



THE MENTORING EXPERIENCES OF FOUR
MISSOURI TEACHERS OF THE YEAR THROUGH
THE LENS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP
CHARACTERISTICS

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Teachers are facing overwhelming pressure in today's classrooms with core standards, and high-stakes testing (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014; Oliver, 2009; Phillips, 2015) resulting in many new teachers' decision not to continue in the profession (Hancock & Scherff, 2010). Across the country, 23% of teachers with one to three years teaching experience either left the teaching profession or moved to another school district (Keigher & Cross, 2010).

As school districts acknowledge the struggle to retain teachers, often beginning teacher induction programs are implemented (Haun & Martin, 2004). A frequent key component of such induction programs is the mentoring of new teachers (Brill & McCartney, 2008). However, districts must demonstrate caution when implementing mentoring programs since those lacking a shared vision have had ineffective results



(Meijers, 2008). “Another cause of teacher attrition is badly structured and operated professional mentoring and induction/orientation programs that actually do more harm than good” (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 760). So while mentoring has become a common solution in many states to combat the problem of teacher attrition, has the leadership of individual mentors been taken into account?

And I came to see the problems of the world as not so much the result of the work of destructive and harmful people as they are the consequences of the neglect of the so-called good people who are capable of exerting a constructive influence. (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 105)

Moreover, Greenleaf (1977) wrote, “concern for pervasive student attitudes which . . . seemed devoid of hope” was the impetus for writing the essay *The Servant Leader* (p. 3). Consequently, mentoring programs with highly trained mentor leaders who have a clear understanding of the purpose of the program, while practicing servant-leadership, can have a substantial positive impact on beginning teachers (Oliver, 2009). As a result, schools are challenged to find such effective mentors for beginning teachers.

A key component to consider when selecting mentor teachers is leadership. Teacher leadership suggests teachers have key roles in how schools operate and function (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Smylie (1995) claimed one aim of developing teacher leadership is to “enhance the institutional capacity and performance of schools by placing teachers in positions of leadership and decision making, thereby increasing resources



and expertise available for improvement” (p. 4). Discovering which leadership theory to apply to the mentoring selection process then becomes a crucial variable for administrators.

Poon (2006) linked servant-leadership to mentoring and called for further investigation of the topic. Although mentoring has been a common element in teacher induction programs (Stanulis & Ames, 2009), little is known about the use of servant-leadership by mentor teachers and the impact this may play on beginning teachers. The following research questions guided this qualitative study: How have mentors, as shared through the narratives of mentees, influenced quality K-12 teachers in their professions? What, if any, of the ten characteristics of servant-leadership did mentors of quality K-12 teachers utilize during the mentoring process?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation for this mentoring research was viewed through the lens of leadership since successful leaders “set up their successors for even greater success in the next generation” (Collins, 2001, p. 39). As the lens of leadership was narrowed these mentor leaders were examined by their service to mentees.

Three leadership theories were considered for this study: Burns’ (2003) theory of transformational leadership and Bush’s (2003) cultural model of leadership ultimately filtering to Greenleaf’s (1977, 2002) theory of servant-leadership as the conceptual framework. Each of these theories directly focuses on the individual within an organization to create change. Since



the focal point of a mentoring program must be the mentee and a mentor's ability to meet the needs and provide guidance to the mentee, these theories of leadership were deemed important to consider.

Transformational Leadership

The theory of transformational leadership was first based upon Burns' work with leadership in 1978 (Hawkins, 2009; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Burn's conceptualization of a transforming leadership style began through the examination of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency where he first claimed Roosevelt led the country through the depression using a style of transactional leadership, but later during the days of World War II Roosevelt's style changed to transformational leadership (Burns, 2003). According to Burns, transactional leadership causes a change in a give-and-take manner while transformational leadership demands a metamorphosis change.

Several features are demonstrated by transformational leaders including charisma, motivation, intellectual encouragement, and personal attention (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). "Transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 3). The focus of the individual in transformational leadership warranted the possibility of using this theoretical perspective for this study. Yet, transformational leadership's idea of



complete change is not the purpose of teacher mentoring programs. Individuals are encouraged to grow through mentoring, but for this study, the entire system would not change. Further, transformational leadership ultimately focuses on the organizational objectives being accomplished by individuals rather than solely trying to better the individual. For these reasons Bush's (2003) cultural model of leadership was then considered.

Cultural Leadership Model

Bush (2003) developed six models of educational leadership and management including a cultural model. Cultural models of leadership “assume that beliefs, values and ideology are at the heart of organizations. Individuals hold certain ideas and value-preferences which influence how they behave and how they view the behavior of other members” (Bush, 2003, p. 156). The concept of values can be pivotal to an organization's design. Values characterize what an organization stands for, qualities worthy of esteem or commitment. Unlike goals, values are intangible and define a unique distinguishing character. “Values convey a sense of identity, from boardroom to factory floor, and help people feel special about what they do” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 255).

The cultural model of leadership has four key qualities making it unique from other models: focus on values and beliefs, emphasize of shared norms and meanings, use of rituals and ceremonies, and assumption of heroes and heroines' existence (Bush, 2003). The theory of moral leadership



encompasses each of these qualities with its focus on values, beliefs, and ethics within leadership (Bush, 2010).

Moral leadership has gained value due to an increasing belief that leaders need to assume an ethical approach to decision making (Bush, 2010). “This model assumes that the critical focus of leadership ought to be on the values, beliefs and ethics of leaders themselves” (Bush, 2010, p. 403). Leaders, conscious of the scheme or not, are value laden and express a moral framework through their actions (Stiffney, 2010). West-Burnham (1997) considered leadership consistently employing an ethical system over time to reflect an idea of moral confidence, claiming there were no value-free decisions made by leadership in schools when considering student learning. “Truly effective leadership requires imagination and hard work, but it needs a moral center” (Stiffney, 2010, p. 96). DePree (2001) stated a vital aspect of long term leadership to be in the understanding of a moral purpose. Yet, not all moral frameworks in leadership support positive outcomes (Gini, 1997), thus Stiffney (2010) claimed servant-leadership as a key component to moral leadership to humbly guide leaders to benefit and serve individuals. “Servant-leaders must know what they ultimately serve. They must, with a sense of humility and gratitude, have a sense of the Source from which all values emerge” (Zohar, 1997, p.120).

Servant-leadership

Consequently, the model of servant-leadership fulfills the moral desire organizations are finding crucial in leaders.



A new moral principle is emerging, which holds 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. (Greenleaf, 2002, pp. 23-24)

The term servant leader was first coined by Robert Greenleaf in his 1969 essay developing his theory of leadership for organizations: servant-leadership (Greenleaf, 2002). Greenleaf's reading of Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East* led him to an understanding of the value of the service and leadership of a key character (Greenleaf, 2002). This character was first seen as a servant to each of the journeymen, but later by his guidance and wisdom he was seen as the leader of the group. Greenleaf's reflection on this text, led to his essay detailing his ideas for a new leadership model.

Individuals who seek to serve first model servant-leadership; they have a natural tendency to serve which is later followed by an aspiration to lead (Greenleaf, 2002). As Greenleaf (2003) explained servant-leadership "begins with a rational feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. That conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 3). Thus, "servant-leadership emphasized increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, building a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision making" (Spears, 1998, p. 4). Greenleaf (2003) in an introduction to his parable depicting the servant as teacher stated, "The ultimate test of the servant motive is what one does with one's optional time for which one is not paid" (p. 78). Servant leaders as individuals exemplify key qualities and



characteristics which impel them to first serve, then lead. In addition, servant leaders encourage followers “to grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13).

The identification of individuals as servant leaders is rooted in several discernible characteristics (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007; Greenleaf, 2002; Spears, 1998). “People are not your most important asset. The *right* people are, and whether someone is the ‘right person’ has more to do with character traits and innate capabilities than with specific knowledge, background, or skills” (Collins, 2001, p. 64). Spears (1998) detailed ten characteristics of servant leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, and community building. The following details each characteristic in relation to servant-leadership.

Listening. An initial quality of servant leaders is their ability to genuinely listen when communicating with others. “One of the defining qualities of servant leaders is their inclination to listen first . . . servant leaders use words sparingly . . . Their art is learning how to say just enough, without excess or embellishment” (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, p. 9).

Servant leaders are receptive and interested in the ideas and opinions of followers to identify and clarify organizational/individual goals (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007; Spears, 1998). “The good-to-great leaders understood. . . creating a culture wherein people had a tremendous



opportunity to be heard and, ultimately, for the truth to be heard” (Collins, 2001, p. 74). Listening carefully to others oftentimes results in a servant leader’s better understanding of himself (Greenleaf, 2003). Active listening requires one to “Listen with your eyes, not just your ears” (Wooden & Jamison, 2007, p. 74). Further, understanding the value of silence and a humbleness to accept when silence is superior to words is evident in a servant leader (Greenleaf, 2002).

Empathy. “An empathetic orientation enables an individual to identify with another, to emphasize commonalities rather than differences, and to appreciate other perspectives as valid and legitimate” (Beazley & Beggs, 2001, p. 59). Servant leaders recognize and accept the uniqueness in the strengths and weaknesses of each individual (Spears, 1998). As Leman and Pentak (2004) noted:

A manager can’t manage what he doesn’t know. . . So you have to make a point of knowing not just the status of the work but also the status of your people. Many managers focus too much on their projects and not enough on their people. . . They’re preoccupied with the work and not with the workers. (pp. 25-26)

Servant leaders realize and emphasize with others’ circumstances and problems (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007). “For all the shortcomings I see in others, I keep in mind that my own failings are many” (Wooden & Jamison, 2007, p. 23). A servant leader always accepts and never rejects, thus requiring a tolerance of imperfection since those led are imperfect (Greenleaf, 2002).



Healing. The concept of healing by servant leaders is defined in both their healing of others and themselves. Servant leaders are aware of the emotional needs and struggles of others and their role to help in the healing process (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007; Spears, 1998).

They foster an environment of restoration. Greenleaf (2002) concluded that the concept of healing was one of “wholeness” and was accomplished by both leader and follower. “There is something subtle 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. 50). All are broken and the understanding of healing is known by and applied to self and others by servant leaders.

Awareness. Servant leaders are aware of their environments and happenings in such a way to utilize all available resources and options. “Awareness aids one in understanding issues involving ethics and values, and it enables one to approach situations from a more integrated, holistic position” (Burkhardt & Spears, 2000, p. 227). When one is aware the entire picture is understood and the servant leader may step back to reflect and make decisions.

The cultivation of awareness gives one the basis for detachment, the ability to stand aside and see oneself in perspective in the context of one’s own experience, amid the ever present dangers, threats, and alarms. Then one sees one’s own peculiar assortment of obligations and responsibilities in a way that permits one to sort out the



urgent from the important and perhaps deal with the important. (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 41)

Furthermore, the servant leader continues to develop and exercise awareness to better serve followers. “The vision has to be something bigger than you are. . . Servant-leadership starts with a vision and ends with a servant heart that helps people live according to that vision” (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003, p. 113).

Persuasion. Greenleaf (1980) denoted persuasion as “the critical skill of servant-leadership” (p. 44). Servant leaders seek to convince and persuade followers to accomplish ideas rather than requirements given by formal/positional authority (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007; Spears, 1998). “The servant-leader seeks to convince others, rather than to coerce compliance” (Spears, 1998, p. 6). This fosters a spirit of collaboration focusing on an understanding and support of all members (Beazley & Beggs, 2001; McGee-Cooper & Trammell, 1999). Leman and Pentak (2004) recommended “when directing your people, use persuasion, not coercion. Instead of making pronouncements, make requests. Offer suggestions and ideas. Don’t dictate and demand; instead, advocate and recommend” (p. 72). An example of such persuasion is seen in the opening of Greenleaf’s (2003) *Teacher as Servant* parable as the head of Jefferson House invites the character to join the house by persuasion, not requirement. This conversation entails a definition of the goals for the house and the purposes its members are trying to accomplish, thus convincing the character to join the house. As argued by Greenleaf (1977),



“leadership by persuasion is a powerful instrument for shaping expectations and beliefs” (p. 15).

Conceptualization. In addition, servant leaders have the ability to conceptualize the world and its possibilities (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007). They utilize their ability to conceptualize when facing organizational dilemmas as they visualize and think beyond regular daily realities (Spears, 1998). “Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to dream great dreams. This means that one must be able to think beyond day-to-day management realities” (Burkhardt & Spears, 2000, p. 227). Servant leaders must be creative and willing to take risks as they try to build and accomplish goals. “Leaders, therefore, must be more creative than most, and creativity is largely discovery, a push into the uncharted and the unknown” (Greenleaf, 2003, p. 51). The servant-leadership characteristic of conceptualization encourages individuals in organizations to try new ideas and learn from the results.

Foresight. Servant leaders display foresight in their ability to understand a situation and foresee the likely outcome using lessons they have learned from the past and their knowledge of current circumstances (Burkhardt & Spears, 2000; Spears, 1998). Servant leaders utilize a balance of foresight and intuition to understand how to apply facts and logic to a situation (McGee-Cooper & Trammell, 1999). “Foresight is critical in helping organizations move from a survival outlook, reacting to the immediate events, to being proactive, moving with an incremental plan” (Young, 2001, p. 245). Greenleaf (2002) explained foresight as the leader’s daily ability to be the



combination of historian, contemporary analyst, and prophet. And as noted, “Servant leaders need to have a sense for the unknowable and be able to foresee the unforeseeable” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 22).

Stewardship. Service, the central goal of servant-leadership, is demonstrated through the leader’s ability to be a steward in an organization. A steward prepares an organization to accomplish its goals to the betterment of society through openness and service (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007; Spears, 1998).

Servant leaders represent stewards entrusted to support and strengthen organizations for future growth. Greenleaf (2002) simply stated “old people may have a part to play in helping potential servant-leaders to emerge at their optimal best” (p. 44). Collins (2001) found great companies are led by leaders who “look out the window to attribute success to factors other than themselves. When things go poorly, however, they look in the mirror and blame themselves, taking full responsibility” (p. 39). Stewardship requires this humility to strengthen companies beyond their current state (Collins, 2001).

Commitment to growth. Servant leaders are committed to the growth of individuals through service to enable each person to fulfill his potential (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007). Leaders strive to nurture an individual’s growth in multiple areas: professional, personal, and spiritual (Burkhardt & Spears, 2000; Spears, 1998). Greenleaf’s (2003) *Teacher as Servant* character, Mr. Billings, represented a commitment to growth throughout the parable as he works with college students. “He stands before them [students] as a model of what he hopes they will become:



true servants” (p. 78). Leaders guide individuals of organizations to higher levels of performance and learning, using the present as a time to encourage each to reach his potential (DePree, 2001). “To deal with individual differences. . . closely monitor each individual’s progress, study the inner workings of each, and teach and respond accordingly” (Nater & Gallimore, 2010, p. 13). Servant leaders endeavor to develop people into higher roles of leadership (McGee-Cooper & Trammell, 1999). The goal for providing growth is to empower others to find their own paths (Covey, 1999), which requires high levels of unrelenting commitment (Leman & Pentak, 2004).

Community building. Servant-leadership recognizes a shift in modern society where large institutions culturally dominate the lives of individuals instead of local communities (Spears, 1998). The servant as leader understands the value of a highly collaborative and interdependent community and will give credit to individuals generously (McGee-Cooper & Trammell, 1999). Each leader devotes effort to community building in an organization rather than the isolation of individuals (Beazley & Beggs, 2001). Greenleaf (2002) emphasized:

Where community doesn’t exist, trust, respect, and ethical behavior are difficult for the young to learn and for the old to maintain. . . all that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way. . . by each servant-leader demonstrating his or her own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group. (pp. 52-53)



Servant leaders understand the value of building an environment of community within an organization and fostering a spirit of cooperation with individuals (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007).

As Spears (1998) concluded, this list of servant leader characteristics is not exhaustive, yet, it provides an understanding of the leadership at the focal point of this study. Each characteristic may play a key role in the servant leader's approach to the mentoring process (Poon, 2006) and is developed through continued learning (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007).

Equally important servant leader mentors may guide and support their mentees using the characteristics embodied in the theory to help meet the mentee's and organization's goals resulting in the follower's ability to lead (Rhodes, 2006; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). Poon (2006) noted there are three key facets of mentoring with servant-leadership qualities: relationship, learning, and leadership development. Mentoring is a "natural relational process, experience and values pass from one generation to another" (Stanley & Clinton, 1992, p. 17). Through this relationship and interaction between mentor and mentee learning occurs and guides the development of leadership in the mentee (Poon, 2006). These objectives of relationship, learning, and leadership development were best met using servant-leadership characteristics by mentors and thus formed the conceptual framework of this inquiry and provided in-depth understanding for the mentoring process.



METHODOLOGY

To examine quality teachers' personal accounts of their mentoring experience through the lens of servant-leadership a qualitative narrative approach was utilized. To study this problem of practice (Creswell, 2007), data were gathered using the personal experience stories of four quality teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This qualitative narrative study was limited in setting to public school teachers in a Midwestern state having won the State Teacher of the Year Award over a ten-year timeframe and who were mentored.

Participants

Participants for this study involved K-12 teachers from Missouri since the state requires beginning teachers to participate in a two-year mentoring program (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010, 2012). The study focused on the population of Missouri Teacher of the Year award recipients and their narrative stories of the men and women who had mentored them in their professional lives. These selected teachers were current K-12 public educators in the state of Missouri who had met criteria establishing excellence in teaching based on the National Teacher of the Year program (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). Having met these criteria verified these teachers as elite and quality educators, and thus provided the population through purposeful sampling to study mentoring. "The Teacher of the Year represents Missouri's 70,689 teachers. . . Only 43 individuals have been



named to the select group of Missouri Teachers of the Year since the state began participating in the national awards program in 1957” (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012, ¶5). Recently the recipient for the 2012-2013 school year was announced, making the total 44 teachers.

Several methods were applied to narrow the population of Missouri Teachers of the Year to a concise sample to study. First, the list of all 44 award winners was narrowed to a list of 25 teachers who had won Missouri Teacher of the Year since 1988. In 1985 Missouri passed the Excellence in Education Act, requiring districts to “provide a plan of professional development. . . for a teacher’s first two years of teaching” (Missouri State Teachers Association, 2005, p. 19). This Act eliminated Teacher Lifetime Certification with a system of renewable certification. Therefore, all valid teaching certificates issued prior to 1988 were exempt from the professional development requirements in the first two years of teaching (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008); even so, it was not until 2003 that all Missouri teachers were under the new requirements of renewable certification (Missouri State Teachers Association, 2005). Thus, all beginning teachers required two years of mentoring to upgrade certification classification. The researcher chose to limit the Missouri Teacher of Year population to those having won after 1988 since it represented the year Missouri began its current mentoring mandates.

From 1988 to 2012, a total of 25 teachers have won the



Missouri Teacher of the Year award (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). The researcher further condensed this list by eliminating all individuals not currently in teaching positions in Missouri due to factors including retirement and state relocation. A database of Missouri educators' salaries provided a current public record of Missouri teachers' earnings and employers revealing those educators still employed and teaching in the state (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 2012). Of the 25 Missouri Teachers of the Year, ten were still working in Missouri public schools.

Further, each of the 10 teachers were divided into three teaching level categories: elementary (grades K-5), middle (grades 6-8), and secondary (grades 9-12). The researcher categorized state winners based on their teaching level at the time they were awarded Teacher of the Year to have all three teaching level categories represented. These diverse participant constructs established participant variation within a small samples size so that "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program" (Patton, 1987, p.53). Therefore, of the ten current Missouri Teacher of Year educators, four were selected as study participants for interviews: one elementary teacher (grades K-5), two middle level teachers (grades 6-8), and one secondary level teacher (grades 9-12) were chosen for interviews. Furthermore, two males and two females were selected to ensure equal representation of gender.



Data Collection

Data collection relies on “a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). The foundational basis for selecting which data gathering procedures to utilize in this research was based on data collection tools which would best answer the research questions. Selected quality teachers participated in individual interviews sharing their personal stories of their mentors and the mentee process.

Each participant was interviewed three times using a semi structured interview protocol. Each interview lasted one hour. The purpose of the interview design was to engage the participant in a one-on-one interview to share an oral telling of his or her story pertaining to the research questions (Bruce, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2008). The interviews enable the researchers to fully understand participants’ perspectives and impressions of an experience (Mertens, 2005). Interviews were recorded for accuracy, later transcribed for analysis utilizing the theoretical perspective of servant-leadership. “This practice [tape recording] ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 87). Field notes were also taken during interviews to further inform the study and protect against any technological failures (Mertens, 2005). “Field notes are accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 5).

Data Analysis

The qualitative narrative data were reviewed through a



social constructivist paradigm and analyzed through the theoretical perspective of servant-leadership emphasizing participant stories (Merriam, 1998). Field texts, including interviews and interview field notes, were reviewed and organized to find common themes of the ten servant-leadership characteristics (Spears, 1998) and during restorying to gain a richer knowledge base of each narrative regarding mentoring experiences.

“Restorying is the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story, and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence” (Ollershaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 332). The qualitative research analysis of restorying began by organizing the narrative field texts into useable forms such as interview transcriptions and typed interview field notes. The restorying process began as the researcher gathered narratives, analyzed each for themes, and finally rewrote each into a logical sequence recognizing the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2008).

FINDINGS

How have mentors, as shared through the narratives of mentees, influenced quality K-12 teachers in their professions?

Knowing students and being aware of their students’ needs was modeled by the different mentors in each participant’s life. As one participant noted,

My mentor taught me that it’s thinking about every single child and how far I am going to take them. It is thinking about every family and what impact have I had on that



family, when they leave me will the parent still remember it is important to sit down with their kids each night asking them questions about school, showing them how important they think education is?

Thus both the mentor and mentee recognized a need for wholeness and healing accomplished by serving others to meet their potential (Greenleaf, 2002). Greenleaf (2002) went on to discuss that servant leaders understand the importance of local, collaborative community encouraging rebuilding “by each servant leader demonstrating his or her own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group” (p. 53). This focus of a developing a collaborative community not only with mentors but the mentee with student’s families was apparent with all participants. As another mentee highlighted, “My mentor stressed the importance of me serving the needs of the student, by understanding the needs of the family.” Greenleaf (1996) denoted “Spirit as the force that drives one to serve others” (p. 55).

Classroom management was mentioned by all four participants as being one of the areas their mentors influenced their professional life. As a middle school teacher mentioned the importance of classroom management in even the small things to establish a productive learning environment, which she saw modeled by her mentors. Another participant from the high school remarked several times on how his mentor taught him the importance of having high expectations for students and enforcing the rules so that all students were safe to learn. “He didn’t let people mess around; he had very high behavioral



and academic expectations.” By creating such high expectations of self, one could argue that the mentors were encouraging their mentees to be more autonomous and perhaps more likely themselves to become servants (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13).

Likewise, each participant mentioned gaining curricular knowledge from their mentors from knowing how to apply brain research in the classroom to being able to disregard a textbook to create student driven lessons. One mentor greatly influenced the middle school participant in his understanding of teaching history to students by showing him how to creatively make lessons that interested students. That mentee went on to note that his mentor went beyond the normal expectations of being a mentor that of sharing lesson plans and curricular materials, his mentor, when teaching a new history concept would also visit his classroom on his planning time and share his ideas with his mentee. As Greenleaf (2003) in an introduction to his parable depicting the servant as teacher noted, “The ultimate test of the servant motive is what one does with one’s optional time for which one is not paid” (p. 78). Servant leaders as individuals exemplify key qualities and characteristics which impel them to first serve then lead.

Finally, all of the participants discussed how mentors pushed them to grow professionally and collaboratively in the school community, whether that was in a school leadership role or in professional development. The high school participant summed up how his mentors encouraged him to move forward in his career, when he noted,



One of the things mentors have done for me is if I am ever stagnant for any period of time. . . something usually happens where I get involved with a mentor and I have another challenge. . . It's kind of interesting how things work.

Another mentee reflected on how his mentor devoted effort to community building in the school than allowing any isolation of individuals and emphasized that the mentee should do the same in the future. Greenleaf (2002) emphasized the same when he reflected:

Where community doesn't exist, trust, respect, and ethical behavior are difficult for the young to learn and for the old to maintain. . . all that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way. . . by each servant-leader demonstrating his or her own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group. (pp. 52-53)

Illustrated in Figure 1 are the areas of emphasis shared with the mentees.



Figure 1. Representation of the topics emphasized through mentoring.

What, if any, of the ten characteristics of servant-leadership did mentors of quality K-12 teachers utilize during the mentoring process?

All four educator participants claimed the value of listening in the mentoring relationship and its importance for communication. Each listed the quality as mandatory for mentors and some even thought it was the most important aspect of the relationship.

One female mentee found the value of listening in the results it can produce in a mentee's reflective thinking, when



she noted, “I think a good mentor listens. . . They [mentees] need to vent or they need to be enthusiastic and you do not want to take that away from them. Sometimes they come up with their own solution which is always preferable.” The process of active listening was taught to another mentee by one of her mentors, as she pointed out, “She [mentor] taught me how to be a better listener. And it’s not just about listening; it’s about really hearing someone and understanding what it is they are speaking about.”

Greenleaf (2003) would have noted listening carefully to others oftentimes results in a servant leader’s better understanding of themselves. Even valuing that silence and the humbleness to accept when silence is more powerful than words is essential for the servant leader (Greenleaf, 2002). The valuing of silence was noted by one mentor as he discussed his mentor:

She taught me how to be a better listener. . . it is my goal and what’s interesting is I find myself practicing that in my personal life more. And it’s not just about listening; it’s about really hearing someone and understanding what it is they are speaking about. It’s really listening and be silent as the other person is reflecting. I think the best communicators are the people who end up being the best listeners in the end.

As a mentee clearly expressed her thoughts on the role of empathy, “You cannot be a mentor if you’re not empathetic. . . You should not be a mentor without empathy, wow, that would be a problem! The mentee is not going to feel willing to open up, to talk, to share.”



Some of these stories were direct examples of servant-leadership like the middle school participant's direct story about her mentor, listening to her and taking time for reflective thought. "She [mentor] was a very good listener. It was really uncomfortable for me at the beginning because I really didn't have someone who had ever had a conversation with me like that before." Some of the narratives were indirect references to the qualities of servant-leadership, either seen in their mentors or comments the participants made refereeing to the characteristic. This was seen in the high school participant's comments about listening, "Listening is so understated. I just think it is probably the most important thing in any type of relationship, including the mentoring one." Thus he indirectly referenced the character trait in association with mentoring instead of offering a story depicting the use of it. All ten of the servant leader qualities were directly or indirectly referenced in all four participants' interviews and created themes to study the data. The resultant themes were: Seek to Understand by Listening, Understanding through Empathy, Healing to Become Whole, Personal and Global Awareness, Persuasion to Create Understanding, Thinking Beyond the Status Quo, Lessons Learned and Foresight, Stewardship—The Greater Good, Commitment to Growth, and Community Building.

The four participants were quality teachers who were mentored by a great number of men and women who shaped them and enabled them to better achieve their goals. Each of their mentors displayed servant-leadership qualities: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization,



foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, and community building. Depicted in Figure 2 are the themes as they relate to mentoring and the characteristics to follow to become a servant mentor.



Figure 2. Represents the characteristics of a mentor displaying servant-leadership.

CONCLUSIONS

From the data findings it can be concluded that there are specific topics that should be addressed in mentoring programs and that the mentors of quality teachers demonstrated all of the



characteristics of servant-leadership. The servant leader's focus is "to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test. . . is this: Do those served grow as persons" (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 32)? Mentoring provides an avenue for servant leaders to serve individuals.

Moreover, all ten of the servant leader traits were spoken of and shared in a positive manner by all participants giving value to the role servant-leadership plays in mentoring. Their narrative stories bring fresh knowledge and life to the mentoring process and confirm the value of the servant-leadership lens in understanding mentors. Servant leader mentors enabled these quality teacher participants to grow and achieve great success in their professional lives. All participants spoke of what they gained from their mentors and what they believed their mentors gained from the relationship, as all four shared direct narratives pertaining to mentoring. One stated, "I am doing things I enjoy doing; they [my mentors] gave me the ability to cultivate the things that I wanted to do to become successful." Two other mentees reflected indirectly about the process as they mentioned what they believed mentors could receive from the relationship, the ability to step back and reflect on their own teaching. Mentoring provides an avenue for servant leaders to serve individuals and to help them grow. As Greenleaf (1977) highlighted, "the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is key to his greatness" (p. 7). Furthermore, the goal of the servant leader is to motivate followers to serve (Greenleaf, 2002), and all four participants have acted as



mentors to others continuing the cycle of service.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study implicated that effective mentors demonstrated the use of specific curricular topics for a mentoring program, along with ten characteristics of servant-leadership in their guiding of these teachers to reach their full potential. Servant-leadership gives school administrators a list of traits to look for in their experienced staff when selecting mentors. The traits of a servant leader provide a body of knowledge for an administrator to reference when trying to connect new staff with individuals for as one participant noted, “Mentors, if appropriately selected and managed, are a vital part of our profession. I still believe that it’s not just about new teacher retention; it should be an ongoing relationship throughout the duration of a career.” Servant-leadership provides this system of mentor selection. However, this is not claiming the act of mentoring made these teachers the great success they are today, but rather it played a role in that success. As Greenleaf (2002) described when discussing Jefferson’s success,

George Wythe was a substantial man of his times, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of the Constitutional Convention. But his chief claim to fame is as Thomas Jefferson’s mentor. It was probably the influence of mentor on understudy, as Jefferson studied law in Wythe’s office that moved Jefferson toward his place in history and somewhat away from his natural



disposition to settle down at Monticello as an eccentric Virginia scholar (which he remained, partly, despite Wythe's influence.) The point of mentioning George Wythe is that old people may have a part to play in helping potential servant-leaders to emerge at their optimal best. (p. 44)

These quality teachers, in their own right, have earned their success and worked extremely hard to achieve so much in their careers. Yet, their mentors played a role on the journey serving them and helping them to understand their potential, what they could offer the world of education. As one mentee stated, "Discussing my past mentors has helped me reflect on my practices and reminded me how powerful and important others are. No one ever achieves or fails in isolation."

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