

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS: TO SUPPORT GROWTH AND EFFICACY

**SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS: SUPPORTING TEACHER  
PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND EFFICACY**

by

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A Paper

Presented to the School of Education and Leadership

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

EEA650 Leadership Capstone Project

August 2022

**Servant Leadership in Schools: Supporting Teacher  
Professional Growth and Efficacy**

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### **Dedication**

This capstone study became a reality through the kindness, support, and help of many individuals. I would like to extend my sincere thank you to all of them.

Foremost, to my husband Blake, I never knew I could love you more, but your unwavering support and love throughout this journey has given me the strength to know that I could do this and anything else I am willing to work hard enough for. Thank you for your patience and understanding through the many long nights and your constant motivation. I love you, always.

To my sister, Marian, you have been and always will be my best friend. You have been my sounding board and my partner throughout this entire process. During my moments of doubt or frustration, you reminded me who I am and what I am capable of. Thank you for always pushing me to reach my full potential.

I would also like to express my gratitude and love to my parents for the encouragement that helped me find the strength to complete this process. Thank you for always being there throughout these two years and all the years before. You are both so very loved.

To the leaders whom I have had the privilege to work for and who saw potential in my abilities and provided me the opportunities and motivation to expand my knowledge and challenge myself to move towards leadership.

Finally, to the City University of Seattle's professors, thank you for the kindness and expertise that guided me through this amazing journey of learning and growth. It has been a privilege and a blessing to have had the opportunity to learn from you.

### **Abstract**

This capstone study identifies the important components of servant leadership and how it can have a positive effect on teachers' self-efficacy and, ultimately, students' success in a school setting. Research has shown that teachers who have a strong self-efficacy are motivated within their classrooms and implement high-level instruction that results in an increase in student success and engagement. The research presented in this capstone study shows that implementing servant leadership creates a strong, positive working environment that supports the motivation, efficacy, and professional growth of teachers. An efficacious teacher has a strong belief in their ability to create change and improve the students' learning in their classroom. They are willing to accept change and challenges and provide a successful learning experience for their students. Furthermore, educational leaders who support and enhance their staff's self-efficacy indirectly support the growth of their students and gain the support of their stakeholders. Educational leaders who implement servant leadership style do so selflessly. Servant leadership is a servant-first approach, so a servant leader is a leader who puts others first. They relinquish most of their authority, and their focus and vision is centered around improving teachers at the core and their school in its entirety. Implementing this approach in a school provides teachers with a safe, caring work environment that allows them to feel appreciated and respected for their skills and abilities. It also enhances teachers' self-efficacy and ability to improve their skills and professional knowledge and has a positive effect on students' success.

*Keywords:* Collective Efficacy, Educational Leaders, Educational Leadership, Extrinsic Motivation, Intrinsic Motivation, Professional Growth, Servant Leadership, Teacher Self-Efficacy

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## **Servant Leadership in Schools: Supporting Teacher**

### **Professional Growth and Efficacy**

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this capstone study is to explore the factors that promote the continuous reflection and development of teachers' professional growth and efficacy and how servant leadership can support this growth. Data and research have shown there is a connection between teachers' efficacy and their students' involvement, engagement, and overall success as well as teachers' job satisfaction. Because efficacious teachers find more success and happiness in their job, this capstone study will explore the leadership method and style of servant leadership and how it can improve and develop this important characteristic in teachers. According to Lee (2020), "research suggests that when leaders, as servant leaders, focus on their followers' needs it can have a positive effect on organizational functioning" (p. 1.). This capstone study also shares the methods used in the application of servant leadership within a school and demonstrates how this leadership style can create collaborative relationships and a working environment in which teachers and their leaders have awareness of their personal efficacy and set goals that are individually focused on strengthening teachers' professional practices and, ultimately, a school's effectiveness.

##### **Background**

Bandura (1986) offered a formal definition of self-efficacy: "Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (p. 391). More specifically, teachers' efficacy is confidence in their ability to teach and connect with their students in the classroom.



Teachers who have positive efficacy and are confident in their abilities will support student learning and the school community. This idea stems from research that has shown that positive teacher efficacy supports students learning and overall school effectiveness. Further supporting this idea, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) stated, “Despite using different instruments several researchers have found that teacher self-efficacy predicts both teaching practices and student learning” (p. 611).

Because teacher efficacy has both positive and negative effects on classroom and school communities, educational leaders must identify and utilize leadership strategies that can nurture and support teachers in understanding their strengths and build their confidence. Lee (2020) noted,

There are two factors that are important for personal growth. First, a clear picture and understanding of the current reality, and second, a clear goal that motivates an individual to move beyond their current practice. Research has shown that having a clear end goal is critical to success. Fritz argued that this created tension can only be resolved by growth. (p. 3)

Within servant leadership, the teacher’s professional and personal growth is the goal. Research has demonstrated that, regardless of a student’s background, hardships, or shortcomings, quality teaching can and will support their academic success. Educational leaders must ensure that all students receive quality teaching. According to Alberta Education (2020a), “a leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences” (p. 4). Because strong efficacy in educators correlates to higher success rates for both teachers and student achievement, leaders have a responsibility to create a working environment that has their

teachers' self-efficacy and professional growth as the foundation of what they do. This can be done with the servant leadership approach.

If a leader implements the servant leadership style, they are a partner in each teacher's journey with their needs and individual priorities at the root of their professional development, and they have set the foundation for an environment of trust and effective teacher leadership, in turn leading to an efficacious environment in which staff will feel supported and more prepared to take risks. Research has indicated that this kind of environment will result in quality teaching, meaningful learning, and positive student achievement.

### **Statement of the Issue**

The issue is that having teachers with low personal confidence or efficacy can result in low progress and ineffectiveness in the classroom. A student's overall performance in a classroom is affected by many different variables, and one of these variables, which is based on their school and class placement, is the efficacy of their teacher. Yoo (2016) explained, "The high correlation between the quality of a teacher and student performance is a widely accepted notion, and thus the focus on teacher quality has had a long history in the field of education" (p. 85).

Since low teacher efficacy creates low student achievement in the classroom, a leader needs to begin with the foundation of each classroom, the educator. Creating a safe, welcoming environment for teachers and leading a learning community with their personal and professional growth at the center will have an overall positive effect on both teachers and students. Teachers must be given the opportunity and guidance to self-reflect on their practice to support their confidence or efficacy in their abilities, and they must be coached to see their strengths and weaknesses to help them to become self-aware. Moving forward with knowledge of the areas

that have a negative effect on teachers' efficacy and having the freedom or autonomy to choose how to develop these areas can develop the teachers' effectiveness and success in the classroom and, ultimately, their efficacy in their career.

Servant leadership lends itself to this style of professional growth as it is not a one-size-fits-all form of professional development; rather it focuses on everyone's needs and the goals that they set for themselves within their profession. Furthermore, as Wu (2015) pointed out, "autonomy seems to be emerging as a key variable when examining educational reform initiatives, with some arguing that granting autonomy and empowering teachers is an appropriate place to begin in solving the problems of today's schools" (p. 241).

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are many factors that affect student performance, such as parent involvement and socioeconomic status, and they can lead to overall low student achievement in a school. Are teachers able to truly help their students find success if they have these obstacles to overcome? However, research has shown that a teacher can make a difference in a student's achievement regardless of their environment, community, or home life. Haycock (1998, as cited in Schmid, 2018) expressed that "a teacher has a greater impact on student achievement than any other factor, including socioeconomic status and parent education" (para. 7). With this information, education leaders can see that, regardless of where their school is located or the challenges that students face, they can create change and improving students' success with quality teaching in the classroom. For this to happen, school leaders need to create and nurture an environment that supports, guides, and develops the teachers who are in front of the students entrusted to their care.

Thus, the purpose of this capstone study is to explore the factors that promote positive teacher efficacy and how servant leadership can support this aim with the use of reflection, professional growth, and development in a school.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the key elements of teacher efficacy?
2. How can school leaders improve teacher efficacy, and how can it improve students' learning experience and achievement?
3. How can a school leader adopt a servant leadership style to cultivate an environment that supports building teacher efficacy and professional capacity?

### **Significance of the Study**

In the education system, there is a common goal for all teachers, which is to provide the next generation with the skills needed to be critical thinkers, goal-oriented individuals, and successful citizens of the world. This goal is a large expectation of teachers with the ever-evolving profession and the diverse, unique students they encounter. With research stating that the most important aspect of students' success is the quality of teaching they receive, it shows the amount of pressure and importance based on the level of teaching being provided to students in a classroom. Sanders et al. (1997) found that teachers have a greater impact on student achievement than class, heterogeneity, student achievement level, and class size (p. 58).

For educational leaders, there is an expectation to support the students in their buildings by providing and monitoring the professional development of their teachers. The significance of this study is to focus on the servant leadership approach in a school and how it can be utilized to develop capacity and self-efficacy in teachers. It explores how educational leaders can increase

these factors and the success of the students within their school community with this leadership approach. As Schmid (2018) stated, “given that teachers have such a great impact on student achievement it is critical to identify what makes teachers successful in raising student achievement” (Summary of Relevant Research section, para. 11).

### **Scope of Study**

This capstone study focuses on the effects of positive teacher efficacy with the use of servant leadership in a school setting and how it can have a positive effect on the students’ and the school’s academic success.

### **Summary**

Research has shown that there are many obstacles or variables that can cause students to struggle in the classroom; however, regardless of these restraints or circumstances, all students can be successful if they receive quality teaching and optimum learning experiences. Knowing this, leaders in schools need to cultivate a culture of high expectations, continuous professional learning, and collaboration that promotes self-reflection and builds efficacious educators.

Creating this culture in a school depends heavily on the leadership style chosen by the leadership team in the building. Servant leadership is a philosophy in which leaders lead from the middle to support teachers in their progress rather than setting goals and expecting teachers to reach these expectations independently. Servant leaders set the goal of their institution to be the growth of each teacher individually. This leadership style is a decentralized organizational structure that fosters effective relationships and places the leader in the role of a coach rather than a boss or facilitator. Moreover, “servant leadership reveals leaders’ commitment to serve followers’ needs and to enable them to improve for their own good” (Ehrhart, 2004, p. 69).

Overall, this capstone study demonstrates the factors that promote teacher efficacy and the methods of how leaders approach staff through the use of servant leadership to further their teachers' professional growth and, ultimately, support the academic success of all students.

### **Outline of the Remainder of the Paper**

Chapter 1 shares the focus of this paper and presents a brief description of teacher self-efficacy and the positive correlation between strong professional efficacy and student success in education. The capstone study addresses servant leadership, including the aspects of this leadership style and how it builds efficacy and capacity in a school's staff and results in a positive work environment and academic success.

Chapter 2 is a review of relevant academic literature related to the importance of building efficacy. It also gives an overview of the philosophy of the servant leadership model, which supports effective relationships and helps school leaders develop a shared responsibility for the professional growth of all staff and, ultimately, the success of all students.

Finally, Chapter 3 is the summary of the importance of having positive teacher efficacy in a school and how it has a positive effect on student success. Chapter 3 also includes recommendations for the implementation of the key principles of the servant leadership style and the methods to implement it to enhance teacher efficacy and individualized professional growth.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Barni et al. (2019) stated, “Self-efficacy, namely teachers’ beliefs in their ability to effectively handle the tasks, obligations, and challenges related to their professional activity, plays a key role in influencing important academic outcomes” (para. 1). For a teacher to be successful in the classroom, they must be provided with up-to-date professional development and must have the materials, technology, and supplies necessary. However, the teachers themselves also need to believe that they are capable of finding success and providing quality and effective teaching methods in their classroom. Zee and Kooman (2016) stated, “Various measures, definitions, and studies imply that teachers with an assured sense of self-efficacy set the tone for a high-quality classroom environment by planning lessons that advance students’ abilities and make efforts to involve them in a meaningful way” (p. 985). Educational leaders are employed to run schools that are expected to provide high-quality education to the students entrusted to their care. Principals and vice principals may strive to connect with the students in their building; however, it is apparent that it is the teachers who work directly with students and have the largest impact on their experience and academic progress. As stated in Alberta Education’s (2020a) *Leadership Quality Standard*, “principals and school jurisdiction leaders have an important role in fostering collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all partners in the education system to enable all students to achieve their potential” (p. 1). Therefore, although they may not have a direct influence or impact on student achievement in a classroom, they are still held accountable and are expected to ensure quality education in their school community and to create a safe learning environment for staff members.

This leads into the research and data surrounding leadership approaches and styles that can not only support teachers' self-efficacy and promote professional development but also indirectly support the academic achievement of each student in a school community. The success of reaching this challenge relies heavily on the leadership style chosen. Hoch et al. (2018) stated,

The importance of servant leadership is evident in meta-analytic findings indicating that servant leadership predicts a range of organizationally relevant outcome above and beyond transformational leadership, authentic leadership and ethical leadership with prompted some scholars to conclude that servant leadership has more promise as a stand-alone leadership than other leadership approaches. (p. 502)

Building a strong working environment with the needs of staff members as the lens can provide a safe, caring environment in which teachers feel heard, respected, and in charge of their professional learning. Helping teachers be aware of their strengths, areas of growth, and goals for professional development goes beyond leading a learning environment. Servant leadership is referred to as a vocation as the people entrusted to a leader are the focus and priority, not the outcome or the expectation (Greenleaf, 1970). As noted by Eva et al. (2019), "servant leaders are authentic not for the sake of being authentic, but because they are driven either by a sense of higher calling or inner conviction to serve and make a positive difference for others" (p. 113).

Efficacious teachers believe in themselves, create strong relationships with their students, and provide quality teaching methods in the classroom (Coban, et al., 2020). School leaders who provide a working environment that promotes teacher self-efficacy and professional growth can help create a positive working environment infused with risk taking, motivation, and student academic success (Calik et al., 2012).



In Chapter 2, the focus is on the key elements of teacher efficacy, what it is, how it can be improved, and the positive effects it has on student success. The research presented in this chapter shows a correlation between positive teacher efficacy and the aspects and attributes of servant leadership. The methods of servant leadership are also discussed and shared along with the positive results found in schools that use this leadership model.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Collective Efficacy*: “‘A shared belief of a group about organizing and managing action phases needed for producing skills at certain levels.’ ... Collective efficacy reflects the belief of a group about efficiently organizing the actions needed for accomplishing a task ... and it determines the power of organizations” (Bandura, 1982, 1997; Goddard et al., 2004, as cited in Çalık et al., 2012, p. 2499).

*Educational Leaders*: People who lead a group and “the process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, students, and parents toward achieving common educational aims” (“Educational Leadership,” 2022, para. 1). This term is interchangeable with *principals* and *vice principals*.

*Extrinsic Motivation*: “Involves performing an activity because it leads to some separable consequence. Thus, activities that are uninteresting will require extrinsic consequences in order for the person to be motivated” (Eyal & Roth, 2011, p. 258).

*Intrinsic Motivation*: “Involves performing an activity because the activity itself is interesting. This comprises the prototype of autonomy because the person is willing to do the activity volitionally, out of interest” (Eyal & Roth, 2011, p. 258).

*Professional Growth*: “Professional development is learning to earn or maintain professional credentials such as academic degrees to formal coursework, attending conferences,

and informal learning opportunities situated in practice. It has been described as intensive and collaborative, ideally incorporating an evaluative stage” (Speck & Knipe, 2005, as cited in “Professional Development,” 2022, para. 1).

*Servant Leadership:* Servant leadership is defined as “(1) an 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 in the organization and the larger community” (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114).

*Teacher Self-Efficacy:* “Individuals’ belief and judgments of their capabilities to manage and execute necessary courses of action” (Bandura, 1997, as cited in Yoo, 2016, p. 84)

### **Teacher Motivation and Self-Efficacy**

There have been many studies on different forms of leadership and their positive and negative effects on stakeholders; however, there are few studies on how certain leadership styles affect the different forms of motivation among those they serve. According to Eyal and Roth (2011), “motivation, in contrast, results when the person believes that engaging in the behavior will result in some desired experience or outcome” (p. 258). There are two specific types of motivation that a person may feel: (a) Intrinsic motivation, which a person feels when the activity they are performing or being asked to perform is interesting and enjoyable, and (b) extrinsic motivation, which comes from activities that will have desirable outcomes at the end of performing a specific task. When creating an environment in a school that motivates teachers to grow in their abilities, leaders need to create experiences where the staff will be able to see the extrinsic motivators. The goal is for staff to feel they can master new skills, develop their professional knowledge, and feel confident in doing so with strong self-efficacy (Eyal & Roth, 2011).

Eyal and Roth (2011) conducted a research study that looked at the connection between different leadership styles and how they affect the motivation and the well-being of staff. The findings were collected through qualitative research through the methodology of a questionnaire with 122 teachers. Many factors can stand in the way of motivation for teachers however the results showed a direct connection to the leadership styles of principles and a positive effect on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of teachers. According to Eyal and Roth (2011), “charismatic leaders promote followers’ intrinsic motivation to act beyond their job description by elevating their self-esteem, self-value, and social identification” (p. 258). The researchers found that different forms of leadership that had a common goal for all staff members did show a measure of intrinsic motivation as teachers were wanting to reach the expectations of their leaders. The researchers stated,

Although controlled motivation can lead teachers to comply with the system’s standards, it is the autonomous motivation that transforms their jobs into a meaningful experience, drives them to practice autonomy-supportive teaching, protects them from burnout, increases their well-being, improves their effectiveness, and fosters their retention in the system. (Eyal and Roth, 2011, p. 269)

Furthermore, research has shown that positive results come from classrooms that have highly motivated teachers, and it is important to acknowledge what factors may stand in the way of the teacher becoming motivated. If teachers on staff are struggling with low confidence or self-efficacy, then motivation and growth will be very hard to promote: “Previous research has provided convincing evidence that the self-efficacy of teachers matters, both for their performance and for student learning outcomes” (Çoban et al., 2020, p. 4). Çoban et al. (2020) identified many factors that contributed to high self-efficacy, such as gender, demographic

variables and years of experience. Importantly, they also discussed recent studies that suggest teacher self-efficacy is also affected by the principal's leadership behavior. Principals have a very dominating influence on the climate of a building and the success of all stakeholders if they create a positive, effective learning environment for all.

### **Methods to Develop Teacher Self-Efficacy**

Çoban et al., (2020) stated, "Research demonstrates that principals' focus on creating a vision and goals for student learning, mentoring teachers and students for success, and encouraging teacher professional development can enhance teachers' sense of self-efficacy" (para. 12). The growth of teachers' abilities can be a daunting task for a leader, especially if their teachers have low self-efficacy resulting in low motivation. To create a meaningful change in their building, a leader needs to begin with teachers first, more specifically their teachers' efficacy (Hassan et al., 2019).

Weisel and Dror (2006) found that developing a collective efficacy must start with a clear vision and a set of goals. Some forms of leadership focus on a whole group of people working towards one specific goal, and while doing so can have a positive effect, research shows a very positive increase in both teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy when the personal growth of each individual is the goal. In addition, when teachers are aware of their expectations and feel they are part of the vision and goal, they feel heard and safe. Weisel and Dror (2006, as cited in Çalık et al., 2012) observed, "There is a positive and significant relationship between supportive and non-threatening leadership and teacher self-efficacy" (p. 2501).

Once the vision and goals are set, a leader must grow with their staff while offering support and feedback along the way. They do so as an instructional leader rather than through a hands-off approach. As Çalık et al. (2012) stated, "when the school principals demonstrated

instructional leadership behaviors, teachers' perceptions about their own self-efficacy grew stronger. They saw themselves more sufficient in educating and teaching the students, and they made a great effort for this purpose" (p. 2501). In addition, Scurry (2010, as cited in Çalık et al., 2012) stated that "positive feedbacks and leadership behaviors that strengthen teachers professionally predict the three dimensions of teachers' self-efficacy significantly" (p. 2501). As instructional leaders, the principal or school leader needs to be aware of the needs and requirements necessary to provide their individual teachers with what they need, for example, time, resources, support, and effective, meaningful professional development (Çalık et al., 2012).

### **Teacher Efficacy and Professional Growth**

As Yoo (2016) explained, "most of the existing literature on teacher efficacy has looked at the teaching experience simply as a number of years in teaching" (p. 86). Years of experience in the classroom are a definite factor of efficacy and belief in the teacher's ability to be successful in creating strong lessons and strong student success. However, another area that can develop the efficacy of staff and that does not rely on years of trial and error is professional development. The realm of education is constantly changing, whether it is curriculum changes, new data-driven implementations, or the continuous evolution of the needed competencies and skills for students. The years of experience a teacher has should not be overlooked; experience is still a strong component. However, teachers who are motivated in their career show a willingness to challenge their current strategies and take risks to keep up with the need for change. Yoo (2016) studied the effect of professional development on teacher efficacy and teachers' self-analysis of their efficacy change. The aim of the study was to measure how professional development affects individual teacher efficacy. This study used Moran and Hoy's Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) on 148 teachers during their change to online teaching to collect

quantitative data. As a form of qualitative data methodology, the researchers also had the teachers describe their feelings towards their change and why they felt it increased. The results showed a large increase in teacher efficacy in the qualitative data where the TSES also showed improvement. Yoo (2016) concluded,

The current research findings have shown that teachers' professional development effort does have a positive effect on teacher efficacy. In addition, the descriptive self-analyses of teacher efficacy in this study have shown that gaining new knowledge was generally positively related to teacher efficacy. (p. 91)

A large takeaway from the study came from the qualitative data, where the teachers discussed their motivation and passion for their new form of teaching as it allowed them to challenge the way they presented material and the focus on student engagement was different. The largest takeaway from this study was the overall theme of teachers' sharing that their increase of motivation and self-efficacy was due to the autonomy allowed in their development. Their goals were set by themselves, and they were trusted to move forward in this new stage of teaching with their professional opinion and personal goal setting as the focus (Yoo, 2016).

### **Positive Teacher Efficacy and Student Success**

The progress of student academic success is a large part of the responsibilities bestowed on educators in a school setting. There are many factors that can affect a child's ability to find success in the classroom; however, the most contributing factor to the success of students is quality teaching. As mentioned in Chapter 1, according to Haycock (1998, as cited in Schmid, 2018) "a teacher has a greater impact on student achievement than any other factor, including socioeconomic status and parent education" (para. 7).

The success of a classroom setting is dependent on the teacher. Mahler et al. (2018) identified three domains centered around a teacher's approach in a classroom: (a) self-efficacy, (b) subject specific enthusiasm, and (c) enthusiasm for teaching the subject. Therefore, when a teacher is working in an environment in which they are led by a principal who infuses a strong vision and implements instructional leadership strategies that have resulted in positive teacher efficacy, there will be a beneficial result in student achievement. The researchers also found an increase in student success in the classrooms of efficacious teachers in the subjects of English, mathematics, social studies, and science. Specifically, they found that efficacious teachers were significantly more successful due to their professional engagement, their effective instructional strategies, and their openness to demanding students in their classroom (Mahler et al., 2018).

For leaders to have a direct impact on student achievement in their schools, if they begin with their teachers' efficacy and personal beliefs in their professional abilities, they will see an increase in their overall academic performance in the school. Zee and Kooman (2016) stated,

Using various measures and definitions, studies imply that teachers with an assured sense of self-efficacy set the tone for a high-quality classroom environment by planning lessons that advance students abilities, making efforts to involve them in a meaningful way and effectively managing student misbehavior. (p. 982)

As explained earlier, a school leader who creates an environment that supports and grows the self-and collective efficacy of their teachers will find success in student success as well as teacher well-being and a strong school culture. To be successful, leaders must take a specific instructional leadership approach to set their goals and vision. Though there is a broad range of leadership approaches or styles that could be effective in reaching this goal, the one that strongly correlates and fosters effective relationships is that of servant leadership.

## **Servant Leadership for School Leaders**

Though serving others as a leader is not a new concept, the term *servant leader* was first used by Robert K. Greenleaf in *The Servant as a Leader*. Greenleaf worked for different institutions and then finished the last 25 years of his career as an influential consultant who supported large corporations. His focus, idea, and teachings of servant leadership came in the form of essays and books. Throughout his career, Greenleaf had many experiences that influenced him, but a book he read in the 1960s, *Journey to the East* by Hermann Hesse, which he described in *The Power of Servant Leadership*, was the most influential work by far. Hesse's story centered around a servant boy whose positive energy and willingness to serve the needs of those around him helped him become the leader and guiding spirit of the group, and the group fell apart when he went missing (Greenleaf, 1970, 1998, 2008; Quay, 1997). Greenleaf (1998) stated, "True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others" (p. 4).

Education is a business of people, and educational leaders are called to adhere to many expectations and standards, including creating effective relationships and leading a learning community. Greenleaf (1970) stated,

The natural servant, the person who is a servant first, is more likely to persevere and refine his hypothesis on what serves another's highest priority, that it is the person who is leader first and who later serves out of promptings of conscience or in conformity of normative expectations. (p. 147)

Alberta Education's (2020a, 2020b) *Leadership Quality Standard and Teacher Quality Standard* are both centered around the importance of the people who are served in this industry. Through the lens of education, regarding how servant leadership can be used, there is a connection in the



need to serve others. For leaders in this field, there are many stakeholders within the realm of their care, and the use of servant leadership is a holistic approach to serve those who serve vulnerable stakeholders (Redfield, 2020). A servant leadership approach builds the goal and vision of the school around the well-being and growth of the staff. If the staff of the building feel heard and respected, they will be motivated to do their best and apply their skills in a way that is beneficial for the entire school community (van Dierendonck, 2011). Redfield (2020) stated,

When a leader is able to give up some of the more traditional autocratic manners, employees in the company are going to feel more passionate about the work they are doing. These employees are going to feel more passionate about their work, more collaborative, innovative, and they are going to work harder at their tasks as well. (p. 12)

To use the servant leadership approach in a school community, a leader will need to have ten key characteristics as the forefront and foundation when approaching their staff : (a) listening, (b) empathy, (c) healing, (d) awareness, (e) persuasion, (f) conceptualization, (g) foresight, (h) stewardship, (i) good commitment to the growth of people, and (j) building a sense of community (van Dierendonck, 2011). These characteristics are discussed in the following sections.

### ***Listening***

According to Denning (2011), “listening means not just a passive reception of sounds but rather an active mental state penetrating, unified, yet focused and permeable, enhanced by the consciousness of the listeners participating in the interaction” (p. 274). An educational leader who implements servant leadership must first listen to their staff, not just hear what they have to say but truly, genuinely listen. At times, a leader may want to fix situations or give feedback right away; however, a servant leader needs to listen to everything their staff has to say,

acknowledge what they have told them, and then if merited, give feedback, or respond.

(Denning, 2011)

### ***Empathy***

Redfield (2020) stated, “To be a leader who is more empathetic, you need to set aside your own viewpoint, value the perspective of others and be open when you approach each situation” (p. 19). Servant leaders are not goal-oriented; they are people-oriented. Empathy is a much-needed skill to serve those who follow. When growing a teaching staff to grow in skill and efficacy, educational leaders must be aware of what may be standing in the way of their teachers. Whether this challenge is professional or personal, a servant leader must be empathetic to the feelings of others.

### ***Healing***

Alberta Education (2020a) stated that leaders must create “a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment” for all stakeholders (p. 3). Doing so is possible but difficult if there may be a need for healing, whether it be the healing of an individual staff member or the whole school community. Redfield (2020) found that healing in the lens of servant leadership involves the emotional wholeness and health of all members, both physically and emotionally. This is not a one-size-fits-all undertaking; rather, each employee will have different needs and may require different supports to reach a place of healing.

### ***Awareness***

To serve others is to not serve oneself. A servant leader needs to be aware of their actions, reactions, and emotions. Most importantly, educational leaders need to be aware of how all of these affect the people around them. There needs to be a large amount of reflection done each day and adjustment to fit the needs of others (Greenleaf, 1998), regarding the kind of

reflection needed to create awareness, Redfield (2020) told leaders to “reflect profoundly on your behaviors, and your emotions. Understand your strengths and weaknesses” (p. 20).

### ***Persuasion***

Redfield (2020) found that the characteristic of persuasion is a large difference between certain other leadership styles and that of servant leadership. Authority is not how to invoke change or movement in the building; rather, it is about persuasion. Persuasion has a more positive effect on staff as it will build credibility, build leadership skills in others, and give voice and choice to those who follow. This helps others follow the leader since they do not feel that they are just being given expectations and deadlines.

### ***Conceptualization***

Regarding the concept of conceptualization, being aware of the needs and restraints of the work environment allows educational leaders to set achievable goals that staff can attain as well as agree with (Redfield, 2020). Al-Mahdy et al., (2016) found, that Creating a mission or vision statement without the input of employees can be harmful to the school’s climate and may result in unrealistic expectations. Thus, servant leaders need to be clear and concise with their vision and mission for the school, and the roles of each member need to be explained thoroughly.

### ***Foresight***

While the work environment will have its ups and downs and not every situation can be predicted, a strong servant leader needs to use the skill of foresight. According to Redfield (2020), “this characteristic is going to make it easier for you to predict the likeliest outcome for a situation” (p. 20). When an educational leader has created a strong learning environment with effective relationships, having foresight comes naturally to them as they are attuned to the needs

of the building. It is important for the leader to trust their intuition and make decisions that have the highest positive outcome for most people (Redfield 2020).

### ***Stewardship***

Greenleaf (1998) found that for leaders to truly take care of the people entrusted to them, the educational leader needs to fully understand and model stewardship to their staff. If a servant leader has set up a strong foundation of trusting in the abilities of their staff, they will take the responsibility for the success of the student and school community as a whole. There needs to be a level of awareness of what is going on in the building if a leader is to share the characteristics of stewardship, so it is important for them to stay involved and informed. Eva et al. (2019) stated, “Servant leadership more explicitly incorporates stewardship as an essential element of effective leadership; this brings a focus on a long-term perspective that takes into account all stakeholders” (p. 113).

### ***Good Commitment to the Growth of People***

Hoch et al. (2018) found that part of servant leadership is effective relationships with open conversations. As servant leaders, educational leaders grow with their staff. Therefore, they need to be aware of the strengths and areas of needed growth of each one of their staff members. Redfield (2020) told leaders, “You need to look for training and strategies to help you to develop your people until they are able to reach their own full potential” (p. 21).

### ***Building a Sense of Community***

Redfield (2020) noted that building a sense of community can enhance teachers’ well-being and the overall professional happiness of the entire staff. Ensuring that the staff feel safe and welcome to talk to administration and their colleagues freely both inside and outside of the school can support fostering effective relationships and a collaborative community.

Being a servant leader may mean leaving behind certain manager-like techniques, and it will take time and effort to accomplish this style. Some of the characteristics may come more naturally than others, and there will be a need for growth and personal development. However, keeping the needs of staff and stakeholders at the forefront will create success in all areas.

(Redfield, 2020). Greenleaf (1977, as cited in Eva et al., 2019) stated,

Servant leadership is a holistic leadership approach that engages followers in multiple dimensions ... such that they are empowered to grow into what they're capable of becoming. It seeks first and foremost to develop followers on the basis of leaders' altruistic and ethical orientation. (p. 111)

This is how servant leadership differs from many other leadership styles, including transitional leadership, which is also known for caring for the psychological needs, though they are the needs of the organization. Many leadership styles are goal-oriented and focus on the outcome at the end of the learning. In contrast, servant leadership is about process and the growth of each individual follower. Ultimately, their learning is the goal (Greenleaf, 1977).

### **Servant Leadership's Connection to Teacher Efficacy**

Servant leadership is a natural fit in a school setting as it focuses on the needs of the people, and that is also what is asked of teachers with their students. According to Whitaker (2003), "effective leaders lead people to accomplish the important work of schools. Like the best teachers, they adapt to change without losing sight of what really matters" (p. 5). For this capstone study, the business is the education system, more specifically a school setting, and the principal is the manager or boss. In the realm of the education business, the ideal outcome would be student success, whether this success is measured by standardized testing results or the holistic viewpoint of creating strong citizens who will function well in society. With the students

as the main stakeholders who receive the most focus and energy, it is easy for a leader focused on the output or results to overlook the needs of the teachers in the building.

However, Hoch et al., (2018) found that implementing a servant leadership approach to the staff can support the growth and mental well-being of the staff and result in student success and high academic achievement for the majority of the school community due to the holistic growth of each individual teacher. Leaders can use the ten key characteristics of servant leadership to foster effective relationships and provide well-structured and specific professional development that the staff members are passionate about, thus resulting in high teacher self-efficacy. As stated earlier in this capstone study, research has shown that efficacious teachers provide students with high-level educational experiences that result in positive academic results. This information shows that the use of servant leadership has a very high chance of being successful for all stakeholders.

Yoo (2016) explained that self-efficacy stems from four different sources: performance accomplishments, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and emotional arousal. Regarding how these connect to the ten characteristics of servant leadership, the importance is placed on effective relationships. To build the efficacy of the staff, the leader needs to be aware of where their teachers are right now. Doing so requires listening, empathy, and sometimes healing. If the teachers have not felt strongly about their abilities or if they have experienced leaders or different situations that have hindered their performance and growth, it is important to be aware of these challenges:

When provided with relevant knowledge on a given day in the light of positive experiences, followers will be willing to follow leaders' advice while in the light of

unfavorable past experiences, the same advice may be seen as expressing leaders' superiority and failing to foster daily self-efficacy. (Kuonath et al., 2021, p. 189)

This effort requires awareness and self-reflection for the leader. To grow along with the staff is to work on being the leader they need. During key conversations, observations, and collaboration, the growth of the efficacy of the staff needs to be at the forefront. Verbal persuasion in the form of compliments or positive key questioning and celebrating the small wins in each staff member shows confidence and appreciation for their work and experience Kuonath et al. (2021).

Promoting collaboration among teachers is the next step. Persuading staff to build a community of trust and support can be beneficial for all. Working together in professional development of collaboration across grade levels or subjects supports efficacy as it allows for vicarious experiences for each teacher. However, building efficacy cannot be the only goal. There is a time for professional development needs to be presented in the building to ensure that each teacher is knowledgeable in their area of expertise, and professional development cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Through servant leadership, so much focus is put on individual relationships and listening that the leader needs to approach professional development the same way—individualized Lee et al. (2020).

### **Implementation of Servant Leadership in a School**

Lee et al. (2020) noted that servant leadership in research is categorized as an ethical leadership style that focuses on the development of the organizational community. In a school setting, the key characteristics and methods of servant leadership share a high predictive validity over other leadership styles. The culture and vision of the school needs to be fully engulfed in this approach: “Servant leadership should seek to create a culture that positively promotes the

development of trust, fairness, and high-quality leader-follower relationships” (Lee et al., 2020, p. 1). When it is fully implemented, then the desired outcome for all followers can be achieved.

Although there are many different definitions and descriptions of servant leadership and how to approach it in a school setting, the one that is highly adopted across the research is by Eva et al. (2019). Eva et al. (2019) captures servant leadership in its key features: motive (other-oriented), mode (focus on follower growth), and mindset (concern for the wider community). Implementing a servant leadership approach in the school starts with the motivation from the leader to become a servant leader, creating a positive culture and building strong relationships between leaders and followers.

### ***Motivation to Become a Servant Leader***

Regarding the research on leadership styles, there is a great deal of focus on power and how it is obtained and used. Research has shown that leaders with a high need for power are more effective. Many who look at servant leadership at a simple glance may assume that a leader would need to give up power or authority in their building. This is not the case, but it is a different form of power. Frieze and Boneva (2001) refer to this concept as the “helping power motivation,” which describes leaders who want to use their power to help others. A servant leader needs this mindset and motivation to fully implement servant leadership in their school community. Ng et al. (2008, as cited in van Dierendonck, 2011) created a study to measure the motivational state that leads to servant leadership behavior. They found,

This motivational state is unique in that it focuses exclusively on the desire to serve as a leader. ... Followers experience a higher leader-member exchange (LMX) quality in the relation with a leader who worked from a motivation to serve. (p. 1244)



### ***Culture***

Alberta Education (2020a) stated that a leader is entrusted with “cultivating a culture of high expectations for all students and staff” (p. 4). Van Dierendonck (2011) identified two cultural dimensions that influence the occurrence of servant leadership in organizations: humane orientation and power distance. Human orientation is rooted in servant leadership with the needs of the staff as the focus for the leader. The staff need to feel that they belong and that they are heard in the decision and vision of a school. Power distance is focused on the culture of the staff and how they accept and support the authority in their building. If there is a large distance between the leader and their followers, then there is a culture of authority and discipline. In servant leadership, the goal is to have a low power distance in which leaders and followers communicate and behave in a more equal manner. This creates a strong culture of trust, and the leader is more focused on stewardship rather than on self-protection (van Dierendonck, 2011).

### ***Relationship Between Servant Leader and Follower***

Leaders who have interpersonal skills and foster effective relationships opens the door to meaningful working relationships between leaders and followers. The majority of the key characteristics of servant leadership are based on the leader’s communication style and approach. According to Greenleaf (1998, as cited in van Dierendonck, 2011),

At the core of the relationship between the servant-leader and follower stands the leader’s belief in the intrinsic value of each individual; it is all about recognition, acknowledgement, and the realization of each person’s abilities and what the person can still learn. (p. 1246)

Thus, the ultimate success of the students and community entrusted to the educational leader relies heavily on the teacher and their well-being. Effective leadership creates effective teachers and, ultimately, successful students.

Building these strong relationships and cultivating a strong learning environment for all start with mutual respect and trust. It is when these important aspects have been established that change and growth of the staff can begin. One of the key characteristics coined by Greenleaf (1998) was *persuasion*:

To build these strong relationships servant leaders rely on their ability to persuade their followers to trust them. In the end, people follow a servant-leader voluntarily because they are persuaded that the leader's path is the right one for them. (p. 44)

Persuasion for the staff in servant leadership is not to be confused with the goals found in other forms of leadership, in which the outcome is the goal. Instead, persuasion in servant leadership is the individualized growth of each individual staff member as the goal.

### ***Outcome of Servant Leadership***

Research on the outcome of organizations that implement servant leadership has mainly been centered around the followers' opinions and professional growth. Regarding this topic, van Dierendonck (2011) stated, "Evidence is expected to show that servant-leaders have more satisfied, more committed and better performing employees" (p. 1248). This evidence is categorized in three areas: self-actualization, positive job attitude, and performance. The researcher further explained, "Self-actualization is related to having self-respect and self-acceptance to a positive attitude about oneself" (van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1249). This is the goal and outcome of each follower under a strong servant leader. Implementing a leadership

style that is rooted in strong relationships and meaningful conversations results in the outcome of self-actualization of every staff member (van Dierendonck, 2011).

The majority of the research and data on servant leadership has focused on the increase in positive job attitudes. Hebert (2003, as cited in van Dierendonck, 2011) reported a high correlation between servant leadership and overall intrinsic job satisfaction. Specifically, building a strong culture that enhances positive job satisfaction can have positive effects on the culture and overall individual positive job attitude. An individual teacher's performance can be heavily based on the success of their students through standardized testing or academic progress. However, a growth in motivation and a willingness to grow and take risks in the classroom can also show growth in a teacher. Servant leadership-led environments enhance learning and professional development for all teachers individually and through teamwork (van Dierendonck, 2011). Moreover, as van Dierendonck (2011) explained, "servant leadership is also believed to have a positive influence on team effectiveness" (p. 1249).

### **Summary**

The ultimate goal of a leader in a school building is to provide an environment for all students and staff that is safe and caring and that provides a strong learning experience. In addition, there is an expectation to ensure academic success for all students entrusted to their care. These expectations hold the leader accountable to foster effective relationships and be an active participant in the learning process for all. Leading a learning community is not an easy task because much is asked of those in charge. However, as Denning (2011) stated,

True leaders do not lead because they are expecting something in return. They lead because they have something to give. They may get something, but this is a contingent

event, not the goal. They give with a spirit of generosity. They are relatively ego free. (p. 281)

The academic success of students is at the forefront of the business of education. It is entrusted to all educators to provide quality education that enhances future citizens with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in the current and future society. Leadership is a key part of a successful school, but student success also relies heavily on strong teachers. Educational leaders strive to have confident, successful teachers who create engaging lessons and keep up to date with teaching strategies: “Outstanding principals know that if they have great teachers, they have a great school; without great teachers, they do not have a great school” (Whitaker, 2003, p. 7).

Research has shown that efficacious teachers who have a strong belief in their instructional strategies and abilities make a difference in the academic development of their students:

Using various measures and definitions, studies imply that teachers with an assured sense of self-efficacy set the tone for a high-quality classroom environment by planning lessons that advance students’ abilities, making efforts to involve them in a meaningful way and effectively managing student misbehavior. (Chacon, 2005, as cited in Zee & Koomen, 2016, p. 982)

Therefore, a school setting a leader must create a positive environment that supports a safe learning environment in which teachers feel respected and heard and have a high level of job satisfaction. Creating strong relationships with staff builds trust and opens the door to meaningful communication and an optimum environment for learning. Too often, leaders lean on new programs or implement new initiatives to fix or grow their school rather than growing their people; however, “these programs do not bring the improvement or growth we seek. Instead, we

must focus on what really matters. It is never about programs; it is always about the people” (Whitaker, 2003, p. 8). To do so, leaders must ensure to implement and proceed with a strong, ethical leadership style that supports the efficacy and professional growth of all staff members.

The beneficial effects of servant leadership for organizations and employees have been supported by much of the literature. Servant leadership is a relatively new area in educational research but shows a very strong promise for future educational leaders in a school setting. It calls for leaders to nurture their staff individually rather than as a whole. Furthermore, Al-Mahdy et al. (2016) stated,

The key mission of a school principal is to be of service to both the school community and wider society. The concept of educational leadership as service to others offers a unique perspective which draws attention to the principles of ethics and caring. (p. 543)

Providing an environment under the servant leadership approach creates a working environment in which all staff can be heard, respected, and trusted, and it is within this environment that their professional growth and self-efficacy is the ongoing goal for the whole school.

### **Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion**

#### **Summary of Findings**

This capstone study is intended to inform current and future educational leaders about the importance of teacher self-efficacy and the positive effect it can have on the quality of instruction in classrooms. It describes and explains the process of implementing a servant leadership style that will result in a school culture that enhances teacher self-efficacy, professional growth, and student success.

Teacher efficacy is a key element of strong schools and successful students. Teachers who work in an environment that celebrates their successes and provides a safe workplace that improves their learning, reflection, and collaboration with their leaders have a better opportunity to enhance their professional growth. Moreover, having efficacious teachers results in up-to-date teaching instruction, strong collaboration with colleagues, and job satisfaction. Thus, it is important for educational leaders to provide an environment that promotes efficacy and professional growth to all staff through the servant leadership style.

Leadership styles are a well-researched field in education. The approach of a leader is the foundation to success in a school setting. Many different forms of leadership have been tried and have been found to be effective in schools. The term *servant leadership* has been labeled an ethical, authentic, and successful form of leadership. Implementing this leadership approach takes time and key characteristics to be successful in providing a safe, caring, and positive work environment.

## **Implications**

### ***Division Office Personnel***

Division office personnel are held accountable by trustees and the community for the success of their schools. They are the individuals who create the foundation and mission of the school division and set the goals for their educational leaders and staff. Although they hold a powerful position, research has shown that there is a change in the way authority runs a successful community. Authority and power are no longer all that are needed to motivate change and success in staff. Instead, the research has shown that leading from within has more successful and positive outcomes. As Tan (2021) stated, “the day of managers getting people to do what they want them to do by virtue of their position are long gone” (p. 36).

The division office personnel’s approach and leadership style have a large impact on the way that their principals approach their schools and staff. Servant leadership can create significant change for staff, so using this approach at the highest level of the school division hierarchy can and will support the implementation of this style across the school division. In addition, implementing servant leadership from the top would give school leaders a safe place to grow, learn, and flourish as they implement this style in their own building. Moreover, “engaged leaders are willing to use their power and influence to design a more equitable system so everyone has equal access to opportunity within their organization” (Bopaiah, 2021, p. 49), thus allowing division office personnel to take a personal, ethical approach to the ones who follow them: principals, vice principals, and training personnel.

With the academic and personal growth of each student as the goal for the division, leaders are entrusted to set a standard of success for all employees. As this capstone study has shown, schools that initiate servant leadership create and support efficacious teachers, who find

success in the classroom. At the divisional office level, using servant leadership will result in strong academic results and pleased stakeholders.

### ***Principal and Educational Leaders***

Student success is the goal for the education system; however, an educational leader's main focus needs to be the people who work for them. Principals need to focus on the individuals in front of them and take care of them. In turn, when the teachers are well taken care of, then the students will be well taken care of as well. As Bopaiah (2021) noted, "equity in the workplace is about designing a system, a culture, or an organization so that everyone has an equal shot, however they may define what they are shooting for" (p. 9).

The implication that falls on educational leaders and principals involves their ability to build the skill set necessary to fully infuse servant leadership in a school setting. The servant leadership style requires a certain level of emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and ability to motivate others. Goleman et al. (2015) explained, "Emotional intelligence is carried through an organization like electricity through wires. To be more specific the leader's mood is quite literally contagious, spreading quickly and inexorably through the business" (p. 24).

### ***Teachers***

Teachers strive to do their best work in their classrooms. It is in their best interest to run a strong classroom with strong classroom management. Having an educational leader who believes that each individual teacher is strong and worthy enhances relationships and sets a strong environment for learning. According to Whitaker (2003), "if we assume all teachers do the best they know how, we can switch our attention to improve what they know" (p. 35). Part of a teacher's self-efficacy is feeling confident in their abilities, and the focus of servant leadership is to build this confidence and acknowledge the work it has taken for them to develop their skills



and knowledge. Using the characteristics of servant leadership allows teachers to feel heard, appreciated, and confident to grow professionally.

The implication for teachers is being provided a very positive, safe, caring work environment. This environment builds equity and makes room for meaningful conversations and powerful collaboration between colleagues and leaders. Teachers are not asked to grow alone; rather, the leaders grow alongside them, asking important questions and offering positive and well-articulated constructive feedback. Tan (2020) explained, “The dynamics of a great team leads to a virtuous cycle in all members’ development because they provide feedback and coaching to each other” (p. 83). An environment under servant leadership allows teachers to communicate and choose their areas of professional growth. There is a sense of autonomy, and the teachers share the accountability with their leaders, in turn resulting in their students’ flourishing in a positive learning environment.

### ***Students and Families***

The implications of the students in a school with efficacious teachers are positive. The students are the center and focus of the education system, and their success defines the work and effort put forth by the teachers and educational leaders in a school setting. Students who are educated by teachers with strong self-efficacy are provided strong instructional strategies and a positive learning environment and are engaged in their learning; “teachers’ important cognitive attribute is a pivotal inspirational construct which arouses students’ curiosity towards learning” (Hassan, 2019, p. 668).

The family community within a school setting is a very important stakeholder, and their happiness and trust are an important part of a high-functioning school. When children are well taken care of, happy, and successful at school, their families feel comfortable and trusting of the

school and its educators. As a result, teachers and educational leaders can avoid conflicts or negative experiences.

Thus, educational leaders who prioritize the efficacy of their staff will indirectly support the students and families in their school. Al-Mahdy et al. (2016) stated,

The key mission of a school principal is to be of service to both the school community and wider society. The concept of educational leadership as service to others offers a unique perspective which draws attention to the principles of ethics and caring. (p. 543)

Educational leaders who implement the characteristics of servant leadership take care of their teachers and build a strong staff of educated, confident teachers who implement a strong learning environment for their students and, as a result, please the families.

### ***Society***

The success of students in the education system creates a heavy implication on society. A community's ability to flourish and be successful requires strong citizens who are prepared to be successful in the current environment and who have the skills to enhance the growth of society. This process begins in the family home. Then, children begin their educational journey at a very young age, and it is the experience and knowledge gained in school that provide them with what they need as they move into the world as adults. The aim is that they attend "a school in which teachers are able to help every student and only promote students when they are ready to take the next step" (Morton, 2016, p. 329). When a school provides a high-quality education in an environment that has trust and enhances motivation, it provides society with successful citizens. When students have experienced classrooms with efficacious teachers who care about their progress, they will be well rounded as both a student and a person.

**Recommendations**

The role of an educational leader is to set the tone of growth and student success within the school building. To do so, educational leaders need to know their staff and where they are in their professional journey. Implementing servant leadership sets the foundation that builds and strengthens the efficacy of the teachers entrusted to their care. As stated by Whitaker (2003), “outstanding principals know that if they have great teachers, they have a great school; without great teachers they do not have a great school” (p. 7). This is only possible when strong, effective relationships are established and when open communication between leaders and followers is not only possible but also consistent. Furthermore, it is only when these relationships are established that weaknesses can be addressed to lead the vision and the next steps for each teacher in their professional development. Throughout the process of growth, the educational leader needs to work alongside their staff, supporting and offering feedback and celebrating all progress and accomplishments, whether they are small or big. Finally, the key recommendation for servant leaders is reflection. Throughout the process, school leaders need to be aware of what works best for those they serve and what changes need to be made at the leadership level to better serve the staff.

The recommendations are meant to describe the necessary steps an educational leader needs to take to become a successful servant leader in a school. These recommendations outline the key foundational principles that will cultivate a safe, caring learning environment established by a servant leader who supports teacher efficacy, professional development, and student success.

***Recommendation 1: Foster and Maintain Effective Relationships***

Servant leadership is a leadership style that focuses on the people in an organization and providing them what they need to be successful. This is only possible in a school setting when the educational leader fosters and maintains effective relationships with their staff. According to Kouzes and Posner (2006, as cited in Schaefer, 2015), “when leadership is a relationship founded on trust and confidence, people take risks, make changes, keep organizations and movements alive. Through that relationship, leaders turn their constituents into leaders themselves” (para. 7).

Doing so begins with the key characteristics of servant leadership. Educational leaders need to first listen. They should hear and truly listen to the needs of those they serve and make time to meet with their staff and ask important questions. Throughout this process, leaders need to have empathy with the staff, understand their viewpoints without offering feedback unless asked for, and build a foundation of trust. It is important to be perceptive of what they have learned from their staff and where they are professionally and personally and to support healing if needed. As Redfield (2019) explained, “to do this, you need to make sure that each person has the right support knowledge, and resources that are needed in order to perform their job well” (p. 19).

Servant leadership is an ethical, people-focused style, so relationships are the foundation needed before there can be change in a building. Fostering and maintaining these relationships are extremely important, and these relationships need to be established before any change or growth can occur. This process is ongoing. Open conversations and making personal connections cannot occur only once or twice; rather, these relationships need to continue to grow to build trust and set the foundation for a safe learning environment. When staff feel heard and respected, they feel appreciated, and their professional growth and self-efficacy can become the focus.

***Recommendation 2: Acknowledge Strengths and Weaknesses***

When relationships between the staff and the leader are established, the next step is to celebrate and acknowledge the staff members' strengths. This needs to be done authentically and honestly. Sharing an appreciation for the work already being done nurtures the confidence and efficacy of staff. Buckingham (2021) explained how to develop this awareness of the staff's strengths and weaknesses:

It takes time and effort to gain a full appreciation of an employee's strengths and weaknesses. The great manager spends a good deal of time outside the office walking around, watching each person's reactions to events, listening and taking mental notes about what each individual is drawn to and what each person struggles with. (p. 14).

Likewise, being active in classrooms and showing support furthers the relationship between school leaders and their staff, and it is important to know the interests and personal strengths of each staff member as this knowledge will help guide the professional development. Just like a leader, no teacher is perfect, and there are always areas for improvement and growth that will further student success. In addition, there will be different levels of teachers; some may need more support and guidance than others who have a strong sense of mastery in their abilities. However, it is important that everyone feels that their strengths are recognized and that growth is possible for all. Emotional intelligence supports a servant leader in knowing when to push and what areas are best to focus on at a certain time. Being made aware of weaknesses from leaders can deteriorate a teacher's efficacy quickly, so it is important that the weaknesses are handled gently and are constructively approached. This is possible if there is a strong relationship and if the teachers know they have their leaders' support in their growth.

***Recommendation 3: Discuss and Create a Shared Vision***

The growth and success of both teachers and students are at the forefront a servant leader's decisions, including creating a shared vision for the school. Developing a shared vision is not done alone by the leader; rather, the vision needs to be created by the school community. Brockner (2015) explained, "When employees feel that they are heard in the decision-making process, they are more likely to support rather than merely comply with those decisions, their bosses, and the organization as a whole" (p. 53). Listening to the opinions and thoughts of staff along with having supportive data on the needs of the students in the building results in a clear focus and vision that all staff members can agree on.

The shared vision of a school also needs to be in line with a leader and their followers' values: "Values are important ideals that guide our priorities and are core to an organization. Values tie people together, set vision, and affect what we do as organizations and communities" (Schaefer, 2015, para. 2). The vision is a hope for the future, and the leader needs to share their dreams for their building and the people they serve. Sharing a vision of growth for the school as a whole shows that the leader trusts the professionals in front of them to achieve goals and support student success.

Another key characteristic of servant leadership is stewardship. The leader sets goals and a shared vision alongside their staff with the belief that their followers have the ability to grow and reach their full potential. The servant leader is willing to take responsibility for their teachers' growth and progress and the ultimate success of their school. Posner and Kouzes (2017) stated,

Leaders don't just speak for themselves. They also speak for their team and organization.

Leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue. Therefore, leaders must reach out to others.

They must understand and appreciate the values of their constituents and find a way to affirm shared values. (p. 1)

Once the vision is established, the leader needs be direct and transparent about the steps that will be taken to reach this vision and each member's role in the process. Doing so relies heavily on the goals for professional development in the school.

#### ***Recommendation 4: Set Goals and Provide Professional Development***

Servant leadership has many similarities to other leadership approaches; however, what makes it different is its ethical approach to its followers. Many approaches focus on the outcome as the goal, but for servant leadership, the growth of each individual teacher is the main focus. This kind of focus allows leaders to set the vision and promote autonomy in the professional development of each staff member. When the focus is on the needs of individual teachers, then there is not a singular program or approach that will benefit all in their growth and efficacy equally, so the servant leader is called to be a facilitator and coach throughout the professional development rather than the instructor. Whitaker (2003) stated,

We can spend a great deal of time and energy looking for programs that will solve our problems. Too often the programs do not bring the improvement or growth we seek, Instead, we must focus on what really matters. It is never about programs; it is always about people. (p. 8)

A leader's job is to be aware of the big picture, the vision, and the goals of the school. The school leader knows that the growth of teacher efficacy and skills results in quality education for students and job satisfaction for staff. Providing professional development opportunities that are autonomous and match the needs of each individual teacher is not enough; they also need to join their teachers in the growth journey, monitoring the growth, giving

feedback when necessary, and coaching each staff member through the process. Each teacher's motivation and goals are centered on the success of the students in their room, while the leader's motivation and goals are centered on the growth and development of their teachers.

***Recommendation 5: Check in on Individual Growth and Celebrate All Accomplishments***

The leader's working alongside staff as they grow allows them to feel seen and supported. The success of students is a joint effort for both leaders and teachers, so if the staff are expected to grow or take risks, they need to have someone working alongside them and there to help if they fail. As explained by Fairholm (1994, as cited in Schaefer, 2015), "true leadership describes unified action of leaders and followers (stakeholders) working together to jointly achieve mutual goals" (para. 3).

Time needs to be set aside to check in on progress of the goals of each teacher and see what is or what might not be working. Furthermore, teachers need to be given time to adjust and continue their professional growth plan to ensure success. Valcour (2021) explained, "The more you follow through on supporting your employees' developmental plans, the more productive your coaching becomes, the greater your employees' trust in you and the more engaged you all become. It's a virtuous cycle" (p. 113). Growth and professional development take time, and the results may take time to be apparent. However, it is important for a servant leader to continue to grow alongside their staff, acknowledge the efforts being made, and celebrate all accomplishments, whether they are big or small.

***Recommendation 6: Reflect on Actions and Reactions***

Nothing will ever be perfect, and not everything a leader does in a school setting will be best for all staff. Therefore, one of the key recommendations for leaders implementing a servant



leadership style that enhances teacher efficacy is to reflect on their actions and reactions throughout the process. Hill and Lineback (2021) stated,

Reflection is critical, and it works best if you make it a regular practice, for example, set aside time toward the end of each day, what action worked well? What might you have done differently, replay conversations. Compare what you did with what you might have done if you were the manager you aspire to be. Where did you disappoint yourself, and how did it happen? Did you practice any new behaviors or otherwise make progress on your journey? (p. 46)

Being aware of personal strengths and areas of needed improvement is part of the servant leadership approach. Serving others is a selfless approach. When leading a learning community, leaders need to be aware of what is working and what needs to change. As Redfield (2020) explained, “with the help of leveraging foresight, leaders are going to be able to guide their current decisions through learning from the past, mindfulness of the present, and understanding some of the potential consequences of the future” (p. 94).

## **Conclusions**

The main purpose of this capstone study was to describe the impact of servant leadership on positive teacher efficacy and student success and how an educational leader can utilize the servant leadership approach to develop teacher efficacy in a school setting. When teachers are provided a safe working environment in which they feel heard and cared for, their confidence in their classroom instruction increases.

Moreover, students in classrooms with an efficacious teacher experience a high level of instruction, a motivated teacher with job satisfaction, and a positive learning environment. An educational leader’s goal is the success of each student in their building, and they do so by

providing their students with quality teachers and a positive environment. To achieve this goal, the leader needs to take care of their teachers first, building their efficacy and promoting progressive professional development.

The application of servant leadership in a school setting, though relatively new in research and application, has shown a positive increase in student engagement, success, and teacher motivation and job satisfaction. For an educational leader to implement this leadership style properly, they need to be aware that it is a selfless approach that needs a high level of emotional intelligence and a low level of ego.

A servant leader needs to implement a people-centered focus in which the growth and well-being of staff is the priority. They do so by fostering effective relationships and communication. Servant leaders focus on listening with empathy and healing any situations that may stand in the way of teachers' reaching their full potential and building strong self-efficacy. Strong efficacy is built by sharing the strengths of the teachers and making them aware of the positive, effective skills they already possess while also making them aware of areas that may need growth and reassuring them that they can achieve growth with support and guidance.

A shared vision should be created, utilizing the thoughts and opinions of others and the support of data and by putting the students at the center of all decisions. When strong relationships are established and a shared vision is implemented, servant leaders can then provide meaningful professional development that supports teachers' confidence and motivation and allows them to find success as they reach their individual professional growth. Throughout the process, the educational leader needs to support and grow with their staff, and they check in on progress while celebrating the small and large achievements along the way. Reflection is key for a servant leader; it is a daily practice that engages their beliefs and values on how they want to

lead the people they serve. Daily reflections help the servant leader keep their goals and be aware of what is working well and what needs to be changed.

Overall, the business of education is centered around people. The goal is to enrich and support students in becoming successful citizens of the community. Educational leaders who choose the ethical servant leadership style focus on all those they serve, especially the teachers. Most importantly, this approach creates a positive learning environment that serves the needs of everyone, creates a workplace that builds teachers' self-efficacy, and promotes professional development that enhances the learning experience for all students and increases student success.

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