SPIRITUALITY AND SERVANT-LEADERSHIP IN TEACHING DEVELOPMENTAL MATHEMATICS
—DAN W. ROYER AND AMY BAIZE-WARD

The purpose of this article is threefold: (a) to describe how spirituality, conceptually informed by servant-leadership, manifests in our teaching practices, (b) to describe how those practices enact support and empathy, which enables our students to succeed in the technical subject of developmental mathematics, and (c) to report our perceptions of student success. We employed a duoethnographic methodology to respond to a common set of questions, highlighting our similarities and differences. In this exchange we explored the setting of our practice, noting disparities between the two-year institutions where we worked. We concluded our experiences, framed through servant-leadership, and described a classroom atmosphere of respect, sensitivity and encouragement for our students. These classroom characteristics are foundational to challenging and supporting students in these courses.

We utilized a duoethnographic approach to do more than simply describe our experiences as developmental mathematics instructors. Through our application of duoethnography, we explored the convergence of our spirituality in a framework of servant-leadership as we sought to illuminate our application of these principles in our teaching. Moreover, applying a dialogical exchange, we examined the intersecting complexities of spirituality, servant-leadership, and

the deconstruction and reconstruction of their meaning in our act of teaching.

DUOETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD

We applied duoethnography to study shared behavior, language, and actions dialogically as we reconceptualized past experiences (Creswell, 2014). In this approach, "meanings are constructed in the process of interpretation. Drawing from this philosophy, duoethnographers engage in multiple interpretations as they use self as a site of analysis of socio-cultural meanings and influences" (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012, p. 629). Applying this approach, we participated in a dialectical exchange of ideas focused on one central topic to produce a jointly created narrative that is polyvocal, applying a democratic process that gives voice to the researched (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). It is also linked to constructionism that Crotty (1998) described, "In the constructionist view, as the word suggests, meaning is not discovered but constructed" (p. 42). This is formative to a social constructionist perspective, and is embedded in this methodology. Norris and Sawyer (2016) further explained, "Duoethnographies portray knowledge in transition, and as such, knowing is not fixed but fluid" (p. 20).

Through the collaborative exchange of self-reflective narratives (Meier & Goldenhuys, 2017), we focused on our common experience of teaching a developmental math course, exploring similarities and differences (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018), including differences in institutional context between For Profit College (Dan) and Midwest Community College (Amy) to reconceptualize these past experiences (Rapke, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutional Context

We queried our individual experiences with student populations that are quite similar and set in institutional contexts that share some similarities, yet feature distinctive differences. The contextual comparison in this study begins with a two-year proprietary career college, For Profit College (FPC), fitting within Iloh's (2016) classification of an Enterprise institution, a regional institution with fairly small local campus enrollments. Here, the language of student support was informed through a lens of "customer service." At FPC administrators understood the student as customer, and encouraged faculty to provide the necessary support for students to succeed and, although unspoken, remain "customers" of the institution. Iloh identified the concept of student as customer as a central identifying hallmark of For Profit Colleges and Universities (FPCU).

Community colleges reside on the other end of the two-year college continuum from the for-profits. These publicly funded two-year institutions expanded access to higher education for marginalized students (Frye, 2014), through low cost, open access policies (Mullin et al., 2015), and the zeal of leaders who referred to them as "democracy's colleges" (Brint & Karabel, 2014). These factors mean that community colleges do not officially share the business model orientation of proprietary institutions. Despite these differences, there are similarities in student experience at both of these open access colleges. Standardized placement test scores identified students below a predetermined cut-off, who were placed into developmental math courses. These courses are intended to remediate deficiencies in basic math skills indicated during testing (Bailey et al., 2015; Royer & Baker, 2018). The impact of this placement serves to reinforce previous experience with academic

shame (Turner & Husman, 2008) and aversion to course content. Additionally, the career focused nature of these institutions communicates the importance of education to improve students' workforce skills (Boggs & McPhail, 2016) and prepare for positions that promise improved wages (Iloh, 2016), attracting students returning to higher education as a means to improve socioeconomic status.

Servant-Leadership

Robert Greenleaf pioneered the concept of servant-leadership in his seminal 1970 essay, *The Servant as Leader*, arguing that a servanthood approach makes strong leaders who promote their followers' well-being. In a subsequent revision of the original work he argued that followers "will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants" (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 12). Ultimately arguing that

> the best test and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served,* become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And,* what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (p. 15)

Additionally, Spears (2003) identified ten characteristics of a servant-leader that included (a) listening to others and self, (b) empathy for others, (c) healing for self and others, (d) both general awareness and self-awareness, (e) persuasion rather than authority, (f) nurturing conceptual thinking, (g) foresight for likely outcomes, (h) stewardship recognizing they hold their position in trust for the greater good, (i) commitment to the growth of people, and (j) building community among those in the institution. Likewise,

Chekwa et al. (2018) identified a linkage between workplace spirituality and servant-leadership embedded in the concept of stewardship. Although specific characteristics of a servant-leader remain persistently fluid, Eva et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis and proposed,

> servant leadership [*sic*] is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and larger community. (p. 114)

Moreover, Eva et al. argued this depiction of servant-leadership addressed three features: (a) the motivational, (b) the mode applied, and (c) the mindset of the leader. These features were also addressed in Spears' (2003) ten characteristics above, adapted by Hays (2008) for a servant-teacher in Table 1.

Table 1: *Ten Characteristics of a Servant-Teacher and Their Classroom Application*

Characteristic	Application
Listening	A servant-teacher listens with an open mind and heart, seeking understanding of students. Such an approach is crucial to understanding a diverse group of students and courses of action.
Empathy	A servant-teacher strives to sense and understand student's sentiments and perspectives.
Healing	A servant-teacher cares about the way students are doing in the course and their individual well-being
Persuasion	A servant-teacher offers, invites, and encourages students to learn and adapt, rather than forcing their perspective on students.
Awareness	A servant-teacher is acutely aware, practicing *mindfulness* that adjusts to classroom conditions.

Foresight	A servant-teacher is aware of the context and possible outcomes of different options to develop a shared vision with students.
Conceptualizing	The servant-teacher sees the big picture and fosters student awareness of the complexity of issues promoting systems thinking.
Commitment to Growth	The servant-teacher accepts responsibility toward their individual growth and development, while promoting the development of others.
Stewardship	The servant-teacher is acutely aware that they are entrusted with protecting the welfare of their students.
Building Community	The servant-teacher sees the classroom as a community, promoting both the individual and collective potential and capability.

Note. This table summarizes the ten characteristics of a servant-teacher, and the related application of each characteristic in the classroom. Adapted from "Teacher as Servant: Applications of Greenleaf's Servant Leadership in Higher Education," by J. M. Hays, 2008, *The Journal of Global Business Issues, 2*(1), p. 117.

Defining servant-leadership is difficult because it is holistic, functioning as a leadership theory (Greenleaf, 2003), a philosophy of life (Song, 2019), a theology of organizations (Vaill, 1998), an approach to teaching and education (Hays, 2008), and a mediator of workplace spirituality (Chekwa et al., 2018). Servant-leadership has also been the subject of multiple survey instruments (Eva et al., 2019; Sendjaya et al., 2019) in an attempt to quantifiably measure servant-leadership behaviors and outcomes. However, much of the focus has been on leaders' characteristics, follower perceptions, and antecedents of leader behavior. We assert this understanding of servant-leadership, coupled with the ultimate test (Greenleaf, 2008) and 10 characteristics above (Spears, 2003) provide the framework that connects our spirituality and teaching.

Servant-leadership necessarily engages qualities of love, humility, compassion, openness, trust, and empowerment, provides a

visible modeling of stewardship (Chekwa et al., 2018), and an expanded understanding we describe in the next section as socially engaged spirituality in a classroom environment. Adopting servant-leadership as a framework for teaching helps each learner grow confidence in self, strengthen peer and instructional relationships, and cultivate a culture of mutual respect and trust. Song (2019) argued servant-leaders can become "healers of self and others" (p. 7) by practicing the characteristics of healing, empathy, awareness, and forgiveness. We concur and argue that these practices are also critical for developmental mathematics students seeking to overcome past experiences of shame. We locate our teaching within the characteristics and features of servant-leadership, beginning with an understanding of the innate value of the students we teach and the universality of spirituality as common to the human experience.
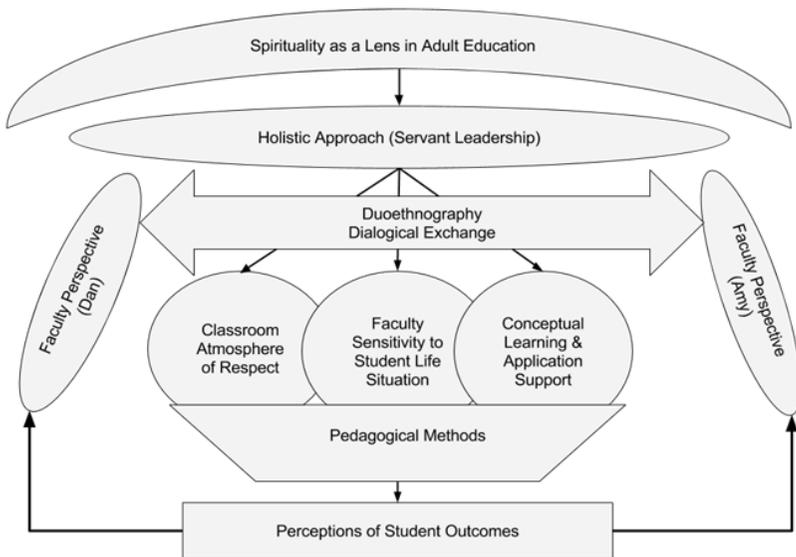
Understanding Spirituality

We understand our teaching practice through a lens of spirituality, conceptually framed in servant-leadership. Such an approach also supports the development of confidence, a dimension of affect connected in the literature with student success in these courses (Goolsby et al., 1988; Hannula et al., 2004). We identified the relationship of these elements in the conceptual map in Figure 1. Greenleaf (2008) elucidated qualities embedded in servant-leadership that are spiritual, mystical and even supernatural, including intuition, empathy, and acceptance that are beyond the reach of cognition alone. Bansal (2012) argued that servant-leaders initiate and honor the spiritual, integrating them into education. Finally, Greenleaf (1998) identified spirit as an animating force and an essential quality in a servant-leader. Rendón (2014) responded to the pervasive nature of spirituality, "I am now beginning to see everything I do as spiritual, for I find life with all its ups and downs

to be a profound spiritual experience" (p. 11). The spirituality we describe is also aligned with Tisdell (2008) who argued "everyone has a spirituality (including agnostics and atheists), but not everyone has a religion" (p. 28).

Figure 1: *Conceptual Model of This Study*

Therefore, spirituality is understood individually and differently, but evidenced in interactions with students. Even as we describe spirituality as a universal human dimension, we understand our spiritual home in the Judeo-Christian tradition, identifying our faith as the motivation for our service to students. Engaging servant-leadership requires us to move from an individually-focused to an expanded, socially-focused understanding of spirituality.

One ubiquitous perception of spirituality and religion, in general, is *individualized spirituality* lacking critical reflection, and focusing on self-development and enlightenment. The problem with

individualized spirituality "is not so much focusing on the interior life of individuals but on closing off the individual from interdependence and one's role in society" (Rendón, 2014, p. 9). We assert that by consciously engaging in servant-leadership and critical reflection we shift the focus away from individualized spirituality toward emancipatory social engagement. Furthermore, when informed through servant-leadership, a lens of spirituality leads to social justice work (Rawls, 1958), through actions supporting opportunity for the underserved (Levin, 2014).

Enacting such a socially focused spirituality requires social action promoting emancipation and equity. This emancipatory approach "is nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and trust" (Freire, 2013, p. 42), and characterized by empathy. We connect the presence of emancipatory spirituality with the practice of servant-leadership, through which we challenge, support, encourage, and help our students find success. Our dialogue begins with a discussion of the similarities and differences based on institutional context.

OUR DIALOGICAL EXCHANGE

In the following dialogue we responded to questions and to one another as we examined our perceptions, noting ways this exchange generated critical reflection and fresh understanding for us.

Institutional Contexts of Origin

Amy: My institutional environment also does not approach students (or any person for that matter) with empathy and support. At least that has been my experience. The staff within the institution do not tend to have a nurturing, caring, or helpful demeanor. When students come to my class they are often defeated, feel alone in the process, and just need someone to listen to them.

The perception of the institution is that they only care about getting students through to completion so they can collect funds.

This infuriates me and makes me work twice as hard in the classroom to show the students they have an advocate. That there is someone who will assist in things other than math, someone that will be there to lift them up.

Dan: My first reaction to your description was, this is not how I envisioned a community college environment. In part this was caused by my perception that these colleges were oriented toward student success, idealistically providing low cost access to higher education for disadvantaged students. Your description of being motivated by the collection of funds sounded very similar to the way I perceived motivation at FPC. From my perspective, the FPC financial model was heavily dependent on student retention. Although my efforts to support student success were intrinsically motivated, I understood administration's motivation was to build revenues based on retaining students and tuition. This was particularly salient when FPC closed. While some peers questioned administration's handling of events that led to closure, few questioned the underlying FPC business model assuming that education and students were simultaneously products and customers. Since students received little or no notice of the closure, many were unprepared for the transition to other institutions.

The similarity in institutional focus on revenue generation was unexpected. After our exchange, we recognized the presence of neoliberalism that Levin (2014) described as an ideology valuing market driven individual competitiveness, displacing democratic concerns of education for the public good. Although anticipated at FPC, it was surprising to find a similar outlook at Midwest Community College.

It is within this institutional context that we considered the

influence of our individual conceptions of spirituality. In this exchange we described spirituality from our individual perspectives, but believe it is evidenced when we interact with students, applying a servant-leadership framework. Although understanding the origins of our spirituality in our faith traditions (Judeo-Christian) we also perceive spirituality as a universally human experience. Enacting servant-leadership, therefore, requires movement from an individual (and internal) practice to an expanded, external, and socially engaged spirituality.

Our Understanding of Spirituality

Dan: I describe my spirituality for the purpose of this work in broad terms. I understand I have a worldview that perceives the humanness of all people and recognizes the intangible presence of the divine image that transcends the physical. This understanding of the spiritual in all people is larger than a single faith tradition, however, my understanding of spirituality originated in a mainstream Christian denomination.

Amy: I also define my spirituality from a Christian perspective. I have a strong faith and understanding of God as the one that I work for, please, and strive to emulate daily. My faith is what I consider to be my spirituality. My values dictate that I am here for a bigger purpose. I am here to help others and to be an example of good within the world."

Dan: I appreciated your thinking here, and recognized some of the confusion with the concept of spirituality. We described it as something embedded in our faith and religious traditions which is accurate, but I also hear you describing the spiritual as motivation to engage servant-leadership. When I think about servant-leadership, I

am convinced that it also requires the presence of emotional intelligence. I believe it is this sensitivity that you described when you wrote about being here for a bigger purpose and helping others. It is such a sensitivity that supports students through difficulties, helping them form a growth mindset and productive persistence.

This connection became apparent as our discussion focused on enacting spirituality and servant-leadership in the classroom.

Enacting Spirituality and Servant-Leadership
Amy: As I think about describing spirituality clearly, I keep thinking that it's a genuine concern for the well-being of other people. It's providing support and encouragement in a manner that is not self-serving, but that is providing them a sense of purpose and success. It's respecting where they come from and assisting them through trust and respect to reach the next level they want. Another way of thinking about this is helping students develop a belief in themselves that they can be successful.

When I am in the classroom my focus is on transferring knowledge in multiple methods to ensure all students have fair and equal opportunity to learn the material. Because of my spirituality, I find myself drawn to the 'underdog' to try to reach out and connect with them on a different level. It is important to encourage, praise and constructively correct, when appropriate.

Dan: You described your attraction to the underdog, and I identified this as a sense of being in the student's corner. When I meet my students for the first time I seek to value each student and demonstrate respect. I see in many of my students the damage and scars from those who told them they could not do mathematics. I believe your attraction to the underdog and my sense of empathy are similar, but I see ways that your desire to help the disadvantaged

feels more focused, particularly when you described engaging in group work. Your perception of the damage and scars in your students and my attempt to support positive emotional and cognitive experiences to overcome prior negative messaging seem to be very closely aligned.

Amy: Your description of an empathetic spirit is embedded in my imperative to connect with students on both a one-on-one basis and as a collective group. We engage in individual and group work so that students can grow to respect each other's talent and abilities. I believe this is important, because it is critical to pull positives from every student. In addition, I believe it is equally important to encourage, praise, and correct students using positive and constructive methods. I do not make fun of people, I do not allow others to make fun of, or call people out. I create, on day one, a safe learning space for confidentiality, mistakes, and assistance to be acceptable and encouraged.

In this dialogue we clarified our individual spiritual lenses, servant-leadership as a framework, and then described the way they influence our teaching in developmental mathematics courses. This was particularly notable when we described a sense of identification with the underdog and a similar sense of empathy. In combination these generated a sense of emancipatory spirituality that is interdependent, socially just, and activated in servant-leadership. We believe this perspective caused us to consider an alternative way to frame and teach developmental mathematics.

Connecting Servant-Leadership and our Teaching

There are times when classroom experiences are poignant, signifying the potential for transformational learning. Through the combined concepts of servanthood and spirituality, our students'

experiences were meaningful to them, as well as to us. Some students experienced success they did not originally believe they could have.

We described this connection between the influence of spirituality, servant-leadership, and our teaching practice in the identified themes or findings that emerged from our dialogue. In Table 1, the first five characteristics of servant teaching are connected with relational and interpersonal indicators of affect based on Hays (2008) described applications. These describe the servant-teacher's connection with students and their ability to (or not to) demonstrate empathy. Examples of these attributes appear in the classroom when, as instructors, we express our commitment and belief in our students' abilities to pass the course. This is also evident in group work that builds mutual respect, and our vocalization that we believe our students can succeed. These connections illustrate the way servant-leadership is enacted to promote listening, empathy, and healing for our students. We considered the second five characteristics, in Table 1, to be attitudes and approaches that a servant-teacher employs to develop learning and community in the classroom. Our suggestion here is not that these are fixed, however, we can identify ways these traits informed our teaching practice. Specifically, these traits were critical in developing a learning community that supported mutual respect, along with the trust needed to challenge and support student learning. In the following dialogue we describe the way these ten characteristics of a servant-teacher connected to inform our three themes of a classroom of respect, sensitivity to students, and providing students with challenge and support, see Figure 2.

Figure 2: *Mapping Servant-Leadership Characteristics in This Study*
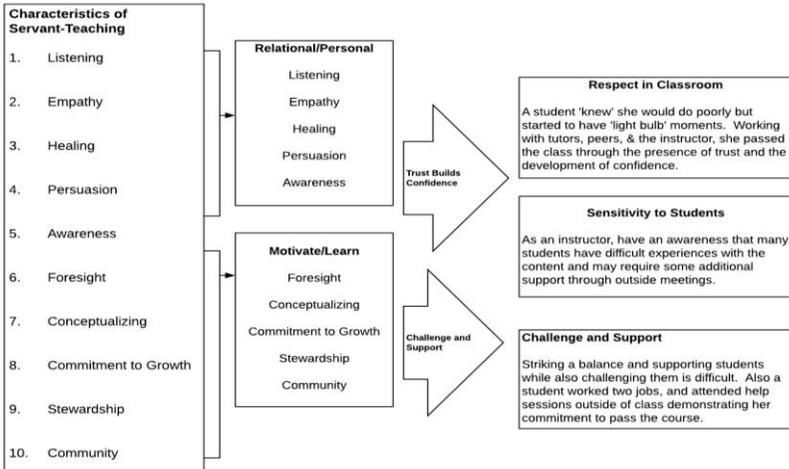
Note. In this figure, we mapped the characteristics of a servant-teacher specifically to this study. Adapted from "Teacher as Servant: Applications of Greenleaf's Servant Leadership in Higher Education," by J. M. Hays, 2008, *The Journal of Global Business Issues, 2*(1), p. 117.

In the first of these exchanges we discussed the way servant-leadership supports the development of respect in the classroom.

Classroom Atmosphere of Respect

Amy: I think of myself as a learner and how I would want to be treated and talked to if I were in the student's situation. There is definitely a balance that has to be implemented, because people can and do try to take advantage of a good situation or work the system, but you can usually tell when that is happening. Treat everyone equal – treat everyone with respect – be an active and engaged listener and advocate for everyone.

I also remember a time when a student walked into my math class and before it even started she approached me and stated, "I know I am going to do poorly as this is my fifth attempt, so please

just tell me what I need to do to pass." My response was, "show up, work hard, ask questions, and change to a positive 'I can' attitude." This was easier said than done, but sound advice all the same. Having never taught this student before, I was unsure what to expect. As the class progressed, I could tell that the student was trying to do as I requested and was starting to have 'light bulb' moments. As is my custom, I met with each student after the first test and when she met with me she was feeling more confident, still struggling, but she was better. The first question I asked was, "what can I do to assist you further in your progress?" At that moment, she realized that I was serious about her success and she said "no one has ever asked me that before." From this conversation, our interaction in the classroom and through emails, and critical meetings throughout the semester, we developed a relationship of honest communication and trust. Most importantly, I attribute her success (she did pass the class) to the realization that someone demonstrated care to her, showed compassion, built trust, was honest, and showed stewardship—both of servant-leadership and spirituality—to her.

Dan: Your description reminds me that finding meaning in the work of teaching mathematics evolved as I realized it was about much more than teaching content. I recall several students who described preconceived ideas and formative experiences that reinforced a sense of anxiety and doubt when it came to math. One of the students that exhibited considerable anxiety related to mathematics was a middle-aged woman who had not been in school for 30 years. I attempted to structure a series of positive experiences that focused on her learning as she worked through the class. This scaffolding included constructive positive feedback in response to her reasoning process on specific problems. In those moments, I saw her demonstrate

growth as a student and a budding sense of confidence with the subject. One day as we neared the end of the term, students were in the process of putting problems on the board. When it was her turn, she jumped to her feet and declared, 'I've got this!', and then proceeded to demonstrate her solution on the board. She continued to have difficulty with some mathematical concepts, but was able to achieve a final grade high enough to pass the course.

For me, spirituality in teaching creates an awareness of the shame that many of my students associate with mathematics. My first goal in the class is to offer a positive perspective of mathematics and communicate an enthusiasm for math and belief in students' abilities to succeed in the subject. Many students recounted instructors' messaging that they did not belong in a particular math course. The shame contained in such messages is clear, the instructor communicates directly that certain students lack the ability to do math. Proceeding from a servant-leadership framework, I accept the responsibility to equip students with the resources they need to succeed. Because of this, I understand my work as a path of authentic service that is true to who I am, becoming a vocation (Palmer, 2000). This combination of servant-leadership and vocational service informs my effort to infuse respect in the classroom.

Lundberg et al. (2018) conducted a study of a developmental math program at Chief Dull Knife College and described the outlook of one faculty member who communicated such a sense of respect,

> A long-time instructor reflected on the importance of seeing them [students] smile as math problems were worked out in class. Smiles indicated to him that students "are discovering" both that being a doer of math is important to them and that "math isn't this big demon that I've got to someday slay. I'm

doing it right now." (p. 79)

We concur, and acknowledge ways we have both experienced similar moments with our students that "I (Amy) call light bulb moments", and "I (Dan) described in the confidence of a student responding 'I've got this!'" We argue that engaging servant-leadership with spirituality supports the development of respect and student confidence in the classroom.

Circling back to our definition of spirituality and the way we described providing support to our students, we now consider the way spirituality informed by servant-leadership produces a sensitivity to our students. When this sensitivity is present, we make an effort to understand our students and their struggles with mathematics. Because of this sensitivity, we seek to be a resource and help our students overcome the anxiety they often associate with mathematics.

Sensitivity to Students

Dan: I seek to understand the students and try to find out more about them. We have times of discussion and provide them opportunities at the beginning of class to talk about things that are not related to math. We then have an overview and describing how we will approach the class. I strive to remember that many of these students come to the course after experiencing anxiety connected to this subject. My first goal is to present a positive perspective of the subject we will encounter, communicate enthusiasm for the subject, and also for the students. In all of this, I conduct my work with a sense of calling and service. Such a perspective means that while I view the act of teaching as a collaborative exchange between the student and instructor, the instructor is present to facilitate student success.

Amy: when I first started teaching, I was not sure what to expect. I have always been in administration and training roles, so this was a new way of thinking. I am accustomed to colleagues who were very confident, not afraid to try new things, and always wanted to learn something new, knowing they could. When I got into the classroom, I recognized a different way of thinking. As I watched and worked with my students, I continued to see stress, fear, and anxiety. They were not confident, and I soon learned they did not really want to learn anything new. Additionally, most were not self-motivated because they had been beat down in so many areas of life. In my mind, the discipline of spirituality is to relieve these emotions. I try to demonstrate the impact of this different way of thinking by telling stories of my own life, leading by example, building trust and showing respect. It's an act of giving of yourself and showing others how to control the emotions. One thing we did to ease the anxiety, was breathing exercises before, during, and after tests. This showed the students a new way to get through something stressful. This practice taught the students how to focus on themselves in a way that was relaxing and productive. As the course progressed students' affect began to change, and was visible in their confidence and different approach to the subject. When they started seeing success, they started believing in themselves and the process.

Dan: My transition to teaching was also difficult, and I struggled with the notion that teaching developmental mathematics was somehow less impactful than my previous work. I came to teaching after spending some time in ministry, a decision fraught with questions about what I 'ought' to do. I did not realize it at the time, but I was in the process of redefining my spirituality in the context of teaching, while also developing a sense of purpose by helping students learn. As I worked through this process, I sensed ways that

my 'pastoral' side was fully engaged to support my students. This was emphasized for me when an administrator classified my interactions with students as patient. There continues to be moments when I question the significance of what I do, however, I try to view my work through the goal of positively impacting students. I recognize the disorienting and uncomfortable feelings in these moments, yet acknowledge that they lead to the critical self-reflection needed to maintain my sensitivity to students.

Amy: I am always intrigued by the stories that are told to me by students if they are taking a class over. I am equally intrigued by first time students that haven't had math in a couple of years. Fair, kind, gentle treatment is essential. I think of myself as a learner and how I would want to be treated and talked to if I were in their situation. Many students are under the impression that math is stupid and never used. They don't realize how frequently they use math. So, my biggest challenges are providing real life examples that the whole class can understand and identify with. I introduce this through the group activities that I organize and administer. I believe students learn better when they are working and learning with/from each other. Also, treat everyone equal . . . treat everyone with respect . . . be an active and engaged listener and advocate for everyone.

Overall, we see the need for sensitivity to students, their life situations, previous experiences with the subject (many resulting in academic shame), and an empathetic approach from instructors who understand these difficulties. As a result of this exchange, we recognize the importance of critical self-reflection as we refined our sense of purpose and service in teaching.

In our reflection and transition to teaching, we described some of the difficulties we faced, the need for critical self-reflection, and an

awareness that we could cope with the challenges we encountered. We acknowledge our privilege in this space, recognizing our experience in higher education as students, faculty, and administration. We recognize the challenges we faced and the support we received to overcome our individual educational hurdles. Although counter-intuitive, we recognize the need to provide adequate challenge for our students. We next consider the way framing our teaching through servant-leadership requires us to provide an adequate level of challenge for our students, while also supporting their development and learning.

Challenge and Support

Sanford (1966) identified the importance of institutional challenge and response (support) in the process of student development. Based on our experiences in developmental mathematics courses, our exchange revealed ways we thought about providing this approach for students individually, rather than institutionally.

Amy: When I began using this approach, no one within the teaching staff noticed what was happening. However, I know students noticed and shared because I would have students the next semester that would say things like, "I was told by so and so to sign up for your class." At first, I wondered if that was a good or bad thing, was I too helpful, too lenient, too soft…it really made me wonder. The more I worked with students the more I realized the way I was teaching the class was making a difference.

Dan: I began meeting with students outside of class by setting up tutoring sessions to assist them with getting an understanding of the content. Initially, I saw this as a way of helping students with the

material, but eventually I recognized that the students in these help sessions were approaching the subject with a different perspective, and seemed to have a more positive, confident outlook. I held these sessions in addition to administrators' normal work expectations and saw them as a way to express my commitment to my students who were often overlooked.

Amy: Yes, but math is a strange beast. You either have a head for it, or it defeats you. Not that you cannot learn and be successful in course completion, but when students enter a room saying, "this is my fifth time taking this course, and I still don't understand" I question why didn't someone take the time to assist you more. It also makes me wonder if they are really applying themselves, so this forces hard and critical conversations—one-on-one—to ensure that I provide a solid learning environment for the student. I ask questions or set up times to meet one-on-one to ensure they are keeping up. I provide extra credit through worksheets of topics they have struggled with in the past and I provide feedback and helpful hints on how to study for tests and completion of homework.

Dan: I agree with your observation and try to interject humor in the classroom (e.g. a child's 911 call for help with math). But I try to find ways to build on student success with the material, while at the same time, letting students know that making mistakes is a part of the learning process. A typical class begins with some demonstration from the text, moves to group exercises, and then finally, students take turns putting answers to problems on the board. It is critical in these moments to provide enough of a challenge in the problem and to support their development of confidence with the material.

We engaged spirituality informed by servant-leadership to

challenge and support students learning, as they encountered content that seemed to be overwhelming. Although counter intuitive this approach engaged activities that supported student development of a growth mindset and productive persistence (Bailey et al., 2015). Such support is an expression of our commitment to the growth of students.

CONCLUSION

We employed a duoethnographic method to examine the way our conceptualization of servant-leadership and spirituality framed our teaching practice, resulting in enacted empathy, and supporting student success. Through this dialogic exchange we explored our approach in institutional environments where we anticipated differences, but also revealed unexpected similarities. In these varied, but similar experiences, we have been challenged, and through the process of our dialogical exchange, have considered and reconsidered our sense of purpose in teaching, along with our pedagogical practices in developmental mathematics.

We argue that servant-leadership and its adaptation in servant-teaching (Hays, 2008) provided us with a framework to describe our engagement of spirituality and affect in developmental mathematics. From this perspective, we seek to employ the characteristics Spears (2003) identified in order to establish a classroom atmosphere of respect, sensitivity to students, and provide challenge and support to our students, see Figure 2. Characteristics such as listening, empathy, healing, and awareness supported the development of trust and a classroom atmosphere of respect. Furthermore, we described many of these same traits in our critical self-reflection coupled with the characteristics of stewardship, commitment to growth, and building community as we detailed our development of a sensitivity toward students. Finally, we engaged traits that also included foresight,

conceptualizing, commitment to growth, and community to conceptually underpin the provision of challenge and support (Sanford, 1966) to our students. Overall, through this exchange we have gained a better understanding of the way the influence of spirituality, informed by servant-leadership, promotes the development of student trust, confidence, and learning, and improves our teaching.

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Dan W. Royer, EdD, CPA is an Accounting Lecturer in the Paul W. Parkison Department of Accounting at Ball State University. His work included teaching a variety of accounting courses in multiple modalities, along with a large lecture financial literacy course included in the core curriculum of the university. His research interests include applying the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in pedagogy, understanding the role of affect in teaching technical courses (mathematics, accounting, and finance), and leveraging AI in sensemaking to understand institutional culture.

Amy M. Baize-Ward, EdD, is a life-long resident of central Indiana, earned her degrees from Ivy Tech Community College, Indiana Wesleyan, and Ball State University. She is currently serving as Vice Chancellor of Student Success for Ivy Tech Community College Muncie-Henry County. Her research interests include popular education which challenges students to look at the world from new perspectives all while empowering them to think for themselves and enables them to create change. Using popular education when focusing on diverse student populations inspires a critical consciousness that encourages action against oppressive elements throughout the college experience.