school superintendents of high-performing, high-poverty elementary school districts. The degree to which public schools and public school districts are being held accountable has increased in recent years. The No Child Left Behind Act was enacted in part to close the achievement gap between the different subgroups that are identified in the act itself. Students who are classified as low income or high poverty have consistently performed below the levels of students not classified as low income or high poverty. The superintendent, in demonstrating servant-leadership characteristics, can have a positive impact on the achievement of all students, including those from high poverty.

A phenomenological study of eight public school superintendents was completed through personal interviews. The superintendents selected led kindergarten through eighth-grade public school districts with 50% or more of their students classified as low income and 60% or more of their students meeting or exceeding state standards on this midwestern state's standardized test. Transcripts of the interviews were coded based on 15 servant-leadership characteristics. The servant-leadership

characteristics, identified by Spears and Walker, were listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people building community, sense of calling, love, shared power, integrity, and serving. The study was informed by the writings of Greenleaf, Spears, DePree, Wheatley, Bennis and others.

Based on the research results, servant-leadership characteristics are identified in the superintendents of this study. All of the participating superintendents expressed the servant-leadership characteristics of listening and shared power. Three of the eight superintendents expressed five or fewer servant-leadership characteristics.

The manifestation of servant-leadership characteristics may contribute to high-academic achievement by students of poverty. Recommendations include further research on servant-leadership characteristics among superintendents of low-achieving schools and research on servant-leadership characteristics of superintendents of schools not considered low income. Perhaps, through comparisons and contrasts of the expressed servant-leadership characteristics, the most important attributes of servant leadership could emerge and be utilized in leadership education and training.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SUPERINTENDENTS OF HIGH-
PERFORMING, HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS
AS SERVANT LEADERS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
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DEPARTMENT OF
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BY

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DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this work
to my parents, Bob and Grace, whose love has
made so much possible

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The superintendent's role in leading a school district can be influential in the success of the school district. The preparation of school leaders should move past the training of efficient managers to an emphasis on visionary, transformational leaders (Siegrist, 1999). Siegrist believes the over 15,000 school districts in the United States are in some type of "institutional inertia" in which the leadership styles are reflective of traditional models, such as systems theory and total quality management, that have been in place for years. Hunt (1999) believes that in the 1970s and early 1980s the study of leadership was lacking and needed development. Hunt further explains and believes that little was added to the study of leadership in the 1970s and 1980s. Bass (2000) details how, in the 1980s, the study of a "new" leadership emerged that focused on transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is leading by showing concern for others, concern for achievement of the group, and activating followers' higher order needs (Bass, 2000). Burns's (1978) *Leadership* describes transformational leadership as a process in which "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation" (p. 20). Hunt (1999) contends that transformational leadership changed the study of leadership from static, boring, and rigorous to new, valuable ideas of leadership that include transformational,

charismatic, visionary, and change-oriented leadership. Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999) contend that servant leadership is a form of transformational leadership. Greenleaf (1970) explains that traditional theories of leadership are based on the behaviors of the leaders; however, servant leadership materializes from the principles, values, and beliefs of leaders. A servant leader can be developed and servant leadership can emerge as a style that can sustain education reform.

Greenleaf's (1970) belief was that servant leadership was a desire to serve others first. Taking care of others' needs first is paramount to the growth of an organization. The key to servant leadership is the growth of those being served. It is through servant leadership that the cumulative talents of followers emerge and systems benefit. In 1970 the term "servant leadership" was described by Greenleaf in *The Servant as Leader*. Greenleaf was a former AT&T researcher who later consulted and taught at schools, churches, and not-for-profit agencies; among them were the Harvard Business School, Dartmouth College, the University of Virginia, Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management, and the Ford Foundation (Greenleaf Center, 2002). Greenleaf wrote on themes of management, servanthood, organizations, power and spirituality until his death in 1990. The Center for Applied Ethics was founded in 1964 and renamed the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985 (Greenleaf Center, 2002). The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership's mission is:

- Increased service to others,
- A holistic approach to work,
- Promoting a sense of community, and

- The sharing of power in decision making.

Servant leadership is a form of leadership that is being closely examined by such leadership scholars as Autry (2001), Covey (1998), DePree (1995), Jaworski (1998), Kouzes (1998), Senge (2001), Spears (2002), Vaill (1998), Wheatley (2001), and Zohar (1997). Zohar (1997) states, “Servant leadership is the essence of quantum thinking and quantum leadership” (p. 146). Zohar contends that Western corporate values relate primarily to achievement, quality of products and service, commitment to never-ending growth, and a “good man” is measured by his quality of *doing*.

Juxtaposed to this ideal are the values of the East, which are centered on compassion, humility, service to one’s family and community, gratitude, and a “good man” has a quality of “being.” It is this quality of “being” that Zohar believes Greenleaf (1970) had in mind in his writings on servant leadership. Servant leadership emphasizes that the “being” and the outcomes and success of organizations can be realized through compassion, humility, and service.

Wheatley (2001) studied organizations and how they are structured, how they adapt and change, and how they sustain themselves. She is a preeminent thinker and speaker on systems change and systems thinking. Wheatley states,

As organizational change facilitators and leaders, we have no choice but to figure out how to invite in everybody who is going to be affected by this change. Those that we fail to invite into the creation process will surely always show up as resistors and saboteurs. . . . I’ve learned that we cannot design anything that works if we don’t have the whole system involved in its creation. (p. 1)

Wheatley's thoughts relate directly to servant-leadership's focus on building community and shared decision making.

Servant leadership emphasizes this collaboration and community of learners, students, and adults. The collective energy, talent, and efforts of the organization are needed to meet the needs of all students, especially students classified as high poverty. The leader must support the self-worth of each follower in fulfilling their needs. Confidence in a follower's integrity, talent, and motivation is paramount (Bass, 2000). The leader must be more than a manager and must harness the collective talents of the individuals in the organization.

Spears (1998), who is acting director for the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, notes 10 characteristics from Greenleaf's (1970) writings that he believes are essential to servant leadership. It is these 10 characteristics, combined with Walker's (2003) additional five characteristics, that make up the framework for examining servant leadership in this research. The servant-leadership characteristics identified by Spears (2002) are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. The five additional servant-leadership characteristics identified by Walker are sense of calling, feeling of love, shared power, integrity, and serving.

Statement of the Problem

Many school districts are faced with low-income populations that present challenges for educators. High achievement in high-poverty schools was seen in only

27 kindergarten through eighth-grade school districts in a midwestern state when using the definitions of this study for high-performing, high-poverty school districts (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2005). In Walker's (2003) research study, under recommendations for further study, she posits the question, "Is student achievement improved by servant leadership? Although superintendents have little direct student contact, servant leadership may provide a positive indirect impact on student performance" (p. 168). This study identifies servant-leadership characteristics of superintendents that provide information related to the impact on student performance.

Given that there is little educational research on servant leadership, more research is needed to explain the phenomenon of servant leadership of superintendents of high-performing, high-poverty school districts. This study may provide beneficial insights that can inform future studies that may be generalized. Also, this study encapsulates the voices of a distinctive group: exemplary educational leaders in high-performing, high-poverty areas.

Significance of the Study

Leadership of schools is a crucial aspect related to student achievement, particularly of high-poverty schools (McGee, 2003). Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a sense of community, and shared decision making (Greenleaf, 2002). Spears (1998) believes that servant leadership can be a model that facilitates growth in an organization. Given the endorsement of servant leadership by

experts in the field and given the lack of empirical data on servant leadership in schools, this study seeks to add to the body of knowledge about servant leadership as a viable form of leadership for schools.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines servant leadership, which has become a leadership style of business (Spears, 1998), in the context of public schools. It seems paradoxical in an ever-increasing age of external accountability to give power away to enable a better system. This study addresses whether servant-leadership characteristics are evident in the superintendent leadership of high-performing, high-poverty school districts. The rationale for the study has implications for education and other organizations. If a servant leader can maximize the productivity of the system in a morally responsible manner, servant leadership is a model that can be emulated in other organizations. Educational leadership training and other leadership training can use the results of this study to incorporate the characteristics of servant leadership in the training process. Providing future leaders with research that supports servant-leadership characteristics can provide a leadership model that may benefit organizations.

Research Question

Leadership of a school district can play an important role in the success of that school district (Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning [McREL], 2005). This study attempts to answer the question, “Are characteristics of servant leadership

discernable in the practice of superintendents in high-performing, high-poverty public elementary school districts?”

Delimitations

The study was limited to high-performing, high-poverty districts in a midwestern state. Superintendents leading the public school districts had at least three years experience prior to the 2005 (including the 2004/2005 school year) standardized state test data.

Definitions

The following terms were essential to the study of servant leadership. The vocabulary is defined as it relates to the framework of this study and is utilized for the purposes of this study.

Awareness: Greenleaf (1970) wrote, “Awareness is not a giver of solace; it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity” (p. 20).

Building community: Building relationships in the school district and community.

Commitment to the growth of people: Worker involvement in decision making and opportunities for professional development (Spears, 1998).

Conceptualization: Seeing the big picture. A servant leader must balance the management tasks and have a visionary concept (Spears, 1998).

Conscience: An inner sense of what is right and wrong (Greenleaf, 2002).

Elementary school district: A school district with grades kindergarten through eighth.

Empathy: The assumption of the good intentions of workers and those workers as people even if the leader cannot accept certain behaviors or performance.

Feeling of love: A “feeling with” and empathy for others (Zohar, 1997).

Foresight: The ability of a servant leader to use his/her experiences and judgment to make a determination of the likely consequence of a decision (Spears, 1998).

Healing: The servant leader’s belief that he/she can help heal broken spirits. Many people have a variety of emotional hurts, and servant leaders recognize the opportunity to help.

High-performing school district: A kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school district that has 60% or higher of its students meeting or exceeding state standards as measured by the state’s 2005 standardized test composite score (ISBE, 2005).

High-poverty school district: A school district that has 50% or higher of its students receiving free or reduced lunch, according to the 2005 state board of education report card (ISBE, 2005).

Integrity: The ability to discern what is right or wrong. One's actions are shaped by this discernment, even when difficult, and one must acknowledge publicly what one is doing (Carter, 1996).

Listening: Being receptive to what is being said. Being reflective of what is being listened to is also a part of this characteristic (Spears, 1998).

Persuasion: Convincing others through consensus building within different groups, not by coercing (Spears, 1998).

Power orientation: One's belief about how power should be used and distributed among stakeholders (Walker, 2003).

Sense of calling: A sense that leaders know on some deeper level that they are called to their work (Jeffries, 1998).

Servant leadership: Leadership that emphasizes increased service to others and promotes a sense of community and the sharing of power in decision making (Greenleaf Center, 2002).

Service/serving: Seeing that others' priority needs are met (Greenleaf, 1970). Greenleaf's belief was that servant leadership is one's desire to serve others first.

Shared power: The need for collaboration as the combined individual talents of professional learning communities work together to problem solve in schools (DuFour, 2004).

Spirit: The essence of life beyond that which is material (Walker, 2003).

Stewardship: A commitment to serve others as a primary focus (Spears, 1998).

Summary

Chapter 1 has introduced this study, stated the problem, and articulated the significance of this study and the purpose of the investigation. This chapter also identified the research question, delimitations, definitions of servant-leadership characteristics, and terms relevant in the context of this study. Chapter 2 presents a review of relevant literature.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

School districts have a formal leadership structure. School boards appoint a superintendent to manage and lead a school district. Education has often mirrored the management practices of businesses in bringing in practices from other organizations (Sergiovanni, 1996). The study of leadership in the 1900s traces a history from trait theory, to behavioral theory, to situational, to transformational and servant leadership. Examining the progression of leadership research and thought from trait leadership to the present day provides insight into the expansion of the human potential of workers and specifically educators.

Leadership

Fayol's (1916, cited in Farahbakhsh, 2006) general and industrial management emphasized the following principles in promoting efficiency: to forecast and plan, to organize, to command, to coordinate, and to control. Andreski's (1983) articulates Weber's belief that bureaucracies are the most efficient way to run an organization. The industrial age reflected the management of effectiveness and efficiency through bureaucracy and scientific management. Early educational leaders were more

reflective of scientific management with an emphasis on efficiency (Siegrist, 1999).

English (1994) states that the term “leadership” did not emerge in literature on school administration until after the turn of the 20th century. It was not until the early 1900s that superintendents were thought of as being more than an under-officer. English emphasizes this shift from minor educational official to major educational leader is less than 100 years old. The study of leadership from 1900 to 1950 centered on distinguishing the difference between leader and follower traits (Mendez-Morse, 2005). Barnard’s (1964) study of leader traits perceives the concern for organizational tasks and concerns for individuals as effectiveness and efficiency. Barnard lists the following traits or qualities: physique, skill, technology, perception, knowledge, memory, imagination, determination, persistence, endurance, and courage. Tead (1935) identified 10 qualities that are essential for effective leadership: physical and mental energy, a sense of purpose and direction, enthusiasm, friendliness, action, integrity, technical master, decisiveness, intelligent teaching skill, and faith.

The study of leadership traits does not fully explain leaders’ abilities; thus researchers have investigated how a situation influences a leader’s skills and behaviors (Mendez-Morse, 2005). Behavioral studies examine how leaders behave as observed by their subordinates, differentiating between task behaviors and relationship behaviors. The behavior approach examines how leaders combine task and relationship behavior in attempting to reach a goal (Farahbakhsh, 2006).

McGregor (1960) describes leadership behavior as related to Theory X and Theory Y. Theories X and Y are seen as two points on a continuum. Theory X is an

authoritarian style of leadership in which a leader assumes that workers dislike work and must be coerced and controlled to reach a goal. In Theory X, workers are thought to have low ambition, avoid responsibility, and possess a low degree of maturity. Theory Y assumes that workers have self-direction, motivation, and ambition and possess a high degree of imagination and creativity. If a leader's belief is that workers are self-directed and possess imagination and creativity, this belief, which includes aspects of servant leadership, also relates to McGregor's Theory Y. Theory Y relates directly to servant leadership in that in servant leadership a leader desires to be of service first and there is an emphasis on collaboration and shared decision making. McGregor's (1960) final sentence in *The Human Side of Enterprise* addresses the need and importance of collaboration: "And, if we can learn how to realize the potential for collaboration inherent in human resources of industry, we will provide a model for governments and nations which mankind sorely needs" (p. 246).

Blake and Mouton's (1985) managerial or leadership grid describes the concern for production and the concern for people as the two factors that organizations use to reach their purposes. The grid features a horizontal axis that represents the leader's concern for production. The vertical axis represents the leader's concern for people. Each axis has a point scale from one to nine and with a score of nine equal to maximum concern. The five leadership styles described by Blake and Mouton are laissez-faire management, in which leaders have low concern for people or production; authoritarian management, with low concern for people but high concern for production; country club management, with high concern for people but low

concern for production; middle-of-the-road management, with an intermediate level of concern for people and production; and democratic management, with high concern for production and people.

Servant leadership is best exemplified by democratic management, in which there is high concern for the production. In education, that product is children's learning and development as responsible citizens. As related to Blake and Mouton (1985), having high concern for people is exhibited by servant leadership in being of service to staff. Superintendents as servant leaders would value the talents of all staff and create a structure in which collaboration and knowledge sharing are the norm.

Situational leadership contends that it is not so much the traits and behaviors that determine leadership but the leadership requirements of a particular situation (Mendez-Morse, 2005). Hersey and Blanchard (1982) believe that the leadership style utilized is dependent upon the followers' development level. In this model, a leader should put more time and resources into those followers who have low commitment or low competence. The less competent and committed followers are, the more directive a leader must be. The level of competence, commitment, and motivation determines whether a leader should delegate, participate, sell, or tell. When a leader tells or directs, he/she may need to use coercive power in seeing that a worker does what he does not want to do. Servant leadership does not assume a time when coercive power must be used to accomplish a task (Greenleaf, 2002). A servant leader creates a structure where he/she is mostly what Hersey and Blanchard refer to as supporting, participatory, and coaching.

Fiedler's (1967) contingency theory states that a group's effectiveness is determined by factors of the situation and the leader's style. The favorableness of a situation is related to the extent that the leader is accepted and supported, the structure of the task (clear goals), and the capacity of the leader to manage subordinates. According to Fiedler, leadership performance is equally dependent on the organization and the leader's attributes and there is no such thing as an effective or ineffective leader, only a leader who is effective or ineffective in a given situation.

House's (1971) path-goal theory proposes that the nature of the task and the qualities of the workers determine the type of leadership chosen. The motivation of the workers and the difficulty of the task are also considerations. This leader must be directive, supportive, participative, or achievement oriented. Mendez-Morse (2005) believes that the contingency models, along with the study of leaders' traits and behaviors, furthered the study of leadership but did not completely explain what combination of characteristics, behaviors, and situational variables are most successful.

The focus on personal traits of leaders re-emerged in leadership literature in the 1970s and 1980s (Mendez-Morse, 2005). Differentiating between managers and leaders was also a focus and remains so currently. Transformational leadership and servant leadership have their roots in the human resource frame in which the emphasis is on shared leadership and empowering workers who have a vision for the success of an organization. The human resource frame of Bolman and Deal (1997) details core assumptions of the relationships between workers and the organization. Bolman and

Deal believe that organizations should serve human needs rather than workers serving organizational needs. Also, workers and organizations need each other in what Bolman and Deal refer to as a “symbiotic” relationship, in which organizations need the energy, talent, and ideas of people and people need careers, salaries, and opportunities. Additionally, if the fit between workers and the system is poor, both suffer. The workers and the system can each become exploited, and both can become victims. Conversely, a good fit between the system and individuals benefits both, as individuals find meaning and satisfaction in their work and the system receives the abilities and energy of the individuals.

Burns (1978) refers to transformational leadership as a leader making a connection with followers to raise the motivation and morality of both the followers and the leader. The leader is aware of the followers’ needs, and his/her goal is to enable the followers to reach their full potential. The leader inspires confidence and loyalty from his/her followers through vision, charisma, and empowerment. Burns describes two types of leaders, transactional and transformational. Transactional leaders address material needs of employees, and transformational leaders focus on the self-worth of employees. Transformational leaders appeal to higher ideals and values of followers as opposed to transactional leadership, which appeals to more selfish concerns. Burns (1978) believes leaders can be both transformational and transactional. He describes that, as transformational leaders, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy could encourage and inspire constituents with righteous ideals. As transactional leaders, Roosevelt and Kennedy could exchange

promises for votes, “wheel and deal,” and trade favors. Transformational and transactional leadership are independent concepts.

Bass (2000) believes that servant leadership closely resembles transformational leadership in the transformational components of inspiration and individualized consideration. Farling et al. (1999) believe that servant leadership goes beyond transformational leadership in choosing the needs of others as its highest priority. Greenleaf (1970) defines servant leaders as leaders who choose to serve first. Spears (1998) addresses the changing times of leadership at the end of the 20th century:

As we near the end of the 20th century, we are beginning to see that traditional autocratic and hierarchical modes of leadership are slowly yielding to a newer model--one that attempts to simultaneously enhance the personal growth of workers and improve the quality and caring of our many institutions through a combination of teamwork and community, personal involvement in decision making, and ethical and caring behavior. This emerging approach to leadership and service is called *servant leadership*. (p. 1)

Distinguishing between managing and leading and how it affects an environment is paramount to the success of the organization. Bennis (1989) states that “many an institution is very well managed and very poorly led” (p. 36). Bennis researched leadership by traveling throughout the United States and interviewing 90 of the most effective, successful leaders, 60 from corporations and 30 from public institutions. His goal was to identify these leaders’ common traits. The group studied was diverse in style, thinking, and even articulation. Bennis concludes a major difference between managers and leaders: “Leaders are people who do the right thing, managers are people who do things right” (p. 36). He further states that he often observed people in top positions doing the wrong things well. Bennis also reveals that

leaders have a vision and clearly communicate this to others in an environment of trust. Last, but of equal importance, is the empowerment of the workforce in which all believe they equally influence the direction of the organization.

DePree (1993) believes these three things should be at the top of each leader's list: understanding the fiduciary nature of leadership, competence in leadership, and moral purpose. The fiduciary leader balances individual opportunity and the concept of community. DePree states, "Fiduciary leaders design, build, and then serve inclusive communities by liberating human spirit and potential, not by relying exclusively on their own abilities or experiences or judgments" (p. 71). DePree believes that competence in leadership lies in communicating a vision, selecting key people, and transforming the present toward potential in recognizing the unique talents each person brings to an organization. Greenleaf (1970) describes a different way to look at the issues of power and authority in that less coercion and more supportive ways are needed in how people interact in organizations. DuFour (2004) describes professional learning communities as schools committed to continuous learning in which members of a team share their knowledge and a collective inquiry takes place. This empowerment of workers and the shared knowledge are major factors in the theories of transformational and servant leadership.

DePree (1993) also believes that a leader must have a moral purpose. Those with a moral purpose are authentic in that they recognize that all members of an organization have the right to belong, the right to ownership and opportunities. Bass (2000) states that the ethics of leadership rests upon the moral character of a leader,

the ethical values reflected in his/her vision and articulation, and the morality of the processes the leader and followers pursue. Bennis and Thomas (2002) mention a sense of integrity as an essential skill for leadership. This sense of integrity includes having a strong set of values.

Servant Leadership

The beginning of the study of servant leadership comes from the writings of Greenleaf, which began nearly 40 years ago. Since the Industrial Revolution, people have been viewed as tools by managers and parts of a machine by organizations (Spears, 2004). Greenleaf's emphasis is on teamwork, community, and developing the personal growth of individuals in the organization (Spears, 2004).

Greenleaf (2002) describes how the terms "servant" and "leader" can both be in one person by describing Hesse's (1971) *Journey to the East*, in which a group of men are on a mythical journey. The main character in the story is Leo, who does the men's chores as well as keeps their spirits up through his words and actions. The servant Leo is integral to the men completing their journey. Leo disappears one day and the group of men become disorganized and cannot continue, and the journey is abandoned. The narrator, who was part of the original journey, discovers Leo some time later and is taken into Leo's order. Leo is the guiding spirit and gracious leader of this order. Greenleaf (2002) believes that Leo was seen as a servant first, and that is the key to his greatness. This key concept of service is described by Greenleaf (1970):

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p. 7)

Greenleaf's (1970) reflection and analysis on leadership arises from 40 years of experience at AT&T where he retired as director of management research in 1964. For 25 more years, Greenleaf's second career as author, teacher, and consultant laid the roots for the study of servant leadership and its implications for organizations. Greenleaf (2002) expands on the principle of servant leadership by stating, "Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. Rather, they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants" (p. 24).

Covey (1998) believes the principles of servant leadership are timeless and that their relevance will dramatically increase. According to Covey, the global economy is demanding production of goods and services at a greater speed than ever, and the only way to meet these demands is through the empowerment of people. Empowerment can happen only in a culture of high trust and with a philosophy in which bosses become servants and coaches (Covey, 1998). Writing 37 years ago, Greenleaf (1970) believed a new moral principle was emerging in which authority deserving of trust and loyalty could exist only when it was given freely by the led to the leader.

Spears (1998) addresses the state of various models of leadership when he states that traditional, autocratic, and hierarchical models of leadership are giving way

to newer ones centered on teamwork and shared decision making, as well as based in an ethical and caring environment. Spears (1998) tells how the terms “servant” and “leader” would appear to be an oxymoron, for how could one both serve and lead. However, Spears believes this is logical and makes even more sense as there is a greater recognition of a team-oriented approach to leadership and management. Spears (2004) notes that Toro Company, ServiceMaster, Men’s Wearhouse, Southwest Airlines, Synovus Financial Corporation, and TDIndustries are companies that have stated servant leadership as a component of their corporate philosophy or as a key principle of their mission statement.

After considering Greenleaf’s (1970) original writings, Spears (1998), who is acting director for the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, identified 10 characteristics that he believes are essential to servant leadership. Knowing what Spears has acknowledged as key qualities and that these characteristics form a basis for much of the work of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, a clearer definition of what servant leadership is comes into view.

1. Listening: A leader practices active listening and is receptive to what is being said. Being reflective of what is being listened to is also a part of this characteristic (Spears, 1998).

2. Empathy: One assumes the good intentions of workers and does not reject them as people even if a leader cannot accept certain behaviors or performance. The most successful servant leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners (Spears, 1998).

3. Healing: A servant leader believes he can help heal broken spirits.

Many people have a variety of emotional hurts, and servant leaders recognize the opportunity to help.

4. Awareness: General awareness and self-awareness aid a leader. Leaders can look at situations from an integrated approach. Greenleaf (1970) wrote, “Awareness is not a giver of solace; it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity” (p. 20).

5. Persuasion: Servant leaders attempt to persuade and convince others, not coerce them. This is done through consensus building among the individual members of various groups.

6. Conceptualization: Whereas a manager is more concerned with the day-to-day affairs and short-term issues, conceptualizing involves seeing the big picture. A servant leader must balance management tasks and a visionary concept.

7. Foresight: A servant leader must be able to use his experiences and judgment to make a determination of the likely consequence of a decision. Spears (1998) believes little has been written about foresight, but this characteristic of leadership deserves more attention.

8. Stewardship: The leaders and staff hold the organization in trust for the greater good of the community. Stewardship assumes that a commitment to serve others is a primary focus (Spears, 1998).

9. Commitment to the growth of people: A servant leader is committed to the growth of each member of the organization. Ideas and suggestions from everyone are taken seriously. Worker involvement in decision making is encouraged, and opportunities for professional development exist.

10. Building community: Spears (1998) believes the sense of connectedness has changed because of a shift from local communities to large institutions that shape human life. A servant leader seeks means for building community among the workers of an institution.

In addition to these 10 characteristics of servant leadership, five other servant-leadership qualities were considered in analyzing the data: sense of calling, feeling of love, shared power, integrity, and serving (Walker, 2003).

11. Sense of calling: Jeffries (1998) believes that many leaders know on some deeper level that they are called to their work. In examining healthcare managers, Jeffries (1998) found that 80% of her audiences believed they were called to their profession and to leadership.

12. Feeling of love: Spiritually intelligent leaders have a love and compassion for their work and those they lead. It is “feeling with” and empathy for others. Servant leaders have a deep, abiding passion and are committed to service (Zohar, 1997).

13. Shared power: DuFour (2004) addresses the need for collaboration as the combined individuals of professional learning communities work together to problem

solve in schools. The leaders, superintendents, and principals share their power to enable the organization to thrive.

14. Integrity: Carter (1996) defines integrity as having three characteristics: one must discern what is right or wrong; one's actions are shaped by this discernment, even when difficult; and one must acknowledge publicly what one is doing. Kouzes (1998) emphasizes that through his studies he continually rediscovers that "credibility is the foundation of leadership" and the first law of leadership is, "People won't believe the message if they don't believe in the messenger. People don't follow your technique. They follow you--your message and your embodiment of that message" (p. 323).

15. Serving: One of Greenleaf's (1970) core beliefs was that servant leadership was one's desire to serve first. Autry (2001) shares that another way to look at service is being a resource for people: "To be a leader who serves, you must think of yourself as--and indeed must be--their principal resource" (p. 20).

Covey (cited in Greenleaf, 2002) proposes that the essential concept that separates servant leadership from other forms of leadership is *conscience*, which he describes as an inner sense of what is right and wrong. This spiritual or moral quality is aside from any religion or religious beliefs. Covey believes that this quality of conscience enables servant leadership not only to work but to endure and that conscience separates the types of leadership that work from the types that endure.

Covey (cited in Greenleaf, 2002) goes on to speak of natural and moral authority as they relate to servant leadership. Natural authority means that people

have the power and freedom to choose and people should do this in a principled way, which is the beginning of moral authority. Covey believes moral authority is another way to define servant leadership. If a leader lives by moral principles and conscience, he or she will develop moral authority, and if followers live by moral principles, they will follow the leader. Leaders and followers share values, trust, and an agreed-upon vision.

Covey (cited in Greenleaf, 2002) believes that moral authority, also referred to as conscience, is the core of servant leadership and defines moral authority as the following four dimensions:

1. *The essence of moral authority or conscience is sacrifice.* One must subordinate one's self or one's ego to a higher purpose, cause, or principle. Conscience advances the ego to a state of service to others, in seeing others fulfilled, in seeing the greater good of the group, community, or organization.

2. *Conscience inspires leaders to become part of a cause worthy of commitment.* Within leaders lies an inner voice, a moral voice that enables leaders to submit themselves to a higher nature and their conscience. Covey (cited in Greenleaf, 2002) explains this dimension this way: "When we change our question from asking what is it we want to what is being asked of us, our conscience is opened up and we allow ourselves to be influenced by it" (p.7).

3. *Conscience teaches leaders that the ends and means are inseparable.* Covey (cited in Greenleaf, 2002) believes ego may tell one that the means justify the end, but one's conscience constantly tells one that the means and ends are inseparable.

How a leader arrives at an end result--the means--is just as important as the end result itself.

4. *Conscience introduces leaders into a world of relationships.* Leaders must have values and a vision that are shared. Leaders who live by their conscience will have great respect for other people and appreciation of their views, feelings, and opinions. Leaders with conscience will not control relationships but will allow for interdependent work and relationships. The interplay among opinions creates energy in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Superintendent's Roles

Houston (2001), in describing the big issues that superintendents face, states that successful superintendents in the 21st century must find a way to lead by sharing power and enlisting organizations' members and the community in the learning process. Houston also states that the job of superintendent is made more difficult by the divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Inequities exist in how school districts are funded, and those with economic advantages seem to get even more resources; those children who need the most get the fewest resources. Servant leaders in high-performing, high-poverty districts often must overcome limited resources. Houston (2001) wrote that America seems to put its resources into remediation rather than prevention: "This was best summarized by someone who pointed out that America is a nation that will air-condition its prisons, but not its schools" (p. 431). Superintendents in the past were thought to be successful if they were good managers.

The “stuff” of education was books, buses, buildings, budgets, and bonds – the “Bs.” Present-day superintendents must be proficient at the “Cs”: communication, connection, collaboration, community building, child advocacy, and curricular choices (Houston, 2001). Houston’s beliefs correlate well with Spears’s (1998) writings on servant leadership in the importance of collaboration and relationship building. Houston believes there must be an emphasis on creating and maintaining relationships by superintendents--“the relationships of children to learning, children to children, children to adults, adults to adults and school to community” (p. 431). Houston (2001) also believes that the education of administrators still focuses on the management aspects of the job, and he calls those “command-and-control tasks” as opposed to collaborative skills needed in the current more intricate and connected world.

Wheatley (1999) discusses the importance of relationships and the connectedness of people in organizations. The power of an organization comes from its ability to learn, train, and grow through relationships. Wheatley states, “Even organizational power is relational. . . . Power in organizations is the capacity generated by relationships. It is an energy that comes into existence through relationships” (p. 39). She believes that to best harness this power, members of an organization must pay attention to the quality of these relationships. Based on research literature, creating, building, and maintaining relationships appears to be a crucial role for superintendents of high-performing school districts.

The No Child Left Behind Act has increased the levels of accountability for educators. School superintendents continue to feel new pressures as greater demands are placed on them to raise student achievement (Anthes, 2002). Whereas Houston (2001) details the high level of management skills by superintendents of years past, Anthes (2002) writes of the need for present-day superintendents to be extremely knowledgeable of assessment instruments and which assessments can best help them diagnose student needs. Superintendents must be instructional leaders or, as Anthes (2002) describes, master teachers. At the very least, they must recruit and maintain central office administrators and principals who are master teachers to best assess and implement appropriate instructional strategies. A danger Anthes (2002) describes is a narrowing of the curriculum as leaders are tempted to “drill and practice” and rely on test preparation curricula. The superintendent also must focus the professional development that is needed to best improve instruction and achievement without narrowing the curriculum.

What Cudeiro (2005) posits concerning instructional gains correlates with what Houston (2001) and Spears (1998) state regarding relationship building and collaboration and with Anthes’s (2002) and Houston’s (2001) emphasis on instructional leadership. Cudeiro identifies superintendents who were successful in improving student achievement. She identifies these leaders with the assistance of Harvard faculty through what would appear to be snowball sampling (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Cudeiro studied three superintendents over a four-year period. She concluded that superintendents can have a positive effect on student learning and that

the chief means for doing this is through support and development of the principals as instructional leaders. Cudeiro believes that superintendents used these various strategies in supporting principals as instructional leaders: (a) superintendents established a vision for the district that emphasized student learning and tied district goals to student performance; (b) superintendents emphasized that the primary role of principals was as instructional leaders, which was reinforced verbally and through writing; and (c) principals were held accountable. Superintendents conducted site visits, walkthroughs and written feedback that focused on instructional practices. The evaluation process included the process of reviewing student performance data, as measurable improvement in student learning was a goal. Principals were provided training and resources from the superintendent and central office.

The call for superintendents to be instructional leaders and master teachers can be difficult if superintendents do not see that as a main area of emphasis or if they believe they do not have the time. Bredeson (1995) stated, in a survey study of 326 responses from superintendents of a large midwestern state, that superintendents responded that budget and finance (18.3%) was the most frequently cited task area. Communications (15.8%), personnel administration (13.5%), and work with the school board (12.3%) were the next highest responses. The other task areas listed were vision (10.7%), instructional leadership (10.2%), general system management (9.6%), and planning (4.1%). When asked to rank order the importance of the task areas, curriculum and instructional leadership ranked fourth behind budget first, planning and goals formation, and public/community relations. The call for

superintendents as instructional leaders would seem to conflict somewhat with what their feelings are, according to the Bredeson (1995) study, in that five other task areas have priority in terms of their time, and three others have priority in terms of task importance.

What seems to emerge from several studies and articles is an emphasis in key areas for a superintendent to be successful. A superintendent who emphasizes the importance of instructional leadership would be highly attentive to increased student learning. This superintendent would ensure principals focus on instructional strategies and provide resources to be successful. The articles have common themes related to the role of superintendents, such as having a vision for success and building relationships with principals and central office administrators.

Balancing these many tasks would seem to become easier if, according to Greenleaf (1970), leaders could answer yes to this question: “Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (p. 7). Greenleaf believes that this question is the best test as to whether someone is a servant leader. A crucial role for superintendents appears to be as instructional leaders, and Houston (2001), Anthes (2002), and Cudiero (2005) seem to emphasize this need and the use of collaboration and relationship building to make it happen.

Greenleaf’s (2002) belief is that leadership should not be the hierarchical principle that is traditional in many institutions. In a hierarchical model, there is one leader at the top whose effectiveness is hampered by isolation at the top. *An image of*

omniscience causes the leader to have distorted judgment, according to Greenleaf (2002). Also, a *burden of indecisiveness* exists that is a liability to the organization. The leader in a hierarchical model holds too much power and lacks the ability to persuade because what a leader says will be taken as an order. Greenleaf also believes that there is a major interruption when a leader leaves by choice or retirement. Greenleaf advocates a concept derived from Roman times called *primus inter pares*, in which the principal leader is first among equals, but the leader is not chief. The *primus* tests and proves his/her leadership among peers. An extension of this principle would appear to coordinate with the role of superintendent as servant leader in school districts where administrative team members are all viewed as equals and the superintendent as *primus*.

High-Performing, High-Poverty School Districts

Pertinent to this study is an examination of high-performing schools that have a high poverty rate. High performance was defined as a kindergarten through eighth-grade school district having had 60% or more of their students meet or exceed state standards on the 2005 Standards Achievement Test (composite score for the district) for this midwestern state. The districts for this study are elementary school districts (K-8 districts). The data analyzed were the 2005 composite standardized test scores according to the state's school report card (ISBE, 2005). In 2005, the state's standardized tests taken were for reading in Grades 3, 5, and 8; math in Grades 3, 5, and 8; and science in Grades 4 and 7. High poverty means that 50% of the students in

a school district receive free or reduced lunch according to this state's board of education (ISBE, 2005). The same criteria for the school districts were not applied to the review of the literature. The review of the literature relates to the individual authors' articles and definitions of high performing and high poverty.

Connell (1999) examined 22 elementary schools in New York City's poorest neighborhoods in an attempt to find high achievement that would have implications for better academic performance for at-risk students. The 22 schools had been on the Chancellor's Honor Roll two of the three years from 1995 to 1997. School site interviews were conducted at 14 of the 22 schools. Management styles ranged from collaborative to "top down." Among the attributes displayed at all 14 schools, according to Connell (1999), were:

- A "walk-around" principal whose plan was accepted by teachers, students, and parents.
- A principal who "managed curriculum."
- Principals and teachers who could assess and determine whether students were reading and writing at grade level.
- Principals who displayed a genuine caring for students and operated with a "code of professional respect."

Superintendents have the task of hiring, training, and mentoring principals. This important responsibility would seem to have a great effect on the success of a school district. Connell's (1999) attributes relate directly to several of the servant-leadership characteristics that Spears (1998) identifies, such as foresight and

conceptualization. A superintendent must have this visionary concept of how the leaders (principals) of schools can best operate.

The McREL (2005) *Final Report: High-Needs Schools--What Does It Take to Beat The Odds?* concurred on the importance of leadership in high-poverty schools. Leadership is important in supporting teachers, influencing the school climate, and assessing student progress in assuring high standards for all students. All these premises reflect servant-leadership principles of persuasion, conceptualization, and foresight (Spears, 1998), and a superintendent who possesses these qualities could seek and train principals to lead the district's schools.

Collaboration among teachers, administration, and staff at schools seems to be an emerging theme present in the stories of successful schools that have high poverty rates. Hancock and Lamendola (2005) describe the journey of a principal taking over a high-poverty elementary school in Rochester, New York. The lack of collaboration greatly hindered the road to improvement. Teachers worked in isolation, with little interaction with each other. The new principal and teachers developed goals, values, and beliefs together. Common time was created for planning, and committees were formed for school-based planning. Without collaboration, schools are left to individual efforts that are uncoordinated and not aligned.

McGee (2003) examined high-performing, high-poverty schools in a mixed-methods research study of Golden Spike Award winners in Illinois. Golden Spike-winning schools were elementary schools that had a state standardized test composite of 66% or better over a three-year period and had increased their scores at least 10%

over that time. Winning schools also had 50% or more of their population comprised from low-income families. Among McGee's (2003) findings were the following common characteristics of Golden Spike winners:

- Strong leadership,
- An emphasis on early literacy,
- Good teachers,
- More academic learning time, and
- Extensive parent involvement.

McGee's (2003) elaboration on leadership describes it as a shared commitment. Time is available for teachers to meet within their school and district. At one school, teachers led staff meetings. A key tenet of servant leadership is the sharing of power in decision making (Greenleaf Center, 2002). McGee (2003) shares one teacher's feelings:

Our staff is very involved in continuous improvement; we work together in teams and make instructional decisions together. We all share the responsibility for continuous improvement. . . . Our staff is very familiar with our school goals and our school improvement plan. . . . Adjustments are made to our structure based on assessment results. (p. 26)

A component of servant leadership is the empowering of all members of the organization in working together toward a common goal. Principal selection and training are responsibilities that a superintendent has that can impact the success of any school district, including high-performing, high-poverty districts. One of McGee's (2003) common characteristics is "having exemplary principals who are

leaders of learning, who are resourceful, who craft a culture of high standards and high expectations, and who model leadership daily” (p. 63).

Summary

The review of the literature informs and describes general changes in the study of leadership and its relation to leadership in educational administration. Servant leadership is defined and referenced in the literature. Characteristics of servant leadership are defined and used as a basis for the research of this study. The literature describes roles of the school superintendent and superintendents’ perceptions of their roles. High-performing, high-poverty school districts were defined and identified.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The intent of this research was to study the servant-leadership characteristics expressed by superintendents of high-performing, high-poverty school districts. The design, instruments, and procedures were an extension of Walker's (2003) methodology in her dissertation, *Phenomenological Profiles of Selected Illinois Public-School Superintendents as Servant Leaders*.

Within the limitations of the interview it is not possible to elicit every aspect of servant leadership from each participant. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted only in the context of the responses of the interviews.

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design that centers on the subjective experience of the individual. The intent of this study was to interpret the perspectives of the participants. It is the subjective experience of phenomenological research that distinguishes this type of research from other qualitative designs (Mertens, 2005). Phenomenological research involves the identification of a topic that is of personal and social significance. The researcher becomes intimate with the phenomenon being studied and comes to understand him/herself within the context of experiencing the phenomenon to the point that phenomenological research can be seen

as directly opposite of quantitative research, which is a detachment of the researcher's self from the phenomena being studied (Gall et al., 2003). The participants are interviewed to obtain a comprehensive description of their experience and the analysis of data involves breaking down the interview data into themes and comparing responses among interviewees before synthesizing case findings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

Eight superintendents were studied using questions based on the literature review and Walker's (2003) open-ended interview questions. The interview answers were analyzed for development of patterns and their relationship to servant-leadership characteristics. The strengths of qualitative research are specifically aimed at gaining insights from this type of small group that could be overlooked by quantitative methods. This research provides interview data that provide answers to the question, "Are characteristics of servant leadership discernable in the practice of superintendents in high-performing, high-poverty public elementary school districts?"

Subjects

Superintendents were selected from high-performing, high-poverty school districts in a midwestern state. High performing is defined as standardized test composite scored of 60% or higher of students who meet or exceed state standards. For purposes of this study, a high-poverty school district is one in which at least 50% of its students are eligible for free or reduced lunch according to the board of education of a midwestern state's demographic information from the state's school

report cards (ISBE, 2005). In 2005, the state's standardized tests taken were reading in Grades 3, 5, and 8; math in Grades 3, 5, and 8; and science in Grades 4 and 7. The districts for this study are elementary, which includes grades kindergarten through eighth (K-8). The initial data was obtained through SchoolMatters (2005). A sort of the data was conducted to identify K-8 school districts that had a 60% or higher composite on the 2005 standardized state test and had 50% or more of low-income students. The data from SchoolMatters was cross-referenced with this state's school report cards (ISBE, 2005) for purposes of the Spotlight Schools Awards, referred to in Chapter 2. The State Board of Education classifies schools as high poverty if 50% or more of the school is low income.

Participating superintendents had been superintendents in their school districts for three or more years prior to the 2005 state standardized tests. Superintendents were chosen from all elementary school districts in this midwestern state that have a qualifying composite standardized test score for 2005. After the high-performing, high-poverty school districts were identified, superintendents were identified through the Champion Foundation (2006) to determine how long, prior to the 2005 state standardized tests, they had been superintendents at their identified school districts. Data from the Champion Foundation were cross-referenced with school district directories from the ISBE (2006) website and from personal information given by identified superintendents as part of the interview process.

Eight personal interviews were completed. Letters of invitations (see Appendix A) were followed by phone calls and e-mails to seek agreement for

participation in the study. The researcher's interviews lasted from 15 to 80 minutes. There were no time constraints from the researcher.

Description of the Subjects

Participating superintendents selected had been superintendents at their school districts for at least three or more years prior to the 2005 ISAT. Ten superintendents qualified for the study. Two superintendents refused to be interviewed. After repeated attempts to establish contact, both declined to speak directly to the interviewer and communicated their refusal through their secretaries. Six of the eight were still at the same school district as they were in 2005. One superintendent had retired after the 2004/2005 school year, and one superintendent had moved to another school district. Letters of invitation were followed by telephone calls to answer questions and clarify the process for the study. Follow-up e-mails were also utilized to establish contact and set up interview times. Interviews were conducted over a three-week period. A total of eight interviews were conducted, each lasting between 13 and 78 minutes.

Four of the superintendents served in the central region of a midwestern state. Two served in the suburbs of a large metropolitan city of a midwestern state, and two served in the western region of a midwestern state. At the time of the 2005 data, the superintendents served in districts with enrollments ranging from 108 to 2,911. Four of the superintendents served in districts with student enrollment over 1,000.

Leadership Characteristics Studied

Servant-leadership characteristics emerged through a review of the literature. For the purposes of this study, these characteristics, identified by Spears (1998) and Walker (2003), were listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, building community, a sense of calling, a feeling of love, shared power, integrity, and serving. The servant-leadership characteristic matrix is presented in Appendix B.

The researcher reviewed the transcribed interviews and culled the responses for servant-leadership characteristics. The interview questions enabled the selected superintendents to describe their journey to the superintendency and focus on their relationships with various stakeholders as well as their degree of responsibility for the stakeholders. Pseudonyms were given to the superintendents to protect their identity.

Observation of Subjects

Superintendent Anderson

Superintendent Anderson had been in the same school district for 36 years, having started his career there as a substitute teacher. He began full-time teaching as a social studies teacher before moving to building principal. When the superintendency became available Superintendent Anderson was seen as someone from within who could fill that position. A few board members approached him about the position, and

after encouragement, he applied and was appointed superintendent, a position he had held for 17 years.

Superintendent Anderson was quite accommodating in a meeting time that he was able to set up shortly after being contacted. The interview took place in a new addition of the administration building that was the product of a successful referendum that Superintendent Anderson was particularly proud of accomplishing. He was at ease and contemplative throughout the interview. He indicated that he was retiring in two years and it would be “someone else’s turn” shortly. The interview lasted 51 minutes, and at the conclusion of the interview, he gave the researcher a book about dismissal/remediation of certified staff. After the interview concluded, Superintendent Anderson wanted to ask the researcher some questions, which led to a conversation related to education issues and the superintendency that lasted another 30 minutes.

Superintendent Brown

Superintendent Brown began his teaching career as a music teacher before becoming a high school principal at the age of 26. After three years as a high school principal, he was invited by the district superintendent to become the assistant superintendent for curriculum, a position he held before becoming superintendent of the district he retired from after the 2004/05 school year. His tenure as superintendent lasted 11 years, all in the same district. Despite having been retired for two school years Superintendent Brown was extremely reflective and thorough in his answers.

Superintendent Brown was quick to respond to the inquiry for an interview and flexible on a meeting time and date. The interview took place at a local restaurant and lasted 50 minutes. He was very much at ease in speaking of his experiences as superintendent. He expressed an interest in educational leadership and indicated that he teaches courses in educational administration at a local university.

Superintendent Crean

As did Superintendent Brown, Superintendent Crean also began his teaching career as a music teacher. He taught vocal music for 23 years before he became a principal. After six years as a principal, he became superintendent, a position he had held for five years.

At first, Superintendent Crean was somewhat hesitant to participate in a research study, claiming they had “a lot of paper to push” as the school year was nearing completion. The researcher informed Superintendent Crean that this would be an in-person interview and it could be conducted at his convenience after the school year had ended for students. Superintendent Crean was less apprehensive and readily cooperated in scheduling a meeting time. The interview was conducted at the district’s administration building in the superintendent’s office. The researcher arrived early in town, and upon calling and asking if the interview could be conducted earlier, Superintendent Crean was flexible in meeting earlier than the scheduled time. At the interview, Superintendent Crean was reflective and thorough in his answers, and the

researcher did not notice any reluctance to participate in an interview that lasted 72 minutes.

Superintendent Douglas

Superintendent Douglas began his teaching career as a math teacher, and after five years he became a part-time math teacher and a part-time principal. After three years as a part-time principal, Superintendent Douglas worked as an assistant superintendent in a regional office of education for nine years. His next position was as an assistant superintendent responsible for monitoring grant programs, curriculum, and personnel, among other duties. After seven years as assistant superintendent, he was encouraged by the retiring superintendent to pursue the superintendency. Superintendent Douglas indicated that the job was not advertised, and after interviewing with the board of education, he was appointed the next superintendent, a position he had been in for the past five years. Superintendent Douglas said he never really looked for a job, saying, "It's just how things have been. I've been at the right place at the right time. It really has been nice."

The appointment with Superintendent Douglas was set up easily and quickly. The interview was conducted in the superintendent's office. The other offices and secretarial space were near the superintendent's office, and the door remained open throughout the interview. Superintendent Douglas was quite reflective on a variety of topics and leadership characteristics. The interview lasted 60 minutes.

Superintendent Emmit

Superintendent Emmit was a physical education teacher for 22 years prior to becoming a principal for two years. He has been the superintendent/principal of his current district and school for five years. Superintendent Emmit specified that the strongest influence on his decision to become superintendent was encouragement from his wife.

Superintendent Emmit phoned the researcher two hours before the scheduled time and indicated that he had a meeting that he would have to attend and he would have to leave at about the time of the scheduled interview. The researcher discussed other options and Superintendent Emmit thought that if the researcher could get there shortly there would be enough time for the interview. The researcher arrived at the interview 30 minutes prior to the originally scheduled time. There was about 25 minutes available for the interview, but the interview only lasted 13 minutes. Perhaps Superintendent Emmit was preoccupied with his other meeting, which he indicated was with the school board president. The researcher thought Superintendent Emmit's answers were brief, and despite follow-up questions, the data from this interview were limited. The interview was conducted in the school/district office.

Superintendent Fern

Superintendent Fern was a high school industrial arts teacher for 12 years. He also served as a vocational director for the school district. After his tenure as a teacher, he served as a principal of an elementary/high school district that had one

school. There were interim superintendents during his two years as principal, and after two years, he was hired as the principal/superintendent. He is the current superintendent at a district other than the district he served during the 2004/2005 school year, the year of the data for this study. Superintendent Fern has served a total of six years as a superintendent.

Superintendent Fern was flexible in setting a meeting time, and he readily offered directions to the district. His father had served as an assistant superintendent in the district he was currently serving, and Superintendent Fern saw his appointment as superintendent as a “homecoming.” The interview was conducted at the table utilized for board of education meetings in his office, that had once served as a classroom. Superintendent Fern was reflective and thorough in his responses as he gave particular details regarding issues and events. The interview lasted 67 minutes, and another 25 minutes were spent talking about the area and local history.

Superintendent Green

Superintendent Green became certified to teach after earning a bachelor’s degree in a noneducation major. After three years as a junior high school science teacher and six years as an assistant principal, he became a junior high school principal. When the superintendent left the district, Superintendent Green applied as an internal candidate and has served as the superintendent for 25 years.

The interview took place in the superintendent’s office. Although reflective, Superintendent Green was straightforward and indifferent in his responses.

Superintendent Green stated that money was the basis for his decision to seek the superintendency. He had a family of five, and the superintendency paid more than teacher or principal positions. He then added that he believed he could influence the education of children. The interview lasted 33 minutes.

Superintendent Hill

Superintendent Hill said that she never intended to become a school official or a teacher. She had been in the field of business, and because of her family situation, she chose a field that she believed would make it easier to support her children. She said she was actually one of those people who go into teaching to have the Christmas vacation and summers off. Upon teaching in low-income school districts, Superintendent Hill found she had a passion for teaching children who are poor. After being advised to earn a principal's certificate, Superintendent Hill became a principal within seven years of entering the education field. She moved to the district she was currently serving as a principal, and after several superintendents did not work out, the district's board of education approached her about becoming the superintendent because the board wanted someone who knew the district. Superintendent Hill said she never applied for the job. She told the board her deficits, her thoughts about the superintendency, and her expectations for a board of education. She said she would try it for one year, and if it worked, she would sign a three-year contract. At the time of this study, she had been at the district seven years.

Superintendent Hill finalized our appointment via e-mail, and the interview was conducted at the agreed-upon time. The interview was conducted in the board of education meeting room, which was adjoined to the superintendent's office. Superintendent Hill offered reflective insights with great detail. Her responses and tone were friendly and open. She spoke to the questions and related areas at ease. The interview lasted 78 minutes.

Summary of Observations

Six of the eight superintendents were reflective, open, and personable. Most superintendents were attentive and detailed in their responses. Seven of the interviews took place in the superintendent's office or a board of education meeting room. One interview took place in a local restaurant. The superintendents' offices contained education-related books on shelves and personal photos and mementos. Servant-leadership characteristics were reported by all superintendents. The typical interviewee spoke of a vision and showed concern for all stakeholders. None of the superintendents indicated that they had sought the superintendency early in their careers as teachers or administrators.

Instruments and Procedures

The interview protocol was an open-ended interview. The questions evolved from research literature. As in Walker's (2003) study, the questions were designed to elicit trust and create a context for each data set. The interviews were structured in

such a way so as to allow the superintendents' leadership styles to emerge. The questions did not use "servant leadership" or related terms in the questions and were designed to allow the superintendents to speak about their leadership styles. Based on superintendents' responses the study reported what servant-leadership characteristics were expressed. The interview questions used were as follows:

1. Please describe your journey to the superintendency.
2. What was the basis of your decision to seek the superintendency?
3. How did your academic training prepare you for your position?
4. How would you describe your relationship with support staff, certified staff, administrative staff, students, parents, community members, and board members during your superintendency? In turn, how would you describe their relationship to you?
5. Describe the scope of the responsibility you experience for support staff, certified staff, administrative staff, students, parents, community members, and board members.
6. How was power distributed among these same stakeholders?
7. Please describe the philosophy behind your decision making as superintendent.
8. How would you define the purpose of the superintendency?
9. How would you summarize the job description of a superintendent?
10. What was the most rewarding experience you have had as superintendent?

11. What is one thing you would change about the time you have spent as superintendent?

Data Organization and Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed by coding. Various servant-leadership frameworks from several authors were related to emerging themes. Included in the data organization are narrative descriptions, narrative report writing, and a table of servant-leadership characteristics expressed by the superintendent. In a qualitative research design the operations of organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data are integrated in the entire “data analysis” process. The data were coded using predetermined categories while examining relationships or patterns among the answers (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). The categories for this study were the 15 servant-leadership categories. The researcher examined the superintendents’ answers for a relationship to each of the servant-leadership characteristics.

Institutional Review Board

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (Office of Research Compliance) of Northern Illinois University. A research proposal was submitted because this is a research study using human subjects.

Summary

This research study detailed servant-leadership characteristics expressed by superintendents of high-performing, high-poverty school districts. Interview data were coded, and themes were identified. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the data from the superintendents' interviews.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

Chapter 4 is an interpretation of the data from eight interviews of superintendents from high-performing, high-poverty school districts. The data analysis addresses the research question, “Are characteristics of servant leadership discernable in the practice of superintendents in high-performing, high-poverty public elementary school districts?”

All the superintendents expressed four or more servant-leadership characteristics. Of the 15 servant-leadership characteristics utilized in this study, two superintendents expressed four characteristics, one expressed five characteristics, three expressed 11 characteristics, one expressed 12 characteristics, and one expressed 14 characteristics (see Appendix B).

Analysis of Individual Superintendent Responses

Listening

Listening involves active listening and being receptive to what is being said. Being reflective of what is being listened to is also a part of this characteristic (Spears,

1998). An example of listening was expressed by Superintendent Anderson when he said that he called his six building principals every day, sometimes “just to see what’s going on, what’s new.” He also said that he called the assistant principals every two or three weeks. He encouraged teachers and principals to call parents and communicate regularly with them. He believed that parents want to hear from school staff on the phone, not necessarily via an e-mail. A group of teachers, administrators, and board of education members (TAB) meet once a month to discuss building and district issues. From these group discussions, ideas can become action items that better the school district.

The importance of listening was expressed by Superintendent Brown. Listening to the stakeholders was mentioned as a key aspect to developing relationships. Brown believed parents were not afraid to come to talk to him because he was a listener and the parents sometimes just needed to talk through a problem.

Superintendent Crean taught with many teachers in the district for many years and believed a high level of trust existed. He was willing to listen to concerns of teachers, and some experienced a greater comfort level with him because they had worked together as teachers. Crean surveyed the certified and noncertified staff members every year to elicit feedback as to how they thought he was doing as the superintendent. The survey results went directly to the board of education, and this information became part of his job evaluation.

After negotiations with three union groups, Superintendent Douglas discovered one of the groups was not happy. Superintendent Douglas’s worry reflected his desire

to listen to the staff. Regarding the unhappy group, Douglas said, “I want every employee to be happy with what their job assignment is and what their compensation package is and not to feel that they were mistreated in any way.”

Superintendent Emmit indicated that he used surveys and needs assessment with staff as a way of determining their needs and to receive feedback. Emmit said, “They’re [staff are] actually doing the job, so let’s find out what you think and what you need and we’ll go from there.” Superintendent Emmit demonstrated listening by seeking these comments and responses from his staff.

The value of listening was articulated by Superintendent Fern in that he believed in asking staff members what they need to be successful. In talking about the distribution of power, Superintendent Fern believed it was extremely important that teachers have an input in the curriculum they are teaching as well as input into staff development. In speaking of teachers, Fern stressed, “They’re the ones that control the learning, and it’s so very essential to have the staff members on board with your vision.” He stated that power rests with the teachers and the teachers need to know the superintendent’s vision.

The servant-leadership characteristic of listening emerged when Superintendent Green spoke about power distribution in the school district. In Green’s district, a group of 12 met regularly to discuss issues that would help them become a better school. The group consisted of three support staff, three teaching staff, three board of education members, and three administrators. This school improvement group had been meeting during each school year for the past 15 years to discuss

negotiations, express problems and concerns, identify issues and solve problems.

Green said that various groups have a say in the decision making.

Superintendent Hill and the administrative team met regularly and identified their flaws. This helped identify areas that needed work, and suggestions were made for administrators for a given situation or to implement a program. Hill meets with the principals weekly at their individual buildings, and then she meets monthly at the administration building to listen to their ideas and concerns and discuss district issues.

Eight out of eight superintendents articulated the importance of listening. All of the superintendents valued the ideas and feedback of staff. Spears (1998) states, "A servant leader seeks to identify the will of a group and helps to clarify that will" (p. 4).

Empathy

Empathy is described by Secretan (1997) as taking into consideration the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others. Spears (1998) claims, "A leader assumes the good intentions of workers and does not reject them as people even if the leader cannot accept certain behaviors or performance" (p. 4).

Superintendent Anderson expressed empathy for principals when he stated that he knows what the job entails, having been a principal himself at the elementary and junior high school levels. He said that it is the hardest job in the district and believed that all the schools had at least one assistant principal, which had not been the case in the past. He said that he realized that having an assistant principal made it easier for principals to have coverage when they were out of the building.

Superintendent Brown expressed empathy for his support staff in giving them additional days off (beyond contractual days off) at Christmas and Easter time, saying, “I felt like that was good for them, they needed more time with their family.” He believed that those gestures were reciprocated because of their relationship; for example, the custodial staff cleared snow from district sidewalks on a Sunday and did not submit timesheets. He said “it spoke volumes” when custodians did not put Sunday’s work on their timesheets. Superintendent Brown had the district pay them for their Sunday snow-clearing work because he said the extra day off was not a “tit-for-tat” thing.

Superintendent Crean was empathetic to the work each group did and looked for ways to acknowledge the good work they were doing. In expressing empathy toward the support staff, Crean said, “I grew up in a blue-collar family. My dad was actually a custodian, and I grew up very much within the hourly sort of background.” He also said that he worked as a custodian during high school and college.

Superintendent Douglas expressed empathy when speaking about the support staff. He said, “My father-in-law was a maintenance man in the public schools. I’m not better than anybody else, and I’ve shoveled snow; I can take care of here when they’re on the plows and everything.”

The servant-leadership characteristic of empathy was expressed in Superintendent Green’s answers describing his relationships with the stakeholder groups. When discussing his relationship with support staff, Green revealed that his own background was “blue collar” and that as a new teacher he also worked in school

maintenance. He appreciated the support staff's work and effort and described his relationship with them as excellent.

Superintendent Hill showed empathy by recognizing that the board might be intimidated by her and afraid to challenge her thinking because, as she said, only one board member had a college degree. Hill believed it helped to praise their questions to ease their fears. Hill said she would tell board members, "I'm glad you raised that question. I haven't thought that question through clearly. Your question is going to help me do that."

Six of the eight superintendents provided answers that articulated empathy. The ability of these superintendents to put themselves emotionally in another's place helped them understand others.

Healing

A servant leader believes he/she can help heal broken spirits. Many people have a variety of emotional hurts, and servant leaders recognize the opportunity to help (Spears, 1998). Sturnick (1998) believes that leaders must first bring themselves to emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical health, which then enables them to heal and improve the quality of life for the workers and the organization.

Superintendent Brown reflected the servant-leadership characteristic of healing when he spoke about communicating with parents. Brown believed parents were not afraid to come to talk to him because he was a listener and parents sometimes just need to talk through a problem. He thought parents were asking the question, "Is there

any alternative solution to help my child in this situation?” He believed parents trusted him, and he was able to help parents sometimes by just listening.

The servant-leadership characteristic of healing was articulated by Superintendent Fern in his description of a situation at the district in which he became superintendent (at the time of this study). At the end of the school year prior to his superintendency, the district voted to deactivate the high school. Six board members agreed to this, and one was opposed, wanting to accept the public’s yes vote for deactivation at the elections. Superintendent Fern said he had six board members who agreed with the deactivation and one strong board member who, Fern said, “led this town.” Superintendent Fern explained why deactivation would benefit students and worked at healing the division of the school board. He said that his relationship became quite good with the board and the board member opposed to deactivation realized that deactivation helped his child get into a major college that would not have been possible had she been part of a small class. Superintendent Fern’s words and continued working relationship with the opposing board member helped heal the hurt this one board member experienced.

The servant-leadership characteristic of healing was expressed when Superintendent Hill detailed how she and the administrative team dealt with their shortcomings. Outside consultation was brought in to help analyze the problems of the district when Hill first took over as superintendent. Blaming others for the problems was not, then or currently, something Superintendent Hill believed in when problem solving. Hill’s thoughts were, “If you come to me with a problem, say, here’s

my involvement, here's where I went wrong. Now, what can we do to fix it?" Hill said that if the researcher had talked to her two years earlier, she would not have been willing to admit her mistakes.

Healing was expressed by three of the eight superintendents. Spears (1998) believes in the power of making others whole through healing. Greenleaf (1970) states in *The Servant as Leader*, "There is something subtly communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share" (p. 60).

Awareness

General awareness and self-awareness aid a leader. Leaders can look at situations from an integrated approach. Greenleaf (1970) wrote that awareness does not give one comfort, but that being truly aware is a "disturber." Superintendent Brown spoke of getting feedback and knowing the district staff's opinions about issues and policy. For example, Brown would have "sawdust sessions," which he described as "groups of people [who] could come in after working hours, meet with me on particular occasions, and tell me what they don't like about the district, tell me what they don't like about a decision or policy." This helped Brown have a good awareness in his district.

Superintendent Crean believed the relationship with support staff was the toughest to maintain, and he admitted that he has to work on that relationship. That awareness is a characteristic of servant leadership. The support staff was unionized

and Crean believed he spent more time working with the union than he did with the teachers. He looked for ways to praise support staff yet also hold them accountable.

Superintendent Douglas stated, “I feel the responsibility to give them the professional development they need to continue to improve their teaching.” In discussing his scope of responsibility for teachers, Douglas expresses the servant-leadership characteristic of awareness, as well as service, in saying, “I feel I need to be on the forefront, providing what the teachers need in order to teach the kids.”

In talking about professional development, Superintendent Fern reflected an awareness that he had in his district. Fern said, “You need to work with the staff to say, how can we get there? What ideas do you have? What are they doing successfully at other districts that we can do?”

Superintendent Hill showed awareness when speaking to district values. Hill said, “We stick to our mission. We have a child-centered learning environment. All decisions, any ideas you bring to the table, how does this impact student learning?” In discussing professional development, Superintendent Hill expressed the value of awareness that resources must be provided when she stated that she has to be “reasonable and thoughtful” in what she’s asking and that teachers need to “have the training and the tools and the equipment to do the job we’re asking.”

Five of eight superintendents articulated examples that valued awareness. Spears (1998) states that awareness relates to general awareness and self-awareness. This awareness allows leaders to look at situations more holistically and integrated (Spears, 1998).

Persuasion

Persuasion is convincing others through consensus building within the different groups, not by coercing (Spears, 1998). Superintendent Brown's responses expressed the servant-leadership characteristic of persuasion in convincing people. As a former band director, Brown likened the superintendency to that of band director pulling together various people and various instruments to make music out of it. Superintendent Brown emphasized his analogy by saying,

I think the major role of the superintendent is to, you know, bring about something that is beautiful, something that is working real well, something that others can look at with awe, and that the individuals in the organization can feel good about, and you know you can--you know you're in a band because you want to be in a band. I wanted the staff to be there.

This analogy supports the expression of persuasion in bringing people together.

Superintendent Fern used persuasion in moving the district teachers to use a technology program he believed would help student achievement. Fern had used the program in a previous district. Fern used persuasion in "making sure it's going to be implemented in a way that it can actually increase student achievement."

Superintendent Hill used persuasion in moving staff toward implementing a reading program she believed would help student achievement, and it corresponded with the district mission. She stressed that she made child-centered decisions and that it was equally important to articulate why a decision was good for students.

Servant leaders utilize persuasion to move followers toward common goals. Greenleaf (1977) believes that servant leaders should never utilize coercion to carry out a task. Decisions and assignments are completed through consensus building

within various groups. Three of the eight superintendents gave examples that reflected the servant-leadership characteristic of persuasion.

Conceptualization

Conceptualization involves seeing the big picture. A leader is able to have a vision of what the organization should look like and what is needed for the organization to move to its desired status. Superintendent Brown saw the need for higher student achievement in his district. He saw the big picture that was needed, and he said he sought opinions on how to go about improving instruction. He arranged for the entire staff, through staggered group trips, to visit other high-achieving midwestern schools with similar or worse demographics than his district's schools. Brown said his staff was able to see the successful approach that similar schools were using, "and then we soaked our staff in staff development on that approach, and, my goodness, what a difference that made in our district, and I'm so very proud of that." Brown added that the student achievement was a little better and "the staff is working toward a greater goal than they were ever working toward."

Superintendent Crean expressed the characteristic of conceptualization when he stated that he had definite ideas about how schools should run and what the district needs to be doing in the schools. Superintendent Crean, in speaking about his responsibility to staff, said, "Whereas the principal is more focused on what you're teaching, the superintendent is more focused on the bigger picture of things." Bennis

(1989) discovered through his research that effective leaders have a vision and consistently communicate this to the workers.

This servant-leader characteristic of conceptualization was expressed by Superintendent Douglas in his answer related to academic preparation for the superintendency. Douglas said, "I think that when you get into a doctorate program, you see things more globally and are focused on what is good for the district, number one, and what's good for education and good for the world." In answering a question about the superintendent's job description, Douglas believed the number one responsibility was to be a "real visionary."

Superintendent Fern expressed his belief that superintendents should have a vision to provide direction for the school and district. Fern said, "I think the big thing with certified staff is to let them know what direction the ship needs to go. Where is it we want to go, and also what areas are we weak in?"

In discussing the superintendency opening with the school board, then-Principal Hill told the school board her thoughts about what a superintendent should do, what the deficits of the district were, and her expectations of how a school board should conduct itself. She ended her thoughts to the board by saying, "I'm going to tell you right now, I'm a teacher advocate, I'm a student advocate, and I'm a community advocate." Her answers expressed thoughts on having a vision of what she thought the school district could become.

Five of eight superintendents articulated the importance of conceptualization. The five superintendents expressed a desire to show direction for the district or for key

stakeholder groups in the district. The servant leader must balance the management tasks and have a visionary concept (Spears, 1998).

Foresight

Spears (1998) states, "Foresight enables a servant leader to use his experiences and judgment to make a determination of the likely consequence of a decision" (p. 5). Superintendent Anderson's response to his relationship with the school board reflects the characteristic of foresight. Anderson said, "It's up to me to educate the board to show them that they need to make this decision versus something else. I need to show them all the options." Anderson also said he would let the school board know what he believed would be the outcome of each option, which is a key component of foresight.

Superintendent Brown's expressed foresight in his ability to make a decision based on his experience and judgment upon taking the superintendency position. During the interview process, he asked the board of education if it wanted a follower or a leader. When the board responded that it wanted a leader, Brown said he knew he would be trusted to make decisions that were best for the students and not be micromanaged by the board of education.

An example of foresight was reflected when Superintendent Crean's district was faced with the problem of the misallocation of funds. District funds were electronically withdrawn at the bank level. Crean showed foresight and integrity in being as open as possible from the beginning. It was quickly determined that it was not any school district employees that was involved, and this was communicated to the

community via a press release. Superintendent Crean informed the board of education, employees, and the community from the start of the problem. He expected many calls to the office from the community and in fact received only three phone calls. Crean was able to analyze a problem and implement a solution that he believed would have the best possible result.

Superintendent Douglas showed foresight in how he assisted the community. He saw the likely outcome of his contribution and believed that his community involvement helped the school district. Douglas said that he served on many community boards. He believed it made it easier when asking for help with the district or with a referendum if the superintendent and principals had been involved in community activities. Douglas said, "People are saying, he helped us, we need to be there helping the school or helping on a project."

Superintendent Fern expressed the characteristic of foresight when he spoke about technology and what it could do for students. Fern's ability to reflect on pedagogical practices supports the research of Anthes (2002), who stated that superintendents must be instructional leaders. Fern had an idea of how the music program could improve with technology that writes the music played when an instrument is plugged into a computer. Concentrating on technological advances showed foresight in that Fern saw the end result and what would come of his decision to allocate funds for technology.

Foresight is intuitive and may be the only servant-leadership characteristic with which one can be born (Spears, 1998). Five of the eight superintendents

expressed the characteristic of foresight in their answers. Foresight is closely related to conceptualization in that conceptualization relates to the big picture and vision; foresight relates to particular decisions. Foresight addresses the intuitiveness of a leader in using his experiences combined with the realities of the organization in making decisions with an idea of the likely outcome (Spears, 2004).

Stewardship

Stewardship assumes foremost that there is a commitment by the leader to serve the needs of others (Spears, 1998). Also, Spears (2004) states that stewardship involves holding the institution in trust for the good of society. Superintendent Brown said that his most rewarding experience was the day-to-day journey. His answers reflected a sense of stewardship in his satisfaction with the progress he believed the district had made. Brown said, "It was nice to see an organization come together. I think I left the district better than when I inherited it."

Superintendent Crean believed that administrators should help each other and become resources to each other. Stewardship was reflected in his thoughts concerning his current group of principals when he said that they were not "territorial" about their school. He said that it was not unusual for principals to offer help to each other. This shows the servant-leadership characteristic of service in wanting to help others and be a resource to others and stewardship in showing the principals interest in the good of the organization.

Superintendent Douglas believed that his number one job was to be a “real visionary” for the school district. He believed the community had a big responsibility to support education, and he saw himself as a part of the large community. He could be viewed as a steward in that he was heavily involved in community committees and saw school and community work as his responsibility. Douglas said, “The community has given so much to me and to the school and to me personally, I feel like I owe a lot to the community.”

Superintendent Emmit said, “It’s my responsibility . . . to do what’s best for the kids and the organization and provide resources for the staff to do their job.” This reflected the servant-leadership characteristic of stewardship. Superintendent Emmit said that he viewed himself as a support person, saying, “I mean, basically, they’re doing the job; I support.”

Superintendent Fern’s answers concerning the superintendent’s job description reflected stewardship. Fern believed that a superintendent should be a person who facilitates communication within and among the different stakeholder groups in the school district for the good of the organization. If staff members had ideas and thoughts, Superintendent Fern believed he should investigate and gather the facts to help formulate common goals and visions. In describing the purpose of the superintendency, Fern stated, “I think the purpose of the superintendent is again to provide that vision [the purpose], and then once you have that vision is to go out and provide that support.”

Five of the eight superintendents gave answers that reflected stewardship. The five superintendents provided resources to staff and were of service in doing so. Serving the needs of others and focusing on the good of the organization are key components of stewardship.

Commitment to Growth

Servant leaders nurture the growth of the workers and have a deep commitment to the development of each member of the institution (Spears, 2004). An example of this commitment to growth is reflected in the way Superintendent Anderson's school district pays for the tuition of principals pursuing doctoral degrees in education. Superintendent Anderson also supports further education of the teachers with tuition reimbursement from the district for education-related courses. A pool of money, about \$50,000, exists for this purpose. There is financial assistance for teacher aides with about \$100.00 per course available for tuition reimbursement, as well as a district commitment to professional development for teacher assistants, custodial staff, and certified staff through workshops, training, and in-service sessions.

Superintendent Brown expressed a commitment to growth by initiating curricular changes and professional development. He developed a plan for textbook adoption and curricular improvement as well as professional development to address academic improvement. He also initiated the after-school discussion sessions with various stakeholders to discuss school and district issues.

Superintendent Douglas detailed a commitment to growth in providing staff with the in-service training and resources to be successful. He believed that as superintendent he must have the vision to know on what areas the district should be focusing. Douglas stated, "I feel the responsibility to give them the professional development they need to continue to improve their teaching." Douglas's beliefs correlate well with Burns (1978), who believes that an effective leader has an awareness of the workers' needs and makes it possible for workers to reach their full potential.

Superintendent Fern exhibited a commitment to growth in his annual survey of teachers about their instructional and material needs. In collaboration with teachers, he has decided what to purchase for teachers and how to provide professional development. In the past, he has allocated money for professional development at what he calls "Saturday school."

A commitment to growth was described when Superintendent Green spoke about the hiring process. He believed that hiring great teachers was absolutely critical to the high achievement of students. Green stated that after hiring great teachers, a superintendent must "then support them so they can do their job and also get good principals. Principals are critical." On speaking to the value of hiring the best teachers and providing resources, Green added, "I think you can make good teachers better and better teachers great, but you can't make poor teachers great."

A commitment to growth was expressed when Superintendent Hill described a program she initiated to assist in the continuing education of teacher assistants. When

teacher assistants needed to meet new state requirements for recertification, Superintendent Hill contacted a local college and began a certification program at night for her district, and the neighboring school district's teacher aides were invited.

Six of eight superintendents addressed the importance of growth for individual members of the district. Professional development activities were often provided, and these were based on the needs of the district and the vision of the superintendent.

Building Community

Servant leaders believe that a sense of community should exist in the workplace (Spears, 2004). Building community involves relationship building among the stakeholder groups of the school district. Superintendent Brown believed that ongoing relationships with consistent communication made issues easier to deal with because of the familiarity and respect among staff. Houston (2001) states that successful superintendents emphasize relationship building.

When he started in the district as superintendent, Brown was told he would deal with a grievance a day. He went on to say that in his 11 years as superintendent, he had dealt with two grievances, and one was dropped. Brown explained, "I think that speaks volumes, the fact that out of all that time, only those two grievances were filed, and one was dropped." In his 11 years, Superintendent Brown went through five contract negotiations with certified staff. He said that negotiations always went smoothly and one contract negotiation was settled in one day; "no exaggeration on that whatsoever," said Brown. He believed negotiations were a process, not an event, and

because the staff and he were always in communication about issues, things were resolved as they appeared.

An example of building community was expressed by Superintendent Crean when he spoke about his relationship with the principals of the district. Crean said, "I'll take them out to eat the first day. We'll have Christmas things. Last day of school, I took them out to eat. Take them to the nicest restaurant, that sort of thing, and let them know you appreciate them."

Building community was reflected in Superintendent Douglas's answers concerning relationships with various stakeholder groups in the district. Douglas believed that recent negotiations on contracts with three separate unions went well because of trust and respect that were built from the beginning of the relationships. However, one of the groups was not happy with how the recent negotiations had been completed, and Superintendent Douglas's worry reflected his desire to build community. Regarding the unhappy group, Douglas said, "I want every employee to be happy with what their job assignment is and what their compensation package is and not to feel that they were mistreated in any way."

When speaking about principals, Superintendent Douglas detailed a team atmosphere. He said, "It's going to be a team, we're going to work together, and we're going to promote each other, and it's happened." He said that he had told principals his expectations of them if they are going to be a member of the team. Douglas believed he was viewed as a successful superintendent because people work together in getting things done.

Superintendent Fern built community by being present at all athletic contests, concerts, and other school functions. Fern's actions paralleled Houston's (2001) idea that present-day superintendents should be proficient at communication and community building. Fern believed it is important for teachers to contact parents when something positive happens with their children. He believed it establishes a rapport beyond calling home only when something negative happens. Fern also believed it is important to visit classrooms and go to the cafeteria to talk to students in the lunch line. Fern said, "It was my goal to be in the school, to always be out there when the kids came in the morning when the buses and parents dropped them off."

Superintendent Hill expressed the servant-leadership characteristics of building community in discussing her relationship and responsibilities for the board of education. She described her relationship with the board as quite good. She indicated that for six years the votes on issues had been 7-0. Hill said, "We don't bring anything to the table that we can't agree on." She said that she was looking forward to her new board because the members may be more challenging and questioning, and Hill believed, "That's how you refine ideas, through controversy."

Building community means that a sense of connectedness among the stakeholders is fostered and maintained by the superintendent. Five of eight superintendents expressed building community in their answers. The five superintendents sought means to build relationships with the various groups in the school district.

Calling

A sense of calling is the idea that leaders know on some deeper level that they are called to their work. The feeling of “wanting to serve” comes as a calling and is manifest in the work of the leader (Jeffries, 1998). Only one of eight superintendents expressed a belief that his superintendency had a sense of calling. This was reflected when Superintendent Crean said, “The Lord kind of leads you in ways, and this is something. . . . Many times, you’re led to things in your life that you need to pay attention to and say, okay, if it’s meant to be, it will be.” Crean added that it was a learning example for his family, and that example says, “Don’t ever look back in your life and wonder what could’ve been.”

Love

A feeling of love is a “feeling with” and empathy for others (Zohar, 1997). Deep caring for people within the organization was articulated by two of the eight superintendents.

Superintendent Brown said that he had a wonderful relationship with the support staff, acknowledging that they problem solved together and, “working through them and with them, I had their respect, I had their love.” Superintendent Brown described his relationship with his support staff as a friendly one in which they worked hard but also could “cajole” one another and “jab each other with sarcasm and go back and forth.” As a principal and superintendent, Brown said he always tried to create a family environment.

Superintendent Fern described his relationship with certified staff as “close-knit.” He said he loved the fact that his superintendent office is attached to the school because that makes it easier to walk the school and see students and teachers. Connell’s (1999) research on high achievement noted that in all successful schools, principals displayed genuine caring for the students. Concerning teachers, Fern said, “I think that the most important part is that the teachers need to know that you care.”

Shared Power

Shared power (DuFour, 2004) is the collaboration of the combined individual talents of professional learning communities working together to problem solve in schools. Collaboration among and between the school district’s staff, parents, students, community, and school board is a characteristic of servant leaders.

Superintendent Anderson exhibited shared power by giving the principals time to discuss issues on their own, and he asked them what they would like to do about an issue. He often followed the principals’ recommendations, especially about issues related to their buildings. Superintendent Anderson gave an example related to school registration, saying, “So they’re asking me [about registration]. I said, you know what, you tell me what you’d like. You, ladies and gentlemen, are in the trenches. So I left the room.” Superintendent Anderson explained that sometimes the principals have to meet alone to discuss issues because “they had arguments among themselves, but it’s better than me saying that this is what we’re going to do.”

When speaking about power distribution Superintendent Brown's answers related to a shared power among the stakeholders. Brown believed that although he had more responsibility and was accountable for more things, decision making and power were distributed evenly in the district, and he thought it had to be. Brown emphasized that point by saying that the staff should have input in policy because they had to live by the policy. He said that the district's staff organization is different from most school districts in that the chart is an upside-down pyramid, with the board of education at the bottom, then the superintendent, then principals, and students on the top on one side and community and parents at the top on the other side.

Shared power was expressed by Superintendent Crean when answering the question on power distribution. Crean said that although the power distribution was a top-down model, everybody had a voice. He added, "Up and down the line, everybody needs to have an opportunity to have a voice in it, and it has to be heard." Crean's thoughts on shared power reflected Greenleaf's (2002) belief that leadership should not be hierarchal. Crean's model was hierarchal only on paper. Crean believed that the committees within the board of education allowed the members to be heard and involved, thus sharing power.

When asked about shared power, Superintendent Douglas said, "I don't like the word 'power' because it insinuates top handed, and I really don't believe in it." Douglas said that he leads by example. Authority exists "for the board to employ and the administrators to administer and the teachers to teach and so on." Douglas also did

not want staff to use power to accomplish anything. He believed in the sharing of ideas and being open regarding his expectations of staff.

Superintendent Emmit indicated that he used surveys and needs assessment with staff as a way of determining their needs and to get feedback. Emmit said, “They’re [staff are] actually doing the job, so let’s find out what you think and what you need, and we’ll go from there.” By asking and answering the needs of staff, Superintendent Emmit was sharing power.

The value of shared power was articulated by Fern in that he believed in asking staff members what they needed to be successful. In talking about the distribution of power, Superintendent Fern believed it was extremely important that teachers had input into the curriculum they were teaching and input into staff development. McGee (2003) declared that his research on high-performing, high-poverty schools indicates that leadership is a shared commitment. In speaking of teachers, Fern stressed, “They’re the ones that control the learning, and it’s so very essential to have the staff members on board with your vision.” He stated that “power rests with the teachers and the teachers need to know the superintendent’s vision and know that he supports them.”

In Superintendent Green’s school district, the group of 12 that meets regularly to discuss issues that would help them become a better school district is an example of shared power. Also, Green said that various groups have a say in the decision making and “teachers and principals are the absolute focus for school improvement activities, and they’re heavily invested here.”

Shared power was a servant-leadership characteristic conveyed by Superintendent Hill in discussing the distribution of power in the school district. She believed everything should be related to the mission and belief statement of the district. Hill believed that if teachers were truly reflecting the values and the beliefs, then they had the power to make decisions with the curriculum. Hill said, "A set of beliefs and a mission that's carefully articulated, student centered--it's as simple as that. We do what it takes to ensure success for all. And then you can make decisions based on that." In Hill's district, principals received discretionary dollars, and they could determine the best way to spend the money for their building.

All eight superintendents expressed answers that reflected the use of shared power as a servant-leadership characteristic. Shared power empowers workers. Empowerment enables the workers to know that each member equally influences the direction of the organization (Bennis, 1989).

Integrity

Integrity is one's ability to discern between right and wrong. One's actions are shaped by this discernment (Carter, 1996). The servant-leadership characteristic of integrity was reflected in Superintendent Brown's responses related to relationships. When thinking about how the stakeholders might describe their relationship to him, Superintendent Brown said that "trust" was a key word. Brown stated, "I think you'd find me to be the person that walks the talk. I don't say one thing and then go off and do something else."

Superintendent Crean also reflected the value of integrity when speaking of relationships with various stakeholders. In describing his role as superintendent, he believed he had to have a sense of transparency about himself. Crean stated, “When you’re dealing with any subgroup, you want people to see, as much as possible, the process, and you want people to see the real story.” Crean added, “It’s not a popularity contest, and you’re not trying to meet their approval; you’re trying to do the right thing.” Crean’s remarks relate directly to Covey’s belief (cited in Greenleaf, 2002) that *conscience* is one’s inner sense of right and wrong and this conscience enables servant leadership to endure.

Integrity was a servant-leadership characteristic expressed by Superintendent Douglas when he said that a leader must be transparent. He said, “If you’re not, people are always saying, why are you hiding something?” Also, it was important to Douglas to “let people know what you expect of them. The other key part is why-- why you expect them to do this.”

Superintendent Hill addressed her integrity by discussing her flaws and saying, “It’s a powerful thing as a superintendent to say, ‘You know, I screwed up. This is not what I anticipated as my outcome.’ But it’s hard.” Hill continued by saying that all the administrators have flaws and identifying them and discussing them can make them better persons and help in their decision making.

Four of the eight superintendents had answers and comments that reflected the servant-leadership characteristic of integrity. The four superintendents’ responses to

integrity were conveyed when discussing relationships. Bennis and Thomas (2002) mention a sense of integrity as an essential skill for leadership.

Serving

Serving is seeing that others' priority needs are met (Greenleaf, 1970).

Superintendent Brown spoke directly about serving and being a servant to the students, parents, and community. Superintendent Brown believed that the students, parents, and community were at the top the district organizational chart because "that's who we are here to serve. . . . We are all servants, and . . . we are trying to serve the students and the community to the best they can be."

Superintendent Crean said about teachers and resources, "I come back to giving them the tools that they need to do the job and trying to create a working environment in which they can really perform their job." In terms of principals, Crean stated, "Again, you come back to giving them what they need. You have to loosen up with some money to get them what they need." His answers reflected a desire to be of service.

In discussing his scope of responsibility for teachers, Superintendent Douglas expressed the servant-leadership characteristic of serving by saying, "I feel I need to be on the forefront, providing what the teachers need in order to teach the kids." Being of service was also expressed when Douglas stated his desire to provide staff with something to improve the climate, such as a piece of furniture or having their room painted, a new flat-screen computer display, or even something small like a wireless

mouse. Douglas described these gestures as “just little things to say, hey, I value you, little things like that.”

Superintendent Emmit indicated that providing resources for his teachers was an important part of his job. He believed that teachers were the ones “actually doing the job” in terms of educating the students, and giving them the proper tools for the classroom was his main purpose as superintendent.

Superintendent Fern believed that as part of his discussion with staff, he should determine what they need and provide resources. His desire to serve was reflected in the questions he posed to staff, such as, “How are we going to raise test scores? How can we get there, and what do you need from me?” In describing the purpose of the superintendent, Fern said, “What is it I need to do for the music, the band, the reading, the English teachers, the math teachers? What is it that they need?”

In speaking about teachers, Superintendent Hill said that she had to be “reasonable and thoughtful” in what she asked and that teachers need to “have the training and the tools and the equipment to do the job we’re asking.” DePree’s (1992) comments speak directly to Hill’s idea of reasonableness and thoughtfulness in that DePree defines serving as liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and compassionate way.

Six of eight superintendents provided answers that reflected service to others or serving. When speaking about their responsibilities to staff, superintendents stated several times that their desire to provide resources was a key aspect to their leadership.

The importance of serving was also articulated when superintendents discussed the purpose of their job and the job description of a superintendent.

Summary

The data collected reflect the answers given by the superintendents interviewed. The absence of an expression of a servant-leadership characteristic does not indicate that the superintendent did not possess that characteristic; rather it indicates the superintendent did not convey thoughts or examples of the characteristic. The design of the questions allowed for the superintendents to share answers that were personal to their life experiences and knowledge. The data were classified by the servant-leadership characteristics expressed by the superintendents. Ten of the servant-leadership characteristics were determined by Spears's (1998) interpretation of Greenleaf's writings on servant leadership. The five other servant-leadership characteristics were defined and referenced by Jeffries (1998), Zohar, (1997), Kouzes (1998), Carter (1996), and DuFour (2004).

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the results of the study, conclusions from the study, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Problem

The training of superintendents in the 20th century focused on scientific management and total quality management (Siegrist, 1999). Since the Industrial Revolution people have been viewed as tools by managers and parts of a machine by organizations (Spears, 2004). According to Hunt (1999), the study of leadership had grown stagnant in the 1970s and 1980s and little new information emerged on leadership. However, a new leadership style, transformational leadership, emerged in the 1980s (Bass, 2000). Transformational leadership involves showing concern for the worker and having workers focus on the goals of the organization (Bass, 2000). Farling et al. (1999) stated that servant leadership is a type of transformational leadership. The paramount tenet of servant leadership is that one has a desire to serve first. Spears (2004) reports a growing number of organizations are incorporating servant-leadership practices.

School leaders are facing a growing demand to raise test scores (Anthes, 2002) and the NCLB Act (2001) has increased accountability for school districts and their leaders. Students of high poverty, in general, have lower standardized test scores than students not classified as high poverty. Some scholars, such as Waters and Marzano (2006), McGee (2003), and Schwahn and Spady (1998) have suggested that leadership or leadership styles of superintendents may make a difference in student achievement. This has led to studies of different leadership styles and school achievement. This study attempted to discern servant-leadership characteristics of superintendents in high-performing, high-poverty school districts.

Spears (2004) states many leadership models are autocratic and hierarchal and the new models emphasize teamwork and shared power in an ethical and caring atmosphere. It is the teamwork, shared power and other servant-leadership characteristics that hold promise for educating students of high poverty.

Summary of the Methodology

This research study addressed the question, “Are characteristics of servant leadership discernable in the practice of superintendents in high-performing, high-poverty public elementary school districts?” High performing was defined as a kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school district having had 60% (composite score for the district) or more of its students meet or exceed state standards on the 2005 state standardized test of this midwestern state. High poverty was defined as a kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school district having a low-income rate of 50% or

more according to the 2005 demographic information from the state board of education of this midwestern state. A qualification for superintendents was that they were superintendent at the qualifying district for at least three years leading up to the 2005 state standardized test, including the 2004/05 school year. Of the 10 superintendents who qualified for the study, eight participated in this study. This study was a phenomenological study that consisted of eight personal interviews. A list of nine open-ended questions was utilized to collect the data. The audiotapes were transcribed and analyzed for servant-leadership characteristics.

Spears (1998), who is acting director for the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, noted 10 characteristics from Greenleaf's writings that he believed are essential to servant leadership. It is these 10 characteristics combined with the additional five characteristic that Walker (2003) referenced that make up the framework for examining servant leadership in this research. The literature from various authors in the field of servant leadership formed the basis for the definitions of the characteristics. According to Greenleaf (1970), the ultimate test of whether one is a servant leader is, "Do those served grow as persons, do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (p. 7).

Discussion from the Study

Servant Leadership and High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

High student achievement is a goal for all schools. However, high student achievement is more difficult for students who are economically disadvantaged or come from families of low income (McGee, 2003). Data analysis of 2005 standardized test data shows that students with higher levels of student poverty have lower achievement levels (SchoolMatters, 2006). However, SchoolMatters (2006) reports “there are many important exceptions that prove that demography is not destiny.” The exceptions could be attributed, in part, to the leadership present in the high-poverty school districts. According to SchoolMatters (2006), the school districts led by the superintendents in this study had standardized achievement results higher than a large majority of schools with similar low income levels.

McGee (2003) concluded that a key component to high achievement for schools with a high poverty rate was strong leadership which emphasized shared commitment and collaboration. It is in examining the servant-leadership characteristics articulated by these superintendents of high-performing, high-poverty school districts that school district leaders and aspiring leaders can inform and possibly shape their leadership.

The emphasis of this discussion is on the discernable servant-leadership characteristics expressed by the school leaders of high-performing, high-poverty school districts. Eleven or more of the 15 servant-leadership characteristics were

discernible in the work of five superintendents. Three superintendents articulated five or fewer characteristics.

A factor in the difference of expressed servant-leadership characteristics between the two groups could be related to the role of delegating responsibilities. In the sharing of power, which was discernible in all superintendents it appears the three superintendents with five or fewer servant-leadership characteristics, relied heavily on delegating. Superintendent Anderson, who expressed five servant-leadership characteristics, described himself as a generalist and building manager as principal. Anderson says he surrounded himself with good people who made him look good. Perhaps in seeing himself this way Superintendent Anderson was less likely to explore additional ways of leading and he felt his main responsibility was to manage. Superintendent Emmit was very short in his answers and the data presented only addressed listening, providing resources and utilizing staff input in answering the questions. Emmit did emphasize that the teachers are the ones closest to the instruction and know best. Superintendent Green answered several questions by stating he hires good principals and relies on them to carry out school improvement. It appears the three superintendents with fewer than five expressed characteristics put a great emphasis on delegating, possibly to a point that limited the development of other servant-leadership characteristics, whereas the superintendents who expressed 11 or more servant-leadership characteristics viewed delegating as a part of their leadership, they but did not emphasize and rely on delegating to the degree of the other superintendents. Conceivably, those superintendents overreliant on delegating may

believe many of their responsibilities related to administrators end, or are lessened, when they hire or have what they believe is a quality administrator.

Listening

Examining the common characteristics of the superintendents revealed that all expressed the servant-leadership characteristics of listening and shared power. A key aspect of listening as a servant-leadership characteristic is being reflective about what one has heard (Spears, 1998). Essential for the servant leader is regular reflection about what is being said and communicated. After the superintendent has heard concerns from various stakeholders he could draw upon his knowledge and experience to better understand the situation.

All of the superintendents spoke of the value of listening to the needs of district personnel, particularly those needs related to student achievement. Superintendent Anderson meets monthly with a group of teachers, administrators and board of education members. He also calls his five principals each day. Anderson has made decisions based on discussions with the teachers, administrators, and school board members that meet and on the input from principals. Superintendent Brown believes contract negotiations are done quickly because he listens to staff and builds and maintains relationships on a continual basis. In listening to others' opinions Brown says, "I wanted to get as many people's ideas before I made a decision." Superintendent Emmit asks the teachers what they need to be successful.

Superintendent Green meets regularly with a group consisting of support staff, board members, and administrators.

These examples are similar to those expressed by all of the superintendents in this study. The characteristics of listening and being reflective are important in the success of any organization. The problem of educating students from high poverty is exacerbated by the conditions that exist for students of poverty (Payne, 1996).

Listening enables the superintendent to hear the opinions, experiences, and voices of the staff. Wheatley (2000) states that the complexity and diversity of life can be looked at as obstacles to communication:

. . . or we can look at it as an invitation to come together and truly listen to one another - listen with the expectation that we will hear something new and different, that we need to hear from others in order to grow and survive. (p. 1)

Servant leadership requires a true commitment. Senge (2002) believes that with commitment comes a “shadow of doubt,” for if someone believes there is an absolute, then that is the way and how it must be done. There is a danger in a superintendent believing that only he has all or many of the answers and solutions regarding the education of students from high poverty. A committed superintendent with a “shadow of doubt,” will listen and reflect and hear the will of the group, the voices and experiences of his staff, his principals, and his teachers, and students of high poverty will benefit.

Listening, which involves being receptive and reflective, can impact schools through the superintendents’ consideration of others’ ideas. When Superintendent Fern and Superintendent Emmit ask teachers what they need to be successful in the

classroom they are willing to reflect on the teachers' feedback for curricular decisions. Teachers working directly with students from high poverty have an intimate and direct knowledge of the best ways to meet their instructional needs. Superintendents who hear those needs from teachers are in a position to provide resources specific to students of high poverty.

Shared Power

Shared power relates directly to the servant-leader characteristic of listening. Shared power could be an extension of listening and reflecting by a leader. Granted, a leader could listen, reflect and choose not to share power in an organization. However, all of the superintendents in this study expressed both listening and shared power. In this study, it was evident that the listening and reflection by the superintendents translated into a utilization of individuals' knowledge and experiences through a sharing of power. Superintendents made decisions based on their knowledge and on staff input.

The sharing of power in decision making is one of the main characteristics of servant leadership (Spears, 1998). A call for collaboration among workers was made by MacGregor (1960), who believed the potential for collaboration was innate in the human resources of industry. Hersey and Blanchard (1982) reported on the value of participation of the leader with the followers, but only in certain situations. Bolman and Deal (1997) stated organizations should serve human needs rather than the workers existing mainly to serve the organization's needs. All of the servant-leader

superintendents expressed shared power in decision making and placed value on this characteristic.

Superintendent Anderson said there was a time he tried to do too much and was too involved in almost all aspects of district operations. Anderson said, “You want to do it all, but you can’t. I learned the hard way you can’t do it all.” Anderson delegates more than before and he said he surrounded himself with good people who make him look great. That acknowledgement and the sharing of power by Anderson have allowed others to help make decisions and positively affect the education of the students. Superintendent Emmitt shares power in asking the teachers what they need. He provides resources based on their feedback and his input. The sharing of power utilizes the skills of the staff to improve instruction. Superintendent Fern believes the board of education and the superintendent ultimately have the power. However, Fern says, “I think you need to let them know you’re willing to give some of that power to those staff members.” The students benefit and achievement increases when the collective ideas and thoughts are part of the decision-making process.

Superintendent Hill said she meets regularly with her principals to problem solve. Hill values a challenging board of education because out of the controversy comes the improvement of ideas. Hill also uses the “professional learning community” model (DuFour, 2004), which emphasizes teacher teams working collaboratively in identifying student learning needs, determining if those needs are being met, and making changes if students are not learning. Professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004) is another example, like Superintendent Fern’s textbook

adoption process, that involves direct teacher involvement in the decision-making process that affects student achievement.

Superintendent Brown sounded like a servant leader when he answered the question on power distribution and the sharing of power. Brown referred to the district's organizational chart, which appears in his school board policy manual, as different from most school districts. He described an organizational flow with the board of education at the bottom followed by the superintendent, then the principal, then the teachers and then the staff as the levels of service move up the organizational chart. At the top of the organization are the students, with the parents and community off to the sides. Brown said he had this design "because that's who we are there to serve and that's one of the things I preached to the [school] board, to my principals, to the teachers, that we are all servants." Superintendent Brown has realized the benefits of sharing power and has made it an explicit component of the district's organizational structure as a visible public document and, more importantly, as the way of conducting business as a school district.

Although Superintendent Brown did not speak of an inverted pyramid, the organizational structure he described is reflected in Figure 1. Blanchard (2001) explained that the boss is always *responsible* and the staff is *responsive* to the boss in a traditional organizational model. Turning the pyramid upside down, the roles are reversed, and customers (or in the case of education, the students) are at the top. In an inverted pyramid model (Blanchard, 2001), the managers or leaders become responsive to those above them. As reflected in an inverted

Organizational Chart
Inverted Pyramid of
Servant Leadership for Education

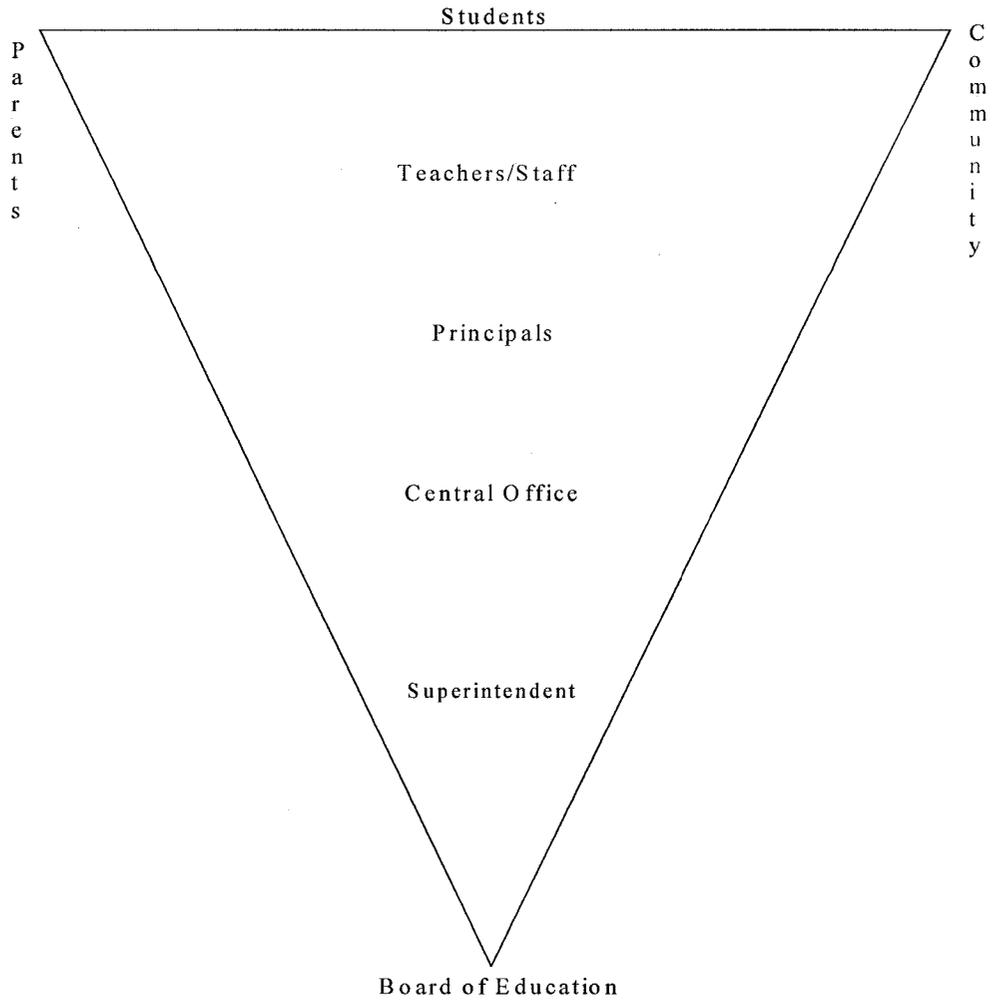


Figure 1: Organization chart.

pyramid, similar to Superintendent Brown's explanation, the board of education is responsive to the superintendent and the energy moves up the inverted pyramid to the ones that matter most, the students. The inverted pyramid represents the flow of service and responsiveness from the board of education to the top where students are served. The organizational chart also represents the ideal end goal of servant leadership, which is those being served become servants themselves (Greenleaf, 1970).

Parents and community have been added at the top of the inverted pyramid because the superintendents in this study spoke of serving the parents and community. All of the superintendents were involved in some aspect of volunteering and/or communicating with community groups in their school districts. In a servant-leader organizational model for public school education, using Blanchard's (2001) concept of an inverted triangle, the students would always be at the top, as those below them, the teachers, staff, superintendent and board of education, are responsive to their needs (see Figure 1).

All of the superintendents demonstrated the characteristic of shared power in decision making. Wheatley (2001), in talking about change, states that all workers should be part of the process and that a design will be effective if the whole system is involved in the process. Houston's (2001) research on the role of superintendents states that school leaders must be proficient at collaboration. The servant leader's ability to collaborate by sharing power increases the production of the organization.

In a school district, the sharing of power in decision making can be an important factor that influences high student achievement.

The implication of shared power is that leadership is shared among members of an organization. The value of shared leadership is that “the many leadership roles at all levels invites an infusion of varied perspectives, a multitude of options and solutions from which the best actions (as these are understood in the moment) can be determined” (Sturnick, 1998). Shared power, as expressed by the superintendents of this study, holds promise as possible means to incorporate a variety of perspectives and possible solutions in meeting the needs of students from high poverty.

Sharing power affirms the staff and they feel vested in the decisions. Some superintendents may be uncomfortable with teachers making decisions or when teachers are part of the decision-making process. It is quite possible a superintendent who exhibits shared power will seek input from teachers and staff as to the best way to meet emerging needs that may develop related to a high-poverty population. Superintendent Anderson and Superintendent Green have regularly scheduled meetings with administrators, teachers, and staff to discuss issues relative to the school district. Power is essentially shared when issues related to high-poverty students are placed on the agenda by these stakeholders and actions implemented from the ideas of the group members.

Building Community

Five superintendents expressed the value of building community, primarily in their answers related to questions about their relationships with the various groups in the school district. Houston (2001) reports that community building is important for superintendents to be successful in the 21st century. Wheatley (1999) states the power in organizations is an energy that is generated by relationships. When Superintendent Brown was deciding which school districts appealed to him as he considered entering the superintendency, he decided against a larger district because he said it would have been hard to make sincere relationships. Superintendent Douglas makes community organization membership a responsibility of his principals and central office administrators. He is very active in his community. Douglas visits the district's schools four days a week.

Bredeson (1995) reported that superintendents of a large midwestern state ranked public/community relations as their third most important task area. Hancock and Lamendola (2005), in their study on successful schools with high poverty rates, identified collaboration as a key attribute in the successful schools. McGee's (2003) study identified a shared commitment between teachers and administrators as a factor in the success of schools with a high poverty rate. One teacher spoke of the value of working in teams and making instructional decisions together. The research of Bredeson (1995), Hancock and Lamendola (2005), and McGee (2003) points to the value of building community as a factor in the achievement of high-poverty students.

The ability to develop relationships with the community could translate to additional resources for the school district. The superintendent who often volunteers in the community may find donations and funds available to support programs that benefit students of high poverty. Superintendent Douglas said that he served on many community boards. He believed it made it easier when asking for help with the district or with a referendum if the superintendent and principals had been involved in community activities. Douglas said, "People are saying, he helped us, we need to be there helping the school or helping on a project."

Serving and Awareness

There are specific examples of the characteristic of *servicing* by the superintendents, some with the superintendent using the word "serve" or "service" in their answers. Superintendent Brown spoke of being a servant to the students, parents, and community. Superintendent Crean detailed the need to give resources to his staff and principals. Superintendent Douglas said he had to give teachers what they need to teach the students and give staff things that improve their own work situation. Superintendent Emmit stated his main responsibility for teachers is to be their support person and provide them the resources for their job. Superintendent Fern discusses with the staff their needs, asking, "What do you need from me?" Superintendent Hill wants teachers to have the training and tools to do the job.

What is common among the superintendents, as related to the servant-leadership characteristic of serving, is the desire to fulfill the needs of the teachers,

principals, and the staff. Autry (2001) declares that the servant leader must consider himself the principal resource, which these superintendents do. The superintendent's desire to serve and provide resources were consistent themes in their answers.

Greenleaf (1970), in describing the concept of service, states the servant leader first makes sure the people's highest priority needs are being met, as these superintendents have expressed in their answers.

Greenleaf (1970) described the servant-leadership characteristic awareness as a "disturber and an awakener." This awareness allows the leader to view situations from a more holistic and integrated approach. Five superintendents expressed awareness with examples related to knowing the professional development needs for staff regarding teaching and instruction. Superintendent Brown increased his awareness by listening to groups of people describe policies or decisions they do not like. Superintendent Douglas said he has to know what teachers need to teach their students and then provide the necessary professional development. Superintendent Fern expressed a desire to know what other districts do successfully in order that his district can incorporate those effective practices. It is through serving and awareness, especially as related to providing instructional resources, that superintendents can identify the priority needs of students from high poverty.

Conclusions

The question that arises, particularly for students of high poverty, is, "How does the leader affect high student achievement?" The 15 characteristics of servant

leadership encompass many areas of leadership for a school district. The superintendents can affect student achievement through the demonstration of servant-leadership characteristics, in particular shared power, building community, and serving, which are three main tenets of servant leadership (Greenleaf Center, 2002). All of the superintendents in this study expressed the servant-leadership characteristics of listening and shared power. This commonality informs and offers insight into characteristics that may assist in the leadership of schools with high poverty. The sharing of power enables the perspectives and voices of an entire organization to be heard and can possibly be a means for high academic achievement in schools of high poverty.

Positively influencing students from poverty can be accomplished in seeing that people's highest priority needs are being met. By being of service to others in the school district the superintendent can start a chain reaction that influences the entire organization. If the superintendent is a servant leader, over time his central office staff and principals also may become servant leaders. Greenleaf (1970) states that if servant leadership exists, those served are more likely themselves to become servants. The flow of energy and the responsiveness to those above flows to the students in a servant-leader organizational model with the superintendent at the bottom and students at the top. The ultimate goal, through the servant leadership of the superintendent, is that the leaders in the schools, the teachers and principals, become servant leaders who, in becoming wiser, freer and more autonomous (Greenleaf, 1970), serve and meet the needs of parents, community, and most importantly the students.

Whether it is high accountability, as required by the NCLB Act (2001), a genuine desire to improve student achievement, or a combination of both, educators are seeking ways to improve the achievement of students of high poverty. Servant leadership, or the manifestation of servant-leadership characteristics, can be successful in high-poverty school districts, as shown by the superintendents in this study. Schwahn and Spady (1998) address the importance of developing and empowering everyone and creating meaning for everyone in the organization for quality learning to occur. Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002) suggest that school leaders employ servant leadership by asking, “What can I do to help teachers develop their full potential as professionals so collectively we can be more effective in meeting the needs of our children?” (p. 55). This question, born out a desire to serve, can be asked by superintendents of high-poverty school districts and, if answered, servant-leadership characteristics may contribute to high academic achievement by students of poverty.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study examined only high-performing, high-poverty elementary school districts. Investigating common servant-leadership characteristics seen in high-achieving school districts that are not high poverty may lead to a better understanding of what characteristics are most successful with certain populations. School leaders may be informed of the servant-leadership characteristics that could positively influence student achievement.

A rank order could be established that indicates which servant-leadership characteristics are most important in a public school setting. Data could be obtained that identifies servant-leadership characteristics from high-achieving schools. The common characteristics could be analyzed and possibly utilized in training programs for school administrators. If certain servant-leadership characteristics continue to emerge in data there could be implications that certain characteristics are most important and should be reviewed in leadership education and training.

Research could identify “high-performing, high-poverty school districts and low-performing, high-poverty school districts. Comparisons and contrasts between the superintendents from low- and high-achieving school districts could reveal servant-leadership characteristics. This research could describe the best practices to emulate and detail which characteristics were absent in low-achieving schools. This research could help inform school leaders of the servant-leadership characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools and, in making distinctions between low- and high-performing schools, enable school administrators to hone in on the characteristics most important for high-poverty students.

Research could be conducted that examines the leadership practices of administrators who worked with and for servant leaders and the achievement levels of their schools. First, servant leaders would have to be identified. Greenleaf (1970) believed servant leadership was an effective leadership practice, and an important test of whether someone was a servant leader was whether or not those served grew as persons and became servants themselves. If those served became servant leaders,

perhaps student achievement improved. The importance of this research could help identify the possible effect of those served becoming servants themselves. Training of servant leadership could be utilized for school and district leaders.

A research study could analyze the effects of service learning on student achievement. A servant-leadership organizational model of an inverted pyramid shows the students on top as they are served by the staff and administration. Greenleaf's (1970) ultimate test of servant leadership is that those served become servants themselves. The value of this extending to students as servants through service to their school and community could be examined. If research can support the use of service learning for academic and social growth, schools that currently employ service learning may be validated, and other schools may see the value in adopting service learning.

This study examined kindergarten through eighth-grade students. A study could be conducted with high school superintendents of high-performing, high-poverty school districts. A comparison of servant-leadership characteristics of K-8 superintendents and high school superintendents could reveal commonalities that reinforce servant-leadership characteristics or expose differences in leadership styles. The analysis comparing and contrasting both groups could inform the leadership of school districts as to the effect of certain servant-leadership characteristics. Training and education of servant leadership could be conducted for school leaders.

Summary

Servant-leadership characteristics were discernible in all the superintendents studied. All superintendents demonstrated the characteristics of listening and shared power. Shared power is one of the main principles of servant leadership. The superintendents in this study utilized the individual knowledge of their staff through reflective listening and made decisions with input from staff. The demonstration of servant-leadership characteristics can play an important role in the education of students from high poverty. This study informs superintendents of the possibilities of servant leadership, especially for school districts with high poverty. Also, this study adds to the growing number of studies on servant leadership, and through a continual, consistent review of the literature, best practices of servant leadership may emerge.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS

[Name]

[Address]

Dear [Name]

As a superintendent of a high performing (60% or higher on 2005 ISAT composite) high poverty (50% or more low income) elementary school district you are invited to be part of a doctoral research study. I am a doctoral student in the educational administration program at Northern Illinois University working on a phenomenological study of leadership styles of successful superintendents of high-performing, high-poverty school districts.

If you choose to be part of this study, I would ask that you participate in a personal interview. In preparation for the interview, I would forward the list of questions I plan to ask you.

I will call you on [date one week later] to introduce myself, answer any questions, and determine if you are interested in participating in this study. There are not many school district in Illinois that meet the high-performing, high poverty criteria, thus your participation would reveal some valuable information on the philosophy and characteristics of successful superintendents.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rob Bohanek
NIU Doctoral Student
Work: [phone number]
Home: [phone number]
Cell: [phone number]
Email: [e-mail address]

Susan Stratton, Ph. D.
Dissertation Chair
Work: 815-753-9340
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Teresa Wasonga, Ed. D.
Dissertation Co-Chair
Work: 815-753-9356
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APPENDIX B

SUPERINTENDENT SERVANT-LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

	Supt. Anderson	Supt. Brown	Supt. Crean	Supt. Douglas	Supt. Emmit	Supt. Fern	Supt. Green	Supt Hill
Listening	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Empathy	X	X	X	X			X	X
Healing		X				X		X
Awareness		X	X	X		X		X
Persuasion		X				X		X
Conceptualization		X	X	X		X		X
Foresight	X	X	X	X		X		
Stewardship		X	X	X	X	X		
Commitment to growth	X	X		X		X	X	X
Building community		X	X	X		X		X
Calling			X					
Love		X				X		
Shared power	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Integrity		X	X	X				X
Serving		X	X	X	X	X		X