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# What I believe about leadership and education : a reflective essay

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# What I believe about leadership and education : a reflective essay

## **Abstract**

An effective leader for educational change must recognize that change is a process, not a destination, and be able to instill continuing leadership in others. The leader must first be able to develop a leadership team through which responsibilities can be distributed. Second, the leader must recognize what type of change is necessary. With those factors identified, it is the leader's responsibility to identify the magnitude of the work to be accomplished, what level of change must occur, and to then adjust their management style accordingly.

Throughout the process, the leader must work to develop the leadership abilities of those on the team. In the end, the measure of a leader is not what they can personally accomplish; rather, the extent to which those involved can carry on leadership roles to impact change that will continue to increase student achievement in the future.

WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

And Postsecondary Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts in Education

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by

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This Research Paper by: Lisa L. Goedken

Entitled: WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Master of Arts in Education.

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The profession of educational leadership is a calling and requires a personal mission. My values, life experiences, and educational background provide the framework for pursuing a career as an educational leader. My convictions regarding the purpose of education and its role in shaping society are what drive my professional vision and goals.

I believe that all children can learn and that there is a specified body of content knowledge that students should learn during their elementary and secondary educational experiences. With this foundation, each student is equipped with the necessary tools to be a productive citizen. Education is the mechanism that enables all people, regardless of socio-economic status, race, or religion to have access to success in our society. Education levels the playing field.

My life experiences provide me with a rich resource as an educational leader. My role as daughter, sister, wife, mother, single parent, step-parent, employee, employer, student and teacher have afforded me the luxury of multiple perspectives through life. These experiences have enabled me to understand the importance of, and actively employ the skill of, putting myself in the other person's shoes which provides the greatest tool in interpersonal relationships and communication. Being able to view situations from multiple perspectives is essential in the role of educational leader.

As an educational leader, learning must be an integral part of life. My experience attending a public elementary and secondary school, private liberal arts colleges, and state university followed by teaching at a non-public, Christian, college preparatory school have given me a broad exposure to multiple educational settings. It has brought me to the conclusion that people in general have more similarities than differences and that education has the power to affect society.

I have chosen a career in educational leadership in order to use the talents, abilities and experiences that I have been given to positively affect the world around me. I have a passion for learning and for helping others and believe that through teaching, mentoring and leading, I can accomplish this goal.

The calling of educational leader bears the great responsibility to promote the success of all students. This responsibility begins with establishing and clearly communicating a vision. The leader must specify a shared plan with detailed goals and strategies then work continuously to maintain commitment to the goal while sustaining the focus on the vision. All this must be accomplished with the heart of a leader, not as a dictator.

Leadership involves maintaining the school's culture. Learning cannot take place in an unstable, unsafe, or hostile environment. It is the educational leader's responsibility to continuously work to maintain a culture that is conducive to learning. This culture includes areas such as climate, instructional

programs, staff development, and community building. These must align with the goals and objectives that focus on the vision.

Organizational and administrative skills are also important. The role of educational leader is multi-faceted and requires the ability to manage several areas of responsibility at one time. Without organizational skills, the leader appears fragmented and out of control. This distracts from the goals and objectives that the organization is working to accomplish.

Although, the leader's main goal is to promote the success of all students, facility and financial management are essential for this goal. Without a safe, functioning facility, the learning environment would be lacking. The financial duties of a leader also affect student learning directly. Budget decisions must be correlated to the educational goals; otherwise, the leader is not acting as a good steward of his/her resources. Being skilled in these management areas is vital to the leader attaining the goals and objectives that focus on the vision.

If the educational leader expects students, parents, staff, and community members to act with integrity and fairness; it is imperative that the educational leader be a model of integrity and ethical behavior. There is nothing more destructive to a school community or to the leader's professional future than the leader putting his/her reputation in question. Following policy, speaking truthfully, and acting with others' interests in mind, provides the guidelines for preserving the leader's reputation.

The scope of the educational leader's influence is not limited to the school community. The leader must be the advocate for the school in the outer arena of local, state and federal government as well as the larger educational community. He/she must stay current on legislative issues, trends in education, and current research. These areas have the ability to affect his/her role of promoting the success of all students. The educational leader is the advocate and must be proactive at all times.

I believe that educational leaders are called and require a personal mission. It is a profession that requires the ability to lead in multiple arenas. The educational leader must promote the success of all students by being an advocate and proactive; always with the goals and objectives in mind that focus on the vision. Personally and professionally, I have a passion for education and its ability to provide equal access to success for all students and positively affect society. It is to that end that I have committed my professional career.

The remainder of this reflective research paper includes detailed discussions, research, my implementation plans, and concluding remarks focused on four key components of educational leadership: (a) ethical leadership; (b) leadership for educational change; (c) instructional leadership; and (d) servant leadership.

## Ethical Leadership

An effective educational leader is characterized by high ethical standards. Behavior is grounded in personal values which should work in harmony with the core values of the educational community. An ethical leader is a leader with integrity and strong moral convictions upholding such virtues as truth and justice. The leader's words and actions are consistent enabling a positive role model for students, staff, and members of the larger community. An ethical leader puts the common good above personal gain and popularity, enacts justice on behalf of others, and always upholds truth as the guiding standard.

### *Research*

“Leadership as moral action is a struggle to do the right thing according to a sense of values and what it means to be a human being” (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 113). Ethical behavior cannot be derived from a list of do's or don'ts (Breden, 2001, p.23). There is no clear right or wrong; merely following the law or policy does not guarantee ethical behavior. “How we behave and what we choose to do will be judged ultimately by the purpose of those actions and the values that guide our decisions and behaviors (Brown & Townsend, 1997, p. 12).

A leader cannot be amoral. Brown & Townsend (1997) state leadership occurs within the structure of one's values.

Purpose, mission and obligations cannot be defined in a vacuum and are not separate and external from whom we are as individuals. They are defined, whether we realize it or not, by our own values and beliefs and the way they are demonstrated in our actions. As school leaders, we simply cannot be neutral. Individuals are never value-free and we bring our values to our organization. (p. 12)

It is crucial that the educational leader be in positions that are harmonious with their values. To do otherwise causes extreme stress and immense pressure to make decisions that are incongruent with those values. "Absent decisions and behaviors consistent with our values and beliefs, we diminish and dilute our own effectiveness and therefore the effectiveness of the organization" (Brown & Townsend, 1997, p. 12). The one question the educational leaders must ask when the big issues are to be decided is: "For what am I willing to give up my job?" (Thomas & Davis, 1998, p. 22).

A leader's words and actions must be consistent. "Over the years, we are far more often judged by our behavior than our words" (Brown & Townsend, 1997, p. 13). Those in leadership positions have a strong responsibility to the group to be ethical role models. "Showing good ethics sometimes means going against what you want or what is best for yourself. It is putting oneself in

somebody else's shoes and being empathetic" (Breedon, 2001, p. 23). An ethical leader makes decisions based on what is best for the group. "Integrity has a utilitarian component: Decisions are made that will benefit the greatest number of people" (Breedon, 2001, p. 23).

### *Implementation*

As an administrator, I believe that a framework that provides an ethical structure for my leadership both professionally and personally should exist. Brown and Townsend (1997) provide four practical guidelines that I plan to implement as the leader of a school community: (a) be explicit and clear about the purpose of our work, (b) be clear about the foundational beliefs and values for our decisions and actions focused upon accomplishing the purpose, (c) consistently act upon those foundational beliefs and values, and (d) talk openly about the ethics and values that shape our decisions. Personally, I believe that reflection and self-assessment are key in establishing, articulating, and enacting my core beliefs and values. These practices must become an integral element of my life as an ethical leader. In Personal and Professional Development class, Dr. David Else (personal communication, July 26, 2005) proposed the following tips for living ethically that I plan to utilize as an educational leader: (a) have someone with a sense of ethics provide honest feedback, (b) become informed by reading diverse publications, (c) do not assume you will do the right thing, (d) have the option to leave your current position available, if necessary, (e)

remember that the ends and the means are connected – we become what we do, (f) be able to forgive, (g) have a sense of humor about yourself and your organization, (h) remember that “what is” is not necessarily “what should be”, and (i) focus on hope, not the barriers. I believe that applying these guidelines and tips coupled with continuous reflecting and self-assessment will enable me to be an ethical educational leader.

### *Conclusion*

Effective educational leaders are characterized by high ethical standards. The following quote from Thomas and Davis (1998) provides an excellent summary of my beliefs regarding ethical leadership:

In the final analysis, moral leadership must rely on integrity, keeping the promise of core values, being a giver versus a taker, never holding a position for power or title, recognizing the dignity and worth of all people, never compromising the truth, and leading people to do what is right (p. 24).

### Leadership for Educational Change

An effective leader for educational change must recognize that change is a process, not a destination, and be able to instill continuing leadership in others. The leader must first be able to develop a leadership team through which responsibilities can be distributed. Second, the leader must recognize what type of change is necessary. With those factors identified, it is the leader's

responsibility to identify the magnitude of the work to be accomplished, what level of change must occur, and to then adjust their management style accordingly. Throughout the process, the leader must work to develop the leadership abilities of those on the team. In the end, the measure of a leader is not what they can personally accomplish; rather, the extent to which those involved can carry on leadership roles to impact change that will continue to increase student achievement in the future.

### *Research*

Effective leaders must have an understanding and possess insight into the process of change. “The change process is about establishing the condition for continuous improvement in order to persist and overcome inevitable barriers to reform” (Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005, p. 55). Successful leaders of change must understand this basic principle and then work to create a leadership team. According to work of Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), a well-functioning leadership team is composed of volunteers and has the following two characteristics: members of the team should share a culture of commitment as well as having a way of working together to develop as a functioning unit. The second characteristic is enhanced when strong operating principles and agreements are established. “Operating principles should be broad and powerful statements that reflect values, or ‘truths,’ that transcend the differences that can divide groups in times of stress or conflict” (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005,

p.105). Once the team has been established and is prepared to operate as a unit, the leader must identify what type of change is necessary.

Change can be identified at two levels, first-order change or second-order change. According to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), the level of change is “defined by the way people react to a proposed innovation” (p. 112). They identify two major defining characteristics for determining the perception of the proposed change: “the extent to which the proposed change is perceived as an extension of or a break from the past” and “the extent to which the innovation is perceived as fitting within existing paradigms” (p. 113). First-order changes are incremental and logically viewed as the next most obvious step in light of current practices. “First-order change is a by-product of the day-to-day operations of the school. The routine business of schooling demands corrections and alterations that by definition, are first-order in nature” (p. 70). Marzano, Waters, McNulty (2005), second-order change “involves dramatic departures from the expected, both in defining a given problem and in finding a solution” (p.66).

Once the level of change has been identified, the school leader and leadership team must ascertain the order of the proposed changes. This can be done by utilizing two techniques. The first technique is used to “determine people’s perception of how difficult it would be to implement the innovation” (Marzano, Water, McNulty, 2005, p. 114). The second technique asks a series of questions designed to assess if the proposed change is an extension of what has

been done in the past using already acquired knowledge, skills and resources. If the answers to the questions indicate that the proposed change is not such an extension, then the change is considered a second-order change. Through the process of working through these questions, the leader and the leadership team will be prepared to identify a specific area of work upon which to focus. “Ideally, the work identified is the most powerful next action the school can take to enhance the academic achievement of students” (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p.112). Once this has been decided upon, they must match the management style with the selected change initiative (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

The meta-analysis done by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) proposes that there are 21 responsibilities of an educational leader (principal), that impact student achievement. These responsibilities encompass all activities related to leadership actions involved in first-order change; however, there are specific responsibilities that are more closely related to both levels of change, and finally, some responsibilities need to be addressed in more detail in second-order change. Both first-order and second-order change require that a principal “establish a monitoring system that allows her to identify effective versus ineffective practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment and evaluate the impact on student achievement” (p.72). This involves knowledge of best practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; the ability to communicate a strong set of ideals and beliefs and act in harmony with those ideals and beliefs.

Second-order change requires that the leader and the leadership team give special attention to the following responsibilities as addressed by Marzano, Water, and McNulty (2005). Building on the knowledge of best practices in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, there must be an understanding of how the selected change affects the current practices in those areas. “The school leader must also be willing to be the driving force behind the change initiative and take a stand for its success” (p. 118). Regarding intellectual stimulation, the “responsibility within second-order change is to stimulate the intellectual curiosity of faculty regarding the innovation” (p.118). This stimulation is a component of the responsibility termed Optimizer. “Within second-order change situations, the responsibility of Change Agent shifts its emphasis to inspiring faculty and staff to operate at the edge of their competence” (p.118). Monitoring and evaluation was listed as one of the three major responsibilities applicable to both first-order and second-order change; however, second-order change requires the leader to carefully monitor the effects of the innovation. Flexibility is another responsibility that must be specifically addressed in second-order change. “Given the uncertainty associated with second-order change initiatives, it is vital that the school leader adapt her leadership style to the demands of the current situation” (p.118). The particular leadership style must change throughout the change process in order to be effective. The third of the three responsibilities for both levels of change, ideals/beliefs, takes on a different hue in second-order change

initiatives. “The focus is narrowed in that the leader addresses the extent to which the identified innovation is consistent with shared ideals and beliefs” (p.119).

This is especially important at times in the change process when staff forget that the selected change is in fact linked to the shared ideals and beliefs. The leaders must keep this connection in the forefront of those involved throughout the change process.

Due to the nature of second-order change, the areas of culture, communication, and order will undoubtedly be affected, requiring the leader to adapt the management style being utilized. Staff may perceive that the culture has deteriorated due to the innovation resulting in a temporary decrease in team spirit and cooperative atmosphere. This is to be expected in the change process; however, it is the leader’s responsibility to address the decrease and work with the leadership team to assist the culture in adapting to the changes as a unit by facilitating a “we are in this together” attitude. Communication may also be affected during a second-order change. It is imperative that the leader “develop clear lines of communication to and from faculty members as well as among faculty members” (p.119). Again, as a result of the innovation, staff members may perceive that communication lines have been disrupted. It is the leader’s responsibility to communicate the awareness of the perception and “emphasize the fact that things will stabilize as the innovation becomes better defined and institutionalized” (p.122). Another area that will understandably be affected more

in a second-order change is that of order. The previously established structures and procedures will be shaken through the change process and may result in a decrease in predictability and increase in unfamiliarity. The leader can address this disruption by utilizing a management strategy that both focuses on those procedures that have remained intact as well as establishing new procedures that create a sense of order in harmony with the innovation. The last responsibility that must be more specifically addressed in a second-order change is input. This involves the perception that faculty and staff have that their voices are being heard and their input valued. The leader should adjust the management style in this case to address this perception by sharing the stages and implications of the change process and then actively seek opportunities to garner input. Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) suggest that the leader “work to develop ‘ownership’ rather than ‘buy in’ for the initiative” (p.122) from the faculty and staff. With this knowledge and understanding, the leader and leadership team will be able to develop strategies to ensure success.

Staff perceptions were mentioned as they related to several of the responsibilities and leadership style adjustments. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) draw upon the work of Fullan (2001) as they address the reality that “some staff members might perceive things deteriorating as a result of an innovation” (Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2005, p. 74). Fullan (2001) is quoted as stating, that “the more accustomed one becomes to dealing with the unknown, the more one

understands that creative breakthroughs are always preceded by periods of cloudy thinking, confusion, exploration, trial and stress; followed by periods of excitement, and growing confidence as one pursues purposeful change, or copes with unwanted change” (as cited in Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2005, p.74).

Fullan is also quoted as adding “those individuals and organizations that are most effective do not experience fewer problems, less stressful situations, and greater fortune, they just deal with them differently” (as cited in Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2005, p.74). It is critical that leaders recognize that periods of frustration and discouragement will occur in the change process; however, they must be addressed with increased idealism, energy, and enthusiasm

Throughout the change process, the leader must develop the leadership abilities of those around them including, but limited to, the leadership team. Fullan, Cuttress, and Kilcher (2005) address this aspect as it relates to leading productive change. “Leadership, to be effective, must be spread throughout the organization” (p.57). They also state that the most effective leaders are humble and driven by intense personal and professional will. This, too, is an important identifier for the leader to be able to generate long-term change. The most effective leaders are those who can generate leadership in others. “To achieve the goal (successful change), we must develop leaders who have greater change knowledge and who can, in turn, develop leadership in others” (Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005, p.58).

### *Implementation*

As an administrator, I believe the first step in implementation is that I must be knowledgeable about the research and theory regarding leadership for educational change. This includes utilizing resources such as the meta-analysis of Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) in addition to other research related to the change process. Studying this research, especially the work of Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, created a bridge between my business administration and management knowledge and experience and that of my current profession as educational leader.

As an educational leader, it is imperative that I have an understanding of the change process as just that, a process, not a destination. Studying the research has enabled me to view change as a continuum. It has also provided me with the ability to distinguish between the two levels of change. The greatest wealth of information was gleaned from the discussion related to the specific responsibilities of a leader of change during a second-order innovation. The ability to identify when and how to address the challenges that inevitably will occur during a change of this magnitude will be crucial to the long-term success of the innovation.

The formalizing of my beliefs about leadership for educational change and the reviewing of the research have been beneficial to me as I reflect on some of the second-order changes that have been occurring at my school over the past

twelve months. I have been privileged to be a part of a leadership team as we undertook a major vision correction and the resulting curriculum, staff, and schedule changes. Reading and reflecting on the work of Marzano, Waters, and McNulty stimulated great personal and professional growth. It enabled me to link research with experience in such a way that I have been stimulated to look back on my experience, read and absorb the research information, and then reflect on how the two are similar and different. The final outcome of this process is that I am better prepared to continue through the change process that is already underway, in a more effective manner, as I utilize the research and accordingly adjust my leadership style and enhance my skill through the process.

### *Conclusion*

Effective leaders for educational change are characterized by their ability to instill leadership in others by utilizing a leadership team approach through the change process. The leader's effectiveness is enhanced by the ability to recognize the type of change that is needed and the work to be accomplished including identification of the level of that change to be implemented. The key to implementing a successful innovation is the ability of the leader to recognize hurdles in the process and, as a result, adjust his/her management style to address the struggles while maintaining high levels of idealism, energy and enthusiasm. In the end, leadership for educational change comes down to creating this enduring legacy: "The main mark of a school principal at the end of his or her

tenure is not just that individual's impact on student achievement, but rather how many leaders are left behind who can go even further" (Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005, p. 57)

### Instructional Leadership

An effective instructional leader must believe that student learning is the fundamental purpose of schooling. With this purpose in mind, the focus should be to keep teaching and learning at the forefront of all decision making.

Developing people is a primary component of instructional leadership with the key to effective classroom instruction being the development of teachers. With the purpose of student learning and the primary component of instruction being teachers, an effective instructional leader must redesign the organization to promote its purpose as well as to facilitate the work of its members.

### *Research*

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) propose that there are three common practices of leadership that effect student learning: (a) setting direction, (b) developing people, and (c) redesigning the organization. These areas must be expounded upon as they are fundamental to the purpose of schooling - student learning. The first practice, setting direction, deals with the instructional leader's ability to identify and articulate a clear vision. With student learning as the focus, all other decision-making must promote increased student learning. The instructional leader needs to consistently set the direction, inspire

the shared vision, foster the acceptance of group goals, and create high performance expectations.

Teachers are key to improving student learning; hence, developing teachers is the second foundational practice for effective instructional leaders. Leaders must “recognize the importance and outcomes of providing instructors with proven strategies to improve and accelerate learning” (Doyle & Rice, 2002, p.50). Buchen (2002) articulates factors that may hinder the instructional leader and their effectiveness in this area:

...the truth is that many principals are not as familiar as they should be with contemporary classroom dynamics, cutting-edge pedagogy, and brain research. Without the recent experience of having to prepare unmotivated students for high-stakes testing, principals as instructional leaders may appear in the unattractive light of failing to practice what they preach (p.44).

The effective instructional leader must be viewed by teachers as being current on research-proven teaching strategies, participating in professional development with the understanding of how it effects student learning, seen as being in-touch with student needs and the challenges of today’s classroom, and as being a trusted colleague and partner in the pursuit of increased student learning. Instructional leaders must also address the environment of their learning community in order to enhance the total team approach. Doyle and Rice (2002), propose that reinventing

relationships between instructional leader and teachers includes the following areas: (a) inclusiveness as part of the team; (b) exclusiveness as special talents and unique contributions are recognized; (c) intimacy in the sense of personal appreciation, communication, respect and dignity; (d) clarity of roles, responsibilities, and accountability in the delegation of decision making; and (e) encouragement of collaboration, cooperation, and team learning.

These types of relationships create a sense of community and a sense of purpose toward the common goal.

In order for the instructional leader to provide the clarity and focus on student learning, develop teachers and create the type of community based on reinvented relationship, the leader must redesign the organization including the role of the principal in order to become an effective instructional leader. The role of principal, as traditionally defined, places very little importance on instructional leadership and the majority of importance on management. “Management concerns...and all the things that consist of ‘doing school’ can be distracting. Unless a principal is careful, these things represent what he or she becomes as a principal” (Brewer, 2001, p. 30). “The current emphasis on management, along with the routine of what many principals call *administrivia*, provides little time or structure to learn the processes of instructional leadership” (Doyle & Rice, 2002, p. 50). “The principal’s challenge is to free himself or herself from the bureaucratic tasks and embrace leadership of the schools’ primary aim and

purpose” (Doyle & Rice, 2002, p.52). The primary obstacle appears to be time. Hughes (2005) states that “background interviews, focus groups and informal surveys showed that principals were spending only 15 to 30 percent of their time on improving instruction in their schools” (p.37). Buchen (2002) suggests that the role of principal be reconfigured to allow the time necessary to be the instructional leader. Possible solutions would be to outsource selected administrative functions, utilize an administrative intern, or have teachers assume some administrative duties. He also proposes the “splitting of the principalship into two separate parts – instructional leader and manager” (Buchen, 2002, p.44). The instructional leader must find a balance that supports innovation, change and growth that is focused on the attainment of the overall purpose of schooling – student learning.

### *Implementation*

As the instructional leader, my primary focus must be student learning. This purpose must be communicated and be an active element in every decision-making process. One of my goals will be to maintain my close connections to the classroom including staying well versed in the current research-based strategies. In addition, I plan on being actively present in various classrooms enabling me to be aware of the current classroom management struggles. I will endeavor to participate in professional development planning and presentation to provide myself with first-hand knowledge of the training and how it should evidence itself

in the classroom. Most importantly, I will focus on developing relationships that foster respect and trust between the teachers and me. Being well aware of the time element necessary to carry out these goals, I will continue to utilize administrative and teaching staff in those areas which they have the appropriate knowledge, abilities, and time. This type of delegation is possible when all members of the learning community understand and support the goal of increased student learning and feel that they are valued, contributing members of the community. All of these pieces must work together in order for the instructional leader to be effective and as a result, increased student learning will occur.

### *Conclusion*

In order for the educational leader to be an effective instructional leader, student learning must be seen as the fundamental purpose of schooling. Teaching and learning must be at the forefront of all decision making. The effective instructional leader must work to develop teachers utilizing current research, appropriate professional development, and strong, meaningful relationships. It is imperative that the instructional leader be viewed as a model of continuous learning, connected to the realities of the current classroom, and an enabler of relationships based on mutual respect and trust focusing on the overall goal of improving student learning. The task of instructional leadership is only part of the educational leaders' role; however, it is the piece that most directly affects student learning. Effective instructional leadership requires that the principal allocate the

time and resources necessary to focus on increasing student learning which may require the delegation of several of the daily management tasks. In order for this to be successful, the entire learning community must be focused on its goal and its members must feel connected and valued, in addition to being committed to achieving its purpose. “The role of instructional leader is an important one...Ideally, it should follow the ancient Tao saying: ‘When leaders lead well, the people always think they did it themselves’” (Buchen, 2002, p.45).

### Servant Leadership

Webster defines servant as “a person ardently devoted to another or to a cause, creed, etc.” (1978, p.1301). A servant leader, therefore, is someone who leads with a focus on others, the cause, or common creed. Servant leadership finds its roots in religious teaching and is highly consistent with the Judeo-Christian teachings focusing on Jesus Christ as the model (Reinke, 2004, p.30). This type of leadership is based on relationships and is characterized by values. It “seeks to look beyond self and work toward the common good” (Sims, 2002, p.95). Such a leader should embody the qualities of relationship building, vision, and stewardship.

### *Research*

The first necessary quality for servant leadership deals with relationships. “Servant leadership is based on the idea that leadership is a relationship, not a position” (Reinke, 2004, p.30). Educational organizations are people driven;

therefore, building relationships is critical to the leader's ability to move the organization toward the desired outcome. The servant leader's ability to listen, heal, have empathy, and awareness of others needs are important (Reinke, 2004, p.30). The leader's ability and willingness to have their daily routine interrupted and to understand that dealing with interruptions is an important element of their job description is a valuable tool in dealing with people. These interruptions provide the leader with opportunities to learn more about the people around them and to lend a hand to those in need, thus providing a natural stimulus for relationship building (Kuck, 1997, p.45). Servant leaders recognize human frailties and work to be empathetic and understanding. This sometimes requires that the servant leader have "the ability and willingness to absorb the hostility of the ill-informed and ill-mannered...The strength of a good leader sometimes lies in the ability to 'take it' without thoughts of malice or vengeance" (Kuck, 1997, p.45). With a focus on people and building relationships coupled with the understanding of human frailties, the servant leader will inspire similar responses in others, creating a true community.

The servant leader must lead with vision. Reinke (2004) defines vision as "the degree to which leaders plan and anticipate for future needs, develop concrete mission or vision statements, and keep situations and problems in perspective" (p.30). Foresight is important in that it "gives the servant leader the ability to anticipate what is likely to happen and take precautionary steps"

(Stueber, 2000, p.50). Concrete mission and vision statements provide focus. A servant leader must have the “ability to conceptualize and communicate these concepts. This type of leader considers the bigger picture as he looks at a problem by looking beyond the day-to-day realities” (Stueber, 2000, p.51). Finally, vision and mission allow the organization to operate on common ground based on adherence to common core values (Sims, 2002).

The third and final key characteristic of a servant leader is stewardship. “Stewardship is defined as the degree to which leaders put the needs of others and the organization before their own personal needs, use a participatory leadership style, and are committed to the growth of employees and the organization” (Reinke, 2004, p.50). “An effective administrator realizes that the school functions because of the dedication of the teachers, staff, parents, and students. He needs them every bit as much as they need him” (Kuck, 1997, p.44). The servant leader must look beyond self and work toward the common good. “He sees the components of an educational community working together in structural functionalism – each one playing its part, specifically suited and equipped, for the good of all” (Sims, 2002, pp. 95-96). A servant leader is committed to the growth of people. “A principal who is committed to the growth of people demonstrates commitment to the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of each individual on the staff” (Stueber, 2000, p.49). Stewardship allows the servant leader to view the entire organization as a community rather than their personal property.

Collins (2001) provides a summary of the appropriate attitude of what he calls a Level 5 leader which applies as well to the servant leader: “They look out the window to attribute success to factors other than themselves and look in the mirror and take full responsibility when things go poorly” (p. 39).

### *Implementation*

As a servant leader, the primary focus will be to develop a sense of community by building relationships. Education is a people business and people thrive when they feel valued and see themselves as part of a productive team. This focus requires me to set personal needs and benefits aside, in order to lead the educational community toward the common goal. I must be able to conceptualize and communicate the big picture to the various players on the team. In addition, I must consciously work to develop the ability and willingness to take the heat, understanding that people many times respond in anger and frustration. As a servant leader, I must develop a servant’s heart, reminding myself that it is not about me; rather, it is about the greater good and purpose of the educational community in which I lead. This involves using my authority to serve rather than be served with the purpose of inspiring a similar response in others. “Most servants don’t consider themselves leaders. They are so focused on meeting the needs at hand that they never look back to see if they are being followed” (Sims, 2002, 99).

### *Conclusion*

In order for the educational leader to also be an effective servant leader, the focus must be on the organization as a whole and its mission. The individual leader must model a servant's heart, setting aside personal gain and the need for public adulation. Such a leader should embody the qualities of relationship building, vision, and stewardship. Their mission must be to serve, rather than be served. As Greenleaf so clearly stated, the servant leader must always remember that "the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader" (as cited in Witcher, 2003, p.28).

### Summary

Through the discussions, research, my implementation plans, and concluding remarks, my beliefs and personal goals related to educational leadership have evolved. Realizing that this is a process, not a destination, I am embarking upon my career as an educational leader with a fervor for student learning, a desire to mentor and build the leadership abilities of those with whom I am privileged to work, and will continue to learn and employ reflective practice as a means of remaining true to my beliefs and staying grounded in sound practice. It is my ambition to be remembered as an ethical leader who led by example, developed the potential in those within my sphere of influence, and who inspired those around me to be all that God created them to be.

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